

## **PROMOTING PRODUCTIVE PEDAGOGIES: PRESERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION FOR NEW TIMES IN QUEENSLAND STATE SCHOOLS**

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... the current model of schooling may more appropriately belong to earlier in the twentieth century. It was developed to educate the masses for work in the industrial era. More importantly, it belongs to a print-based culture in which knowledge is owned by those who can access books in which it is recorded. Success is examined and certified by teachers, testing an individual's ability to apply that knowledge. Classroom structure, timetabled lessons, content-based instruction and classes organised sequentially by age are features of the print-based school.

The relevance of this model in the next century needs to be critically examined.

(Education Queensland, 1999, p. 15)

This is a paper about change, pedagogic change in schools and teacher education that might more appropriately equip learners for life and work in the twenty-first century. It addresses the urgent need for more productive pedagogic relations in each of these sites and possible connections between the two. Framing the paper and our teaching and research is the notion that pedagogy *matters*; not only regarding *what* is learned but perhaps more importantly *how*, as pedagogic interactions and relationships are seen to be the sites where life-long learners, including teaching professionals, are at least partly made. Our enduring concern is, of course, to try to identify and maintain those features of our pedagogy that engender in preservice teachers inquiring habits of mind, competence with the knowledge base and skills of teaching as well as the ability to 'see' and want to do something about educational disadvantage.

### Introduction

Educational change and reform is far from a new phenomenon; social evolutions from industrial to modern to post-modern times have parallel 'threads' of change within mass-schooling that reflect, to some extent, the changing nature of life generally. An examination of such evolutions in recent times suggests, however, that the rhetoric of change is far greater than the evidence of actual change in practice (Fullan, 2 000).

Papert (1993) tells an oft-cited 'parable' in which he compares the reactions of a teacher and a surgeon who may have lived one hundred years ago and who are magically transported to their respective workplaces today. The surgeon would be totally at sea, unable to cope with the surgery of today and involved in an 'exercise of incompetence' (Lord David Puttnam, chair of Britain's General Teaching Council, 2 000). On the other hand, Puttnam (2000) suggests that a teacher today might well fit quite comfortably into the classroom of a century ago. Puttnam (2 000) describes change on a broad global basis as "leaping ahead in vast bounds" while the educational sector is making change to track this broad evolution in only incremental ways. It is this adherence to incremental change which is one reason the education sector has fallen further 'out of synch' with the broader social context. This has led

to a sense of urgency which has caused various educational agencies to move into what Fullan (200) describes as " ... the second serious attempt at large-scale educational reform in the past half-century."

### *Educational change in the State of Queensland*

The state of public education in Queensland is under considerable scrutiny and emerging change of a quite dramatic nature. Three major events have converged to inform current moves towards school reform. These factors play a major part in the background to our research and this paper and are briefly discussed below.

In April 1999 Education Queensland published a document titled *The next decade: A discussion about the future of Queensland state schools* which was broadly circulated across the State to various interest groups for comment and reaction. This document suggested the need for major educational reform for a variety of reasons, ranging from serious economic concerns due to a loss of students from State to private schools, to the changing nature of work for children leaving school in the future. A series of community-based consultations were established in which response to the document and its content were sought and collected by a team of consultants. This is now operating under the title of *2010 Strategy* to indicate the timelines under which the proposed reforms will gradually be enacted.

At the same time, a research project commissioned by Education Queensland and undertaken by staff from the University of Queensland, was into its second year of a three year mandate. Referred to as the Queensland Longitudinal School Reform Study, the focus was on pedagogy and what was actually happening in schools. This study, combined with earlier work on authentic pedagogy by Fred Newmann and colleagues in the U.S. (1996), has resulted in a series of teaching factors which are referred to as indicators of *Productive Pedagogies*.

As a result of this community consultation process, early findings emerging from the longitudinal study and research coming in from around the world on educational change issues, the need for dramatic changes seemed urgent. A team of people, chaired by Professor Alan Luke, as acting Deputy Director-General of Education, developed a stream of ideas that have led to the formulation of the *New Basics* and *Rich Tasks*. These have attracted state, national and international interest and have become the focus of attention and, for some, high expectations regarding the hoped-for reforms that have been the cry of many advocates of educational change.

What has been most significant for us as teacher educators has been the renewed emphasis on pedagogy; on how important it is for learners to be challenged, to be able to construct deep intellectual knowledges, to be supported in finding their own way and making personal sense of experience if they are to develop the competence and disposition to further inquire and learn. Previously we may have equated 'good' teaching with the use of colourful resources, active teachers and children, group work and collaboration; these however, do not problematise the existing teacher/power, student/dependence relationship. Remembering how teaching relationships *form* the students of the future, it is important that these relationships are appropriately productive of empowered, agentic learners. As Terry Moran, former Director-General of Education Queensland states: "The central aspect of education - the point at which learning takes place - is undoubtedly the relationship between teachers and their students" (Education Queensland, 1999, p. 1). As teacher educators we have similar relationships with students and this becomes an issue of extreme interest and investigation as our research proceeds.

### *This study*

From a 'macro' view of global educational change, we move to a micro view of the study site for the research included in this paper. Our teaching partnership in this 4<sup>th</sup> year core education subject has continued in various forms over several years; each year we examine current and future issues for teachers who are soon to enter their own classrooms for the first time. Given our shared and growing interest in post-structural research methodology, the links between pedagogy and power became the focus of our attention in this subject for 2000. Since teaching/learning interactions shape learners to see themselves in particular ways and the power to do this 'shaping' lies with the teacher in terms of the partnerships which get established, we regard issues of the 'power' differentials between ourselves and the students as important.

The content for the particular subject in which this research is undertaken was informed by new and current directions in the curriculum areas of English, Mathematics and Technology; within this subject all three are presented as language with accompanying useful, relevant and integrated literacies. We, as staff responsible for teaching this subject, have a shared commitment that students due to graduate as teachers at the end of the current year should engage at high levels of thinking about the professional career on which they are about to embark. As a result, we have tried to make this subject one which 'stretches' thinking to quite eclectic levels, including consideration of various aspects of 'schooling' for a world that is rapidly changing.

At the beginning of the year we were conscious of the a-critical ways in which students accept the curriculum, pedagogy and means of assessment as given in educational institutions. In an attempt to disrupt this a-critical reaction to both the content and pedagogy in the subject we attempted to increase student engagement and active participation through modelling a paradigm leaning more towards 'curriculum as inquiry' (Heald-Taylor, 1996). This suggests a pedagogic approach in which students have considerable input to content and knowledge-creation through inductive learning and constructivist practice.

The content for study in the subject drew from a focus on our own teaching practices and the Productive Pedagogies work. The only 'textbook' for the subject was the background papers and discussion list linked to the Frameworks Project, the 'umbrella' under which the New Basics and Rich Tasks materials were located on the Web. Our own pedagogy became a major focus of study at a number of levels, opening up our own teaching practice, as it were, to critical scrutiny. Thus we concentrated on the issues of pedagogy at two levels:

1. critical reflection on pedagogy at tertiary level as 'modelled' paradigm for practice, and
2. student consideration of and critical reflection on 'repertoires of practice' compatible with their personal understandings of good pedagogic practice.

From the above it can be seen that we tried to achieve an inquiry approach to our own teaching with the aim of causing students to see the value in such a paradigm. It was assumed that such a paradigm would encourage higher intellectual engagement and relevance for the preservice teachers. An important assumption framing our practice was that modelled investigative processes would enhance student participation and consequent classroom practice.

### *The Rich Tasks Project*

The subject began with an examination of the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSLRS); in collaboration with the students, we examined the research findings that

had been reported thus far, considered the research methodology behind the study and, ultimately, examined the 20 points for which scoring was done under the descriptor of Productive Pedagogies. We looked at the four broad headings used, the points listed under each and the scale of measures to indicate the presence or not of these traits. We tried to develop some sense of the 'applied' nature of these views of pedagogy by viewing short segments of video tapes from teachers in classrooms and tried to locate evidence or not of any or all of these twenty traits.

As extension to this scrutiny of pedagogy, we then moved into the New Basics and Rich Tasks materials coming from Education Queensland and the pedagogic implications these suggest. We examined some of the work being done in schools around these two linked concepts and how they were actually emerging in trial form. This led to considerable discussion and reflection on practice which led to the first piece of assessment in the subject. In order to more fully develop an understanding of what a Rich Task might involve we had students work in groups of 4-6 'mapping backwards' from the rich Task to the pedagogic environment and interactions that might be conducive to the competent completion of the Rich Task. The students also studied how the New Basics could be imbedded in such assessment events and mapped which of the 20 indicators of productive pedagogy would be demonstrated over the development of the particular Rich Task.

Throughout the subject we continued to engage in discussion with students on explicit aspects of our own teaching; we encouraged them to consider our teaching against the 'productive pedagogy' checklist and to make recommendations for improvement. This involved examining the rationale and issues of power and desire located in our choosing the content we 'prescribed' for the subject and 'problematizing knowledge' represented by these choices. It involved consideration of the 'usefulness' or not of the ways we presented ideas and the relevance it seemed to have currently for students in preparation for teaching. As well it involved reflection on student presentations of work done around the Rich Tasks and the assessment of these.

### Some identifiable outcomes

Our work with the 4<sup>th</sup> year students marked a very exciting move for us. It caused us to open everything we had done in the 4 years these students had been with us to close scrutiny and critical examination. However, some events throughout the year appeared significant in that the outcomes were not entirely as we had hoped and expected. We began to re-think our assumptions of change underlying the subject:

1. How effective is 'modelled inquiry' in bringing about change in learner behaviour;
2. How effective is critical reflection in this regard?

For example, we asked students to be conscious of the Productive Pedagogies materials in considering the pedagogic issues and content that would be included in an hypothetical classroom context and to come together after a couple of weeks and share with their colleagues the sorts of ideas they had considered. As a means of framing this context in some kind of 'real' way we had each person complete a small survey that would roughly describe their preferred learning mode/style. We tabulated the distribution of the results and asked them to use this distribution as an indicator of the student population they would be teaching. This was a major point of discovery for us that caused us to take a step back and think about our own pedagogy. The results of this survey determined that although many students had a preferred learning style that favoured the reading/writing mode of development, more preferred kinaesthetic or visual ways of appropriating new knowledge. As we began to consider the implications of this, it became apparent that our tendency to

focus on reading and writing as dominant means of teaching forced many students to work outside their preferred modes of learning. We were then able to introduce alternative ways of accessing and presenting information for our students. What became interesting was how this modelled event, which we saw as increasing student engagement in learning, was interpreted and taken up by the students.

The preservice teachers were asked to think about the concept of a Rich Task and to imagine a pedagogy that would encourage and stimulate pupils' higher order thinking and intellectual quality. For example, one such task was:

Students will show that they are able to collect oral histories from older members of their own community and from the people in different cultural groups. They explore a range of lifestyle changes that have taken place during the 20<sup>th</sup> century with particular reference to the changing nature of work. They prepare a multi-media presentation for a selected audience to show significant changes in work practices that have occurred in the past and predict how practices might change in the near future.

Whereas we had intended the students to think about how they would challenge and involve students in the various learning processes, what issues of possible difference might arise and be significant, how they would value student input and exploration, what they did was to plan the unit down to the last bit of content to be covered and merely ticked off the fact that they managed to cater for all learning styles. What happened was that all the boxes were ticked but higher order thinking, indeed relevance, supportive environment and recognition of difference were taken for granted.

Another issue was that as we worked with the students we imagined that it gave them 'voice' in ways that they had never been asked to speak previously - we saw it as a 'now' event that happened then and there rather than as an 'after' event where students gathered with their colleagues in the refectory to rave over, or conversely whinge about, the quality of the ideas and the teaching they had just experienced. The students were invited to voice their reactions as they occurred with the people who were doing the teaching and learning in its real-time context. We attempted to query and validate the points contained in the productive pedagogies' research for reflection on our own practice, to enable the students to use these indicators to reflect on the extent to which they were reflected in our teaching.

Ultimately however, the range and depth of discussion and reflection we had anticipated didn't really happen! Despite our efforts, all 'knowing' was still mediated by us, the teachers, leaving the students with a sense of 'the familiar' and an unwillingness to engage in deep levels of critique. As well, on several occasions the 'reflection' deteriorated into victim bashing when one student in particular, framing her outburst on liberal humanistic understandings of all individuals as equally able and willing to participate in class discussions, pointed the finger of blame at students who did not participate as ably as she did. At a whole group level, students in reflective discussion often resorted to blaming children or teacher or parents for poor educational outcomes and took the pedagogy and enframing social structures as given and immutable. For example, they regularly blamed parents: "the parents don't read to the children", "they don't give them breakfast", "they don't speak English!". Of particular interest, of course, is the fact that students, though invited, did not in any way question or criticise the lecturers' practices.

### Tentative analyses of outcomes

Could it be that we in our teaching are talking *investigation* and *inquiry* but doing *activity*? Are we confusing participation with empowerment? When we look at our work with the fourth



year students we find it is still very teacher directed (and of course the students willingly participate in the institutionalised "game of truth"). We now see that inquiry is more student centred, it focuses on student investigation where they access all the information they can find and *create* knowledge. The teacher's role becomes that of facilitating learning processes initiated by the learner, of posing potential questions, of challenging outcomes, of supporting and recognising difference. These are professional qualities that are not fixed, innate or easily taught as skills; these are new ways-of-being in teaching that are alert to what learners bring to the experience and how this can be harnessed for agency and empowerment.

Critical reflection is very popular in teacher education but what positive use are we to make of it? Again, we are beginning to think that it is the reflective *process* that matters. In this process, too, teaching professionals are made. Does the reflective process become simply inquiry, where learners and teachers meet as colleagues to ponder possibilities and analyse relevant issues? A difficult issue is to break the power/knowledge nexus; teacher educators may need to see and treat fourth year students as colleagues rather than students. It may be that we need to concentrate more on the students' construction of teaching portfolios that demonstrate growth, perseverance, critical analyses of issues and depth of knowledge construction. Preservice teachers want practical activities, lesson ideas and resources that they can use in the classroom and we think that these should be developed as part of their professional portfolios.

Another very difficult and controversial issue in teacher education and schooling in general centres on the notion of 'productive' pedagogy and how pedagogic interactions and relationships 'produce' the learners in certain ways. In every interaction learners may learn something about themselves or the world that empowers and instils a positive identity, or something that diminishes and destroys them. What we have learned from our research is that when teachers or lecturers are constantly in charge of the direction that learning takes, students get the message that they are not capable of finding their own way or that their own way is not good enough. In teacher education we want our actions and interactions to be productive of competent, agentic teaching professionals; this is a manner of being an educator that has to be constituted, constructed through learning processes and actions. It is not something that can be tucked into the folds of their graduating paraphernalia to be taken out and applied as necessary.

### Conclusion

In Queensland State Schools the pedagogical discourse is at least changing to fit in with 'new times' and facilitate the development of learners who are flexible, adaptable knowledge workers of the future. School based and teacher educators are coming to recognise the importance of the experiences and perspectives of the learner in learning processes and productive pedagogies. No longer can the teacher her/himself get it right. It takes two, or many more, to make the educational encounter productive and empowering.

We began our research based on what we now consider to be old and tired notions of teacher development and change. We imagined that through actively involving the preservice teachers in learning and critical reflection on pedagogical issues that they would be able and willing to reproduce these when teaching. We now realise that there is no perfect pedagogy to model, there are only potentially productive interactions and relationships to be fostered or ignored. There is no teaching style to hold in derision or contempt; all are experienced as learning encounters that can empower or damage. We are coming to think that we need to focus less on our knowledge and control of the learning process and focus more on the process itself, its quality and potential to liberate. McWilliam (1999, p. 16) believes that pedagogical pleasure must ultimately come "from a teacher's



success in using pedagogical techniques that turn students' eyes away from the teacher's own performance and back toward their own individual or group performance". After all, it is in their own performance that life-long learners and teaching professionals are (re)made.

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