

Struggling for Purchase? What Shape Does a Vocational Education and Training Agenda Take Within a Contemporary University Education Faculty?

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the discourse among academics with a shared interest in the relationship between vocational education and training (VET) and higher education within the University of Southern Queensland's Faculty of Education. The authors endeavour to make sense of how VET pedagogies and praxis are currently envisaged and enacted within the faculty, how they respond to present-day influences and developments in the VET sector and how they will in turn shape teaching, learning and research activity.

In the paper, the authors put their personal and professional ideologies under the microscope in a dialectic that aims to inform the development of a shared set of meanings that will serve as a platform from which to move forward in their practice. This dialectic examines the nuances of practices from the perspectives of a reflective (Schön, 1983, 1987) and a reflexive (Usher, 1987) practitioner. Theoretical lenses drawn upon in this reflective and reflexive dialectic include critical theory (Habermas, 1972, 1973), criticality (Barnett, 1997) and the humanist tradition in education (Dewey, 1916, 1938).

The results of this dialectic are then used to engage pedagogies that relate to further education and training (*fet*) within the faculty. To guide this situated engagement, several questions are asked. The conclusions drawn confirm that the convergence of these personal and professional ideologies is helpful in shaping the contributions of *fet* to the existing and emerging needs of the faculty's lifelong learners.

Introduction

This paper is concerned with two crucial issues:

- the most effective means of managing and structuring pre-service and in-service teacher education in an Australian contemporary university for those with trades and (para)professionals wanting to teach in the VET and senior/middle schooling sectors
- the interplay between conceptual frameworks and approaches to pedagogies and learning in the context of that teacher education provision.

The first issue – designing an effective teacher education curriculum that engages with tradespeople and (para)professionals in their transition into the teaching profession – articulates with current changes in Australia and internationally to postcompulsory educational options and pathways. Previously sectoral boundaries separating higher from technical and further education (and the associated different views of knowledge construction and acquisition) were finite and fixed. Now, facilitated by such developments as the advent of the Australian Qualifications Framework (Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board, 2002) and the much greater capacity of organisations to apply for accreditation as registered training organisations (RTOs), postcompulsory education provides what is claimed to be unprecedented and increasing flexibility and freedom for learners in moving across qualifications and sectors. This flexibility and diversity are accompanied by considerable complexity, which in turn has an impact on the opportunities and challenges in developing teacher education programs for secondary and VET teachers and trainers that are effective, innovative, accessible and responsive (Harreveld & Danaher, 2004; Harreveld, Danaher & Kenny, 2002).

The second issue – the interplay among conceptual frameworks, pedagogies and learning – resonates with contemporary debates about teachers' work, identities and professional status (Hall, 2004; Smyth, Dow, Hattam, Reid & Shacklock, 2000; Stronach, Corbin, McNamara, Stark & Warne, 2002; Woods & Jeffrey, 2002). Concerns about teaching becoming deprofessionalised (Seddon & Brown, 1997; Shain, 1998) are accompanied by perceptions of practice as being unreflective and untheorised. By contrast, convictions about teacher professionalism are inseparable from a focus on teaching as reflective (Schön, 1983, 1987), reflexive (Usher, 1987) and theorised.

It is appropriate at this point to distinguish between being reflective and reflexive in relation to practice. Schön (1983, 1987) has elaborated a well-regarded framework for understanding the multiple strategies by which educators can and should reflect critically on their own practice. Usher (1987) makes a distinction between “reflective awareness” and “reflexive awareness”, where the former “is concerned only with surfacing and analysing the past” and the latter “implies going beyond this and actually changing the theoretical under-pinnings of action” (p. 34). In combination, reflective and reflexive practice ensures an ongoing and self-critical critique of pedagogies and learning that is attentive to the play of interests of different stakeholders in those educational processes. This critique and this attentiveness underscore the rationale for adding the reflective and reflexive practice to the paper's conceptual framework. That is, focusing continually on such practice is a crucial means of ensuring that the authors' theoretical interests link directly with their students' and colleagues' empirical and material concerns and *vice versa*.

In keeping with this distinction between reflective and reflexive practice, the two issues identified above create challenges and opportunities for the authors in their ongoing contribution to the project of refashioning teacher education in the Faculty of Education at the University of Southern Queensland specifically for tradespeople and (para)professionals who wish to become teachers. As this paper demonstrates, they are assisted in that project by their deployment of a number of powerful theoretical lenses that are synchronously attuned to the possibilities and problems of

postcompulsory pathways and responsive to the need to link conceptual frameworks, pedagogies and learning in ways that are meaningful and productive for learners and teachers alike. From this perspective, the interrogatory focus in the paper's title on 'struggling for purchase' is a reference to the efforts of the authors and their colleagues to enlist those lenses in program development that simultaneously helps to construct graduating teachers who are both professional and reflective and draws on the authors' own reflectivity in ongoing program evaluation and redesign.

Thus the paper constitutes one among a number of ways in which the authors seek to 'practise what they preach' by presenting their reflective and reflexive deployment of some of the aforementioned theoretical lenses. That presentation takes the form of a synthesis of two particular theoretical lenses, followed by a collective discussion of organising questions that emerged from that synthesis. The intention of this collective discussion is twofold: firstly to bring to life the authors' respective and shared understandings about conceptual frameworks, pedagogies and learning in contemporary secondary and VET teacher education programs; and secondly to demonstrate how such an engagement can function effectively as one among several possible pedagogical devices in such programs. The paper concludes by identifying possible implications of this approach for the forms and functions of such programs at the University of Southern Queensland.

Significantly it is through the interplay of these lenses and the meanings that emerge from them that a firm purchase will be established and a critical pathway illuminated for the provision of *fet* for practitioners working in VET. The authors argue that it is time to act strategically to respond to the demands of existing and new cohorts of lifelong learners for learning pathways without sectoral boundaries.

Two Sets of Theoretical Lenses about Conceptual Frameworks, Pedagogies and Learning

The task in this section of the paper is to present a brief overview of two sets of theoretical lenses, selected respectively by the third- and the first-named authors:

- critical theory and criticality
- the humanist tradition in education.

At one level, almost any lenses could have been chosen, given the authors' commitment to theoretical multiplicity and plurality. At another level, the collective discussion in the next section demonstrates the authors' conviction of the need to subject any theoretical lens to scrutiny for its contribution to extending understanding of other selected lenses and for its potential utility in helping to frame the secondary and VET teacher education program development at the University of Southern Queensland.

Critical theory and criticality

The VET rhetoric is all around us: the training reform agenda, learning pathways, competency-based training (CBT), training for work, on-the-job assessment, the Australian Quality Training Framework, recognition of prior learning – and the list goes on. How might this knowledge and rhetoric shape the direction of teaching, learning and research in relation to *fet* in the faculty?

Note the lower case in *fet*. The lower case is used because, in comparison with the previous situation where *fet* was a department within the faculty, it is now a concept under which several undergraduate programs sit. These programs directly service students who come from trade and (para)professional backgrounds and who wish to obtain education qualifications.

It is suggested that *fet* in its undergraduate programs struggles for air in the faculty. This position is fed by two perceptions. Firstly, the faculty has a discourse that is dominated by pre-service school teacher education and secondly, because of this, there is little interest expressed in *fet* or even VET.

In order to elbow *fet* back into significance in the faculty, should a connection with VET be used as a leverage point? In order to answer this question, the elements and significance of VET will be explored with a lens shaped by criticality (Barnett, 1997).

It would be fair to say that VET from a curriculum perspective is very much prescriptive and didactic in nature. Smith and Keating (2003) attest to this picture of curriculum in VET by identifying it as being specified in behavioural terms, aligned with industry standards, modularised and focused on outcomes. This curriculum, commonly known as CBT, is a model that sits well with Tyler's rational model of curriculum development (Tanner & Tanner, 1995). More specifically, it is considered behaviourist education (Billett, Kavanagh, Beven, Hayes, Angus & Seddon, 1998; Misko, 1999).

Paulo Freire, the well known critic of educational processes which oppress (Elias, 1994), offers the first critical lens. Freire (1970) puts knowing and education in the same basket. For him, knowledge occurs through a dialogical and problem solving process. It is the task of education to move students from mere opinion to true knowledge, and the way that this is achieved is through reflection (as opposed to reflex). For Freire, teachers and students should be in the process of knowing together, not in the process of just handing on knowledge. VET, as prescribed by the former Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), appears to be in the business of training for domestication, the antithesis of Freire's true knowing. Using Freire's concept of banking education (1970, p. 65), in which knowledge (and skill) are deposited into the passive student, one can see that VET, whilst arguing for its role in modernising education for economic development (Australian Education Council, 1991), appears to fail by keeping individuals from seeing their own potential for bringing about change in relation to the real concerns of society. It is education and training for maintaining the *status quo*, where capitalism, disadvantage and passivity towards political rhetoric remain. It is accused of having "...little regard for values, attitudes and underpinning knowledge..." (Lundberg, 1994, p. 15).

Freire (1973) also comments on the manner in which knowledge is socially conditioned. In particular, he distinguishes between naïvely transitive consciousness, the knowing of reality on a superficial level, and critically transitive consciousness, or knowing the proper causes of things. Only critical consciousness knows reality (p. 17). Many ask the question, "Where is the critical in CBT?" Misko (1999) implies that it is nowhere, and therefore CBT is not well suited for the development of conceptual and experiential knowledge.

It would be remiss to move on from Freire without mentioning his views of knowledge and action. The word ‘action’ might be considered to be in harmony with the outcomes of CBT, but, as will become clear, Freire connects action with criticality. This serves to distance action from the prescriptive nature of CBT in that action, as a concept in Freire’s eyes, is seen to be dynamic as it is involved in creating new action.

Explaining the relationship between action and knowing in terms of praxis, Freire believes that the journey from opinion to knowledge comes about only through the efforts of work. If action (or work) involves critical reflection, it moves people from naïve knowledge to critical knowledge. Knowledge is a process of “dialectical movement which goes from action to reflection and reflection upon action to a new action” (Freire, 1970, p. 13). This implies flexibility in the application of knowledge. Hark back to the political agenda of training for economic development, in particular the Finn Report (Australian Education Council, 1991), which calls for ‘worker flexibility’ as being one of the major players. CBT is said to fail in delivering worker flexibility, as its training is directed at the achievement only of specified competencies which are unlikely to be adaptable (Smith & Keating, 2003).

A perspective that adds weight to the argument that VET should look further than objectified knowledge comes from Habermas (1972, 1973). In developing arguments that critique positivism, Habermas talks of purposive-rational action and social interaction (communicative action). The former is governed by technical rules and directed at goal attainment, whilst the latter is governed by consensual norms, which define reciprocal expectations. He argues that one cannot occur without the other and that purposive action is subjected to consensual norms, reciprocal expectations and grounded intersubjectivity (values). To separate the two, as VET has done through the use of the positivist paradigm of Taylorism (Tanner & Tanner, 1995), puts actions, in which goal attainment (reaching competency) predominates, at the expense of interpersonal relations. For Habermas, norms, values and shared standards are decisive in the relationship between purposive-rational action and communicative action, for they give us reason to reflect – reason to draw new meaning outside a world of self-subsistent facts.

Citing Habermas, Soucek (1993) articulates how the economic development agenda is impacting on the lifeworlds of private citizens. This is considered to be a Habermasian crisis because it is an intrusion by the state without critique. The analogy can be drawn between the above and how the federal Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), which has now taken on the responsibilities of the former ANTA, dictates VET within Australia. Training packages in the format of CBT dictate how and what private citizens will be trained in, and what qualifications are required for work. What is more disconcerting, and this relates to the above discussion, is how it is done through mechanisms that are distanced from public debate. Habermas (cited in Stevenson, 2003, p. 335) calls for “exhaustive controversy” in relation to public opinion informing the state, thereby fostering a society-wide conversation involving all players. Presently in VET there is evidence of only a minority of participants in this conversation. A cursory glance at an advisory flow chart produced by DEST (Australian National Training Authority, 2005) puts students and community at the bottom of a six-tiered structure with no mention of

teachers or academics (possibly because they are more likely to offer critique). Politicians, bureaucrats and industry monopolise input.

Barnett (1997) connects the reflexive methods used to articulate the concepts within this paper with criticality. This connection relates centrally to arousing caution around using VET pedagogies to further *fet* within the faculty. Barnett acknowledges reflective practice, but suggests that it is far from critical. He suggests that the art of reflection is talked about in a fragmented world, where ‘knowing how’ has replaced ‘knowing that’. The discussion above is very much focused on being critical of ‘knowing how’, at the expense of ‘knowing that’, which appears to be what is happening in VET. Barnett contends that universities used to be in the business of producing knowledge for reason; now there is pressure to be in the business of producing knowledge for doing, for example, through work, economy and consumer markets. Clearly the question remains, “How do we deal with this tension between pedagogies for reason and pedagogies for outcome?”

The humanist tradition in education

“The humanistic viewpoint states that an individual’s real world is his [*sic passim*] phenomenal world (what he perceives) and thus he, alone, can fully know it” (Dubin & Okun, 1973, p. 9). This viewpoint “is based, by definition, on the assumptions of the inner worth and equal dignity of all persons” (Bowen & Hobson, 1987, p. 167). According to Tovey and Lawlor (2004), “proponents of the humanist perspective...emphasise the role of learning as the means through which individuals maximise their potential” (p. 69). This is consistent with the views of such educational theorists of the humanist tradition as John Dewey, who in his seminal works *Democracy and Education* (1916) and *Experience and Education* (1938) presented his argument – from both an anthropological and a psychological position – for reform of the whole conception and practice of education as it was seen in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

In a reaction against what he believed to be the Aristotelian dualism inherent in mainstream educational thought at the time, and rejecting what he saw as the elitist tendency of the traditional liberal education of the day “to make abstractions substantive” (cited in Bowen & Hobson, 1987, p. 168), Dewey proposed a theory of education founded in authentic human experience, where education is development, human experience the foundation platform of learning and shared, social or conjoint activity its realisation (cited in Bowen & Hobson, 1987, pp. 167-168, 197). He dismissed a purist academic approach to learning, suggesting that scholarship or mastered subject matter that is not grounded in the learner’s own experience may actually impede effective learning.

Drawing on the scientific method, Dewey posited an experimental approach to educational thought that focused on the activity or process of thinking as critical enquiry consisting of five stages: firstly, the existence of a genuine experience in which the learner is engaged; secondly, the emergence of a problem, challenge or ‘perplexing situation’ within this context of authentic experience; thirdly, the availability of data on which to base and with which to inform considerations of potential solutions; fourthly, the formulation of ideas, or possible solutions; and lastly, the application – or testing – of these solutions in real life.

For Dewey, this process of thinking is the “method of an educative experience” and “identical with the essentials of reflection” (cited in Bowen & Hobson, 1987, p. 194). He contrasted this with what he called a utilitarian view of education, making the thought provoking distinction between learning that is *instrumental* – which he maintained has the intrinsic value of being a means to an end – and learning that is *utilitarian*, which he accused of being irreflective and of serving “pecuniary ends” (p. 193).

Much of Dewey’s thinking is echoed in more recent educational discourse. He saw education as an “essentially social process” where the development of experience comes about through interaction (Dewey, 1938, p. 58; cited in Roberts, 2003, p. 8) and as a process of “continual reorganising, reconstructing and transforming” that has as its purpose the facilitation of conditions for human growth and development (cited in Bowen & Hobson, 1987, p. 197) – perspectives that have been developed and further articulated in social learning theory, transformative learning theory and constructivist approaches to education. Contemporary andragogical concepts of the role of the educator as ‘facilitator of learning’ can also be traced back to Dewey’s conceptualisation of the role of the teacher as facilitator of quality learning experiences that have as their point of reference the experience that learners already have (Dewey, 1938, p. 74).

Predating concepts of ‘recurrent education’ and ‘lifelong learning’ that emerged during the latter part of the 20th century (Cropley, 1979; Faure, 1972; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1973), Dewey wrote in 1916 of the importance of education as continued growth and stated 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). “In Dewey’s view, the true aim of educators was to develop in youth the continued capacity for growth, the lifelong ability to continue learning” (Wonacott, 2003, p. 7).

What educators can learn from Dewey is the importance of an holistic and interconnected approach to education that is founded in authentic human experience and that advocates 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” (Dewey, 1938, p. 25). He taught the importance of experiential, social learning in the development of knowledge, understanding, skill and what he termed “moral insight” (Dewey, 1916; cited in Bowen & Hobson, 1987, p. 203), and in doing so he provided a coherent theoretical foundation for the development of both VET curriculum and the reflective and reflexive VET practitioner.

A Collective Discussion of Contemporary Secondary and VET Teacher Education Conceptual Frameworks, Pedagogies and Learning

These two theoretical lenses – critical theory and criticality, and the humanist tradition in education – have several convergences and divergences that could be elaborated. For example, similarities and differences between the lenses could be articulated in relation to their respective and shared understandings of such phenomena as action, knowledge, reflection and thought. As a way of identifying some of those similarities

and differences, and also of linking them with the issue of pedagogies and learning in the secondary and VET teacher education programs at the University of Southern Queensland, the authors derived four organising questions to focus their collective discussion. Three of these are addressed in this section of the paper; the fourth forms the basis of the conclusion. The four questions are as follows:

- What are the purposes of education?
- What are some useful pedagogies and learnings in enacting those purposes in *fet*/VET at the University of Southern Queensland?
- How does the reflective and reflexive practitioner contribute to implementing those pedagogies and learnings?
- What do these purposes, pedagogies, learnings and reflective and reflexive practices mean for envisioning and enacting *fet*/VET at the University of Southern Queensland?

It should be emphasised that these organising questions are not intended to be research questions (although each of them could certainly underpin a robust and significant research agenda). Instead they are conceived as linguistic devices for framing action. This is why they have been located in this section of the chapter, after the theoretical lenses have been elaborated: the lenses have provided the initial springboard for articulating the questions as well as an important interrogatory and evaluative strategy for assessing the potential utility of the answers that the authors and others develop in response to those questions. As was noted earlier in the paper, reflective and reflexive practice is seen here as interdependent and as helping to link theory and action – so too with the authors’ commitment to reflect self-critically on both the bases of and the responses to the organising questions listed above.

One illustration of this commitment is the first organising question: what are the purposes of education? While this question’s broadness is acknowledged, so is its centrality in the discussion framing this paper. That is, a premature narrowing of focus on more localised and particular issues runs the risk of downplaying and overlooking precisely this kind of enduringly significant enquiry – and thereby of playing into the hands of an economic rationalist agenda that pretends that the purposes of education are ‘common sense’ and taken-for-granted by all right thinking individuals. At the same time, as the discussion below makes clear, the authors are convinced of the need to link this kind of broad question with very specific and practical concerns at the level of individual programs and courses.

What are the purposes of education?

Education has an important role in developing citizenship (Burrows, 2004), which could be argued to be a concept steeped in self-development. Having a regard for fostering citizens who care, who understand, who involve themselves in robust debate and who are interested in elucidating the truth serves the common good. Conscientisation (Freire, 1970), a phenomenon within citizenship, is considered a useful process not only for the oppressed but also for any student. It is a means of developing a critical consciousness (Freire, 1970, p. 304) in which there is an in-depth examination of issues through the use of practised dialogue, as opposed to polemics. It could be said to be part of active citizenship. Habermas (cited in Stevenson, 2003, p. 335) would concur through his call for “exhaustive controversy”, especially in matters where the state has an impact upon the world of private citizens.

In *Democracy in Education*, Dewey (1916) made a number of points that are particularly relevant to a discussion of the purposes of education. According to Wonacott (2003):

Dewey concluded that education should involve three carefully balanced aims: *natural development*, or the development of the individual's native, inborn powers and abilities; *social efficiency*, or the "cultivation of power to join freely and fully in shared or common activities" (p. 144); and *culture*, or "the capacity for constantly expanding the range and accuracy of one's perception of meanings" (p. 145). (p. 7; emphasis in original)

Nonetheless, Dewey cautions that "in our search for aims in education" we should not be "concerned with finding an end outside of the educative process to which education [itself] is subordinate[d]" (cited in Bowen & Hobson, 1987, p. 181). We should rather focus our efforts on ensuring "the continuance of education by organising the powers that ensure growth" (p. 180) – in other words, we should emphasise education for education's sake. He also saw education as "a means through which the collective experience of a democratic society can be utilised as a resource for solving future problems" (p. 167), which is consistent with views of 'education for citizenship'. Dewey described education as "the enterprise of supplying the conditions which ensure growth, or adequacy of life, irrespective of age" and proposed 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" (p. 180). Not surprisingly, Dewey maintains that the purposes of education are – and should be – infinitely varied. What is important in a democratic society, says Dewey, is that educational aims and purposes "should arise from the free growth of [the individual's] own experience" or else they risk being a "means to more ulterior ends of others than truly their own..." (p. 182).

What are some useful pedagogies and learnings in enacting those purposes in fet/VET at the University of Southern Queensland?

The development of criticality within students studying through *fet* at the University of Southern Queensland is central to the discussion around which pedagogies to utilise. Because of the age of the majority of these students, they have been educated in a system that employed teacher-centred models. The teacher was the focus of learning. This influenced an unquestioning compliance. If our society is truly to become one in which lifelong learning is a priority (Harrison, 2005), we need citizens who are able, and who are not afraid, to ask questions about its direction. The discussion above of criticality would suggest that knowledge, from a VET perspective, has become a supplier of "means to non-debated ends" (Barnett, 1997, p. 6). It is argued that criticality supplies the means for 'debated ends'.

One of the major elements of criticality is critical thinking. Critical thinking is a popular phenomenon seen to be important for survival within our rapidly changing world (Paul, 1992). Putting aside the debate (a debate to which the authors will contribute elsewhere) about how critical thinking manifests itself and is taught (Halonen, 1995), it is a practice that is bent on understanding. Barnett (1997) argues that the debate over critical thinking needs to be broadened because it "confines the thinker to given standards of reasoning within specific disciplines" (p. 7). This broader view would include: "...three domains, knowledge, the self and the world...[Increasing the scope to include these two other domains unleashes] the

emancipatory potential of critical being – in thought, in understanding and in action...” (p. 8).

In an analysis of the place of theory in curriculum design for adult educators, Usher (1987) adopts an unashamedly “Deweyesque” perspective, stating that

...it is impossible to have theory which does not arise from practice and practice which is not located in theory. We therefore come to the paradoxical yet valuable conclusion that *all theory is a form of practice and all practice is a kind of theory*. (p. 30; emphasis in original)

The starting point for curriculum development, he argues, needs to be those theories which guide and inhere in practice (“practitioners’ theory-in-action”) – and in particular practice *problems* rather than practice *per se*. A process of surfacing, reflecting on and “teasing out” practice problems and questioning the “normality” of practice provides fertile ground for the germination and growth of a “critical, self-questioning attitude” which leads to “critical awareness of self, practice-based experience and their interaction” (p. 31). Through this process of “review”, Usher maintains that “...a reflexive awareness can be achieved which refines and changes practice-theory through freeing it from the constraints of habit, assumption and unrecognised ideology” (p. 34). Could this, then, be one example of what Barnett (1987) has referred to above as a broader view of critical thinking?

Another potentially useful approach to pedagogies and learning in *fet/VET* at the University of Southern Queensland is provided by Eraut’s (2002) concept of *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” (cited in Lindell & Stengstrom, 2004, p. 4). Eraut maintains that: “...this type of interaction involves deep, critical and systematic thinking about work-based practices and experiences with guidance from concepts and ideas encountered in education/training context[s]” (p. 4).

This concept promotes the importance of “*praxis* that is the connection of learning with real life situations” (Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993; cited in Chappell, 2003, p. 8; emphasis in original), and that is “not tied to a particular educational theory” but takes on “...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” (Chappell, 2003, p. 4).

How does the reflective and reflexive practitioner contribute to implementing those pedagogies and learnings?

When criticality and the reflective and reflexive practitioner converge, a rhythm develops. This is evident when attention is drawn to Schön’s (1983) reflective practitioner. Confronted with a problem, the student/worker embraces his or her confusion, reflects on the problem with prior understanding (which is implicit in behaviour) and endeavours to experiment with responses to the problem to generate new understandings and possible means of change (Schön. 1983, p. 68). This self-monitoring process is reflexive in nature. This reflexivity is a general resource for responding effectively to change, and therefore a means of generating knowledge (Barnett, 1997).

The implications of this discussion link criticality with reflection and self. The means to extend this into a community of individuals who are active commentators and practitioners, who engage in robust debate, who reflect upon reasons for knowing and who in doing so attempt to free themselves from a take-it-for-granted world lie in the above discussion. From this perspective, pedagogies ‘for doing’ deserve – and take – second place.

With clear resonances with this focus on a critical approach to reflective and reflexive practice, Dewey (1916) notes that

...since the curriculum is always getting loaded down with purely inherited traditional matter and with subjects which represent mainly the energy of some influential person or group of persons in [*sic*] behalf of something dear to them...[there is a need for a] critical outlook and survey...[of the curriculum that] requires constant inspection, criticism, and revision to make sure it is accomplishing its purpose...ensuring that the studies and topics included furnish both direct increments to the enriching of lives of the pupils and also materials which they can put to use in other concerns of direct interest. (cited in Bowen & Hobson, 1987, p. 199)

Similarly, an active engagement with the pedagogies and learnings identified above mandates a degree of reflexivity, in the form of “an acknowledgment of the ideological and historical power” exercised by “dominant forms of inquiry” (Smyth & Shacklock, 1998, p. 6), which almost by definition include the forms of educational provision in university faculties of education, RTOs and schools. Reflexive practice therefore includes efforts to change “the theoretical under-pinnings of action” (Usher, 1987, p. 34) and an ongoing interrogation of the effectiveness of those pedagogies and learnings in helping to attain the purposes of education outlined earlier in this section of the paper. Thus the distinction between reflective and reflexive practice is vital to ensuring the interdependence of theory and action that is crucial in turn to maximising the possibilities of educational provision in the contexts elaborated here to ‘make a difference’ in the lives of learners – and to make that difference often and sustainably.

Conclusion: Implications for Secondary and VET Teacher Education at the University of Southern Queensland

The introduction to this paper identified two key issues: the most effective means of designing an effective teacher education curriculum that engages with tradespeople and (para)professionals in their transition into teaching; and the most appropriate interplay among conceptual frameworks, pedagogies and learning in that design. In pursuing those issues, the paper has traversed the theoretical lenses of critical theory (Habermas, 1972, 1973) and criticality (Barnett, 1997) and the humanist tradition in education (Dewey, 1916) and has drawn on the perspectives of a reflective (Schön, 1983, 1987) and a reflexive (Usher, 1987) practitioner.

As a way of synthesising and bringing to a provisional and tentative conclusion these complex and diverse ideas and issues, the paper concludes by engaging with the fourth of the four questions identified above: “What do these purposes, pedagogies, learnings and reflective and reflexive practices mean for envisioning and enacting *fet/VET* at the University of Southern Queensland?” Two principal points are made, each with a number of important elements and implications.

Firstly, for criticality to gain purchase, it is suggested that content for the *fet* curriculum be chosen and structured with an eye for debate. This means a depth and breadth of material, rich in dialogue and offering varying perspectives grounded in action. This is material that prompts questions for self-reflection, whose answers further prompt communicative action (Habermas, 1972, 1973). Assessment could align the degree to which students can articulate reasons for knowing with how this knowing informs their practice. This could be considered as an appraisal of the degree of students' critical engagement. Essential to this formula is the disposition of the lecturers. How closely do they and their pedagogies align with criticality? How accepting are they in relation to having a critical eye cast over the value of their chosen curriculum for students? These questions imply having lecturers who are open to critical reason being focused on their choice of curriculum, their pedagogies and even their valued professional perspectives. Having a dialectic in which both student(s) and lecturer engage in robust debate exemplifies "...pedagogical [and andragogical] practices...[that] engender [the elusive] critical spirit..." (Barnett, 1997, p. 20).

Secondly, an examination of issues relating to pedagogies and learning through the humanist lens supplied by Dewey (1916) and others in the context of the current tension between VET and higher education has much to offer the authors in their search for a firm purchase for VET and *fet* within the Faculty of Education at the University of Southern Queensland. Four elements in particular of this potential contribution are worthy of identification:

1. The curriculum needs to be truly learner-centred, holistic and interconnected – that is, founded in genuine and authentic experience in which learners are engaged and making the link between institution-based and work-based learning (mutual enhancement).
2. The pedagogy (andragogy) needs to be both *experiential and experimental*, connecting learning with real life/work situations, concerned with the interplay between subject matter and the learner's own experience and encouraging personal growth through reflection on existing as well as new experience (experimentation).
3. Key learning and assessment activities need to be learner-centred, growth-enhancing, situation focused and problem-based, facilitating a learning environment where learners reflect as a social group or learning community on their practice – their theory-in-action – moving through a process of identifying, reflecting on, teasing out and theory-testing practice problems and dilemmas in order to 're-map' their future courses of action (Usher, 1987).
4. As reflective and reflexive practitioners themselves, the authors need to 'walk the talk' and use the above strategies and principles as a foundation for development as well as the regular review and evaluation of their curriculum and pedagogy to ensure the continued rigour, coherence and relevance to the needs of learners of that curriculum and pedagogy.

In combination, these two points and their associated elements and implications attest to the need for and the value of the ongoing envisioning and enactment of *fet*/VET at the University of Southern Queensland to direct attention simultaneously to multiple foci:

- *philosophy* (for example, in engaging with the purposes of education)
- *theory* (as exemplified in the depth and richness of the concepts interrogated here)
- *curriculum* (reflected in the tensions between CBT and other curriculum forms)
- *pedagogies* (a number of possible pedagogical/andragogical strategies having been outlined here)
- *learning* (as in articulating the assumptions about learning underpinning different theoretical lenses)
- *practice* (understood as the intersection between the reflective and the reflexive practitioner)
- *politics* (recognising that the preceding foci have in common a concern with and an impact on the exercise of power).

The authors hope that these points, elements and foci about and of *fet/VET* at the University of Southern Queensland resonate and articulate with equivalent concerns in other teacher education faculties in Australian and internationally. The four questions outlined and addressed above are intended to highlight some of the issues currently confronting advocates around the world for this form of teacher education. The wider applicability of those issues derives from the global reach of many of the changes and challenges presented by late capitalism, ranging from the interface between education and work to the commodification of different kinds of skills to the public and private benefits and costs of lifelong learning. *fet/VET* at the authors' institution is only one site for the interrogation of and engagement with those issues – but it is no less meaningful or valuable for that.

Thus it is clear that the struggle for purchase for *fet* and VET in the Faculty of Education at the University of Southern Queensland resonates with a much broader set of debates about theoretical lenses, pedagogies and learning and meaning-making in contemporary Australia. Particularly significant in this regard is the macro debate surrounding lifelong learning and whether it can be encouraged by programs that relegate the lenses advocated in this paper to a secondary position. Critics of the learning for work (VET) paradigm would argue that this relegation is already a reality. They describe the learning that takes place within that paradigm as promoting learning for profit and/or for industry goals and as learning that is driven by constant competition in an employment market in which workers need to 'skill up' in order to survive. This approach is fostered at the expense of learning for intrinsic value and for community empowerment (Gouthro, 2002). No doubt this is an important debate that needs to be held over for another paper. However, for the authors, criticality, critical thinking, the humanist tradition in education and the interdependence of reflective and reflexive practice all have a vital contribution to make to the urgent task of meeting the needs of existing and future lifelong learners to access educational pathways that are truly without sectoral boundaries.

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