Pedagogic Learning in the Pedagogic Workplace: Educators’ Lifelong Learning and Learning Futures

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Abstract
Pedagogic learning – that is, teachers’ ongoing learning about pedagogy – is both about pre-entry learning and an ongoing workplace learning issue. This paper focuses on the learning of teachers in postcompulsory education and training, although it recognises that many of the issues are common with educators in other parts of the educational system. Educators are conceptualised as workers who, of necessity, are constantly engaged in workplace learning, be it in the corridors, the staffroom or the classroom of that workplace. Three popular discourses of the ‘good teacher’ and their implications for educators’ learning are examined: the teacher as charismatic subject, as competent craftsperson and as reflective practitioner. A number of challenges to these discourses are raised by conceptualising teaching as ongoing socially situated practice (Lave, 1996): issues of power and purpose; questions of compliance and resistance; a view that pedagogic acts are acts of identity construction; and a perspective on pedagogy and knowledge construction. It is suggested that such an understanding of teachers’ workplace learning is essential in considering Learning Futures.

Introduction
The notion of Learning Futures highlights the need for professional educators constantly to update their knowledge and skills in order to prepare individuals and groups for the challenge of life in contemporary global society. But precisely how do we conceptualise the educator and the educator’s learning within what might be termed a Learning Futures discourse? As Ben Kehrwald (this issue) suggests, there are serious questions about the ability of education and educators to respond to rapid social, economic and technological change. Educators themselves are challenged both in terms of their own lifelong learning and in the relations between pedagogic knowledge and pedagogic practice in a fast changing world. Rather than taking the view that educators somehow need more training or retraining (‘upskilling’, ‘updating’, ‘refreshing’, etc.), I suggest that a perspective which views educators’ ongoing pedagogic learning as workplace learning – in other words, that prioritises learning on the job – will be more productive. In order to consider this question of educators’ learning, I want to address the issue tangentially through a focus on discourses of the ‘good’ educator and their implications for pedagogic learning. I then argue for a much more situated understanding of teaching as ongoing socially situated practice (Lave, 1996) as a way of exploring what might be called pedagogic workplace learning and then consider the implications for Learning Futures.
For some time, I have been concerned with what Janice Malcolm and I have called pedagogic identity and pedagogic learning in relation to teachers in postcompulsory education and training (that is, higher, technical, further and adult education). We have rebelled against the very narrow English understanding of pedagogy which is often used to describe instructional techniques covering ‘teaching methods’ and ‘teaching styles’. Instead of conceptualising pedagogy as teachers’ actions inside classrooms to bring about learning, such that teaching is a decontextualised transfer of knowledge, skills and practice to the acquisitive learner, we have tried to escape this teaching/learning polarisation by conceiving of pedagogy as encompassing “a critical understanding of the social, policy and institutional context, as well as a critical approach to the content and process of the educational/training transaction” (Zukas & Malcolm, 2002, p. 215).

In other words, we have moved beyond the classroom to develop a much wider understanding of the arena and settings in which pedagogical practices develop and take place, to use Jean Lave’s (1988) language. (I am therefore following Lave [1988], who defines an arena as a physically, economically, politically and socially organised space in time and a pedagogic setting as “a repeatedly experienced, personally ordered and edited version of the arena”.)

Much of the research on teachers’ learning in the postcompulsory sector either tends to be about teachers’ learning at the start of their careers or relies on very narrow conceptions of pedagogy. Research on practising teachers tends to assume some kind of change within the individual teacher – the acquisition of a new skill, the further development of a teacher’s sensitivity to student needs and so on. There is little regard for learning cultures, broader contexts and the purposes of the educational/training transaction, let alone teachers’ own personal histories and the ways in which they elect or are required to engage in the workplace. Most significantly, issues of power and purpose are rarely considered.

Of course, there is an honourable tradition of critical educational research – although rather less apparent in the postcompulsory education and training field than in initial education – which takes as its starting point the social structures in which teachers find themselves. But the problem with much of this work is that it tends to de-emphasise teachers’ agency and particularly teachers’ own values, histories and dispositions. As an example, whilst recognising macro-political, economic and social forces, the discourse of Learning Futures fails to take account of educators’ own situatedness, politics and histories. If we conceptualise pedagogy and pedagogic learning as the interpenetration of persons and contexts (Lave, 1996), we can avoid these arguments between structure and agency and understand that individual teachers embody the historical, cultural, economic and political contexts for education. But they are not just ciphers for structure; they also embody their own histories, politics, values and so on and in turn produce those educational contexts through their day to day work.

However, current discourses of teachers and teacher learning get in the way of this theoretical understanding and I begin by exploring three current discourses of teachers: the teacher as charismatic subject; the teacher as competent craftsman; and the teacher as reflective practitioner. My purpose here is to consider how teachers are positioned within each of these discourses and to raise questions about the
pedagogic (workplace) learning implications of each, particularly in terms of the Learning Futures agenda. I then go on to consider several other issues concerning pedagogic learning: purpose and power, compliance and resistance, pedagogy and identity construction and pedagogy and knowledge construction.

**Discourses of the ‘Good’ Teacher**

This special theme issue is testament to my claim that the discursive construction of the ‘good’ teacher is ubiquitous. For example, Ben Kehrwald (this issue) shows how the desire to “prepare educators not only for participation in contemporary global society but also for professional activity…which cultivates these abilities in their learners” is difficult to achieve, not least because of the diversity of contexts of education. What we mean by ‘good’ in this context (promoting ‘sustainable’ or ‘inclusive’ education) is not easily transferable or understood across contexts. However, there is still an implicit assumption that the situated experience of this particular program will produce ‘good’ teachers who will be able to meet the Learning Futures agenda. The ‘good’ teacher here is someone who is able to participate in global societies and who is able “to integrate their newly acquired knowledge and skills into their educational practice in order to prepare today’s learners for the challenges of a complex and ever changing society” (Kehrwald, this issue). In other words, the ‘good’ teacher is a global citizen and lifelong learner, able to produce global citizens and lifelong learners, however that might be interpreted.

Such discourse is, of course, highly normative, as well as ambitious. It is somewhat outside the more common discourses of the ‘good’ teacher (certainly in the United Kingdom) within social, cultural and policy debates. Drawing on a symposium about the ‘good’ teacher (Zukas, Fenwick, Harris, Jarvis, Malcolm & Pratt, 2003) and the work of Alex Moore (2004), I now turn to these more common discourses of the ‘good’ teacher and analyse three: teacher as charismatic subject; teacher as crafts-person; and teacher as reflective practitioner. In each case, I ask what pedagogic (workplace) learning might look like.

**Teacher as charismatic subject**

In an exploratory study, Christine Jarvis and Ann Harris (Zukas, Fenwick, Harris, Jarvis, Malcolm & Pratt, 2003) asked student teachers about their ideas of ‘good’ teaching and found that many students associated ‘good’ teaching with popular cultural images of charismatic individuals who had changed the lives of those whom they taught. They included examples of teachers as carers or saviours: Sidney Poitier in *To Sir with Love*; Maggie Smith in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*; Michelle Pfeiffer in *Dangerous Minds*; and perhaps most popularly Robin Williams as Mr Keating in *Dead Poet’s Society*. Teacher recruitment drives often rely on this discourse of charisma and change. For example, for some years in the United Kingdom, the recruitment campaigns for compulsory education consisted of a series of stories by famous people speaking about the teachers who had inspired them.

This discourse of the charismatic teacher assumes that there is some essential quality to being a teacher which is either present or absent; ‘gifted’ teachers owe their success to their personal qualities which inspire and enthuse learners. If one is learning to be a teacher, one either has to be a charismatic teacher or to try as far as possible to become like a charismatic teacher (a somewhat failure laden pathway which can lead to severe disillusion and self-loathing, as Moore suggests). There are traces of this...
discourse within the Learning Futures assumptions: somehow by embodying the qualities of global citizenship and lifelong learning, learners will be inspired to follow suit.

Within this discourse, how then do we educate educators? Given that charisma is (assumed to be) an innate quality, there seems little opportunity for learning and identity transformation since charismatic teachers will automatically understand how best to teach. In this discourse, teachers’ personal qualities form the basis of pedagogic practices – and the pedagogic learning project, if there is one, is the project (and the projection) of the self. The charismatic teacher is a de-situated, de-politicised individual who teaches in a classroom far away from the wider sociopolitical concerns and circumstances of education and has little or nothing to learn from or to do with other teachers, often being situated as a loner outside the system. Pedagogic practice is a showcase for personal qualities such as inspiration and enthusiasm. Within this discourse, perhaps what is most important is that, if things go wrong – that is, that students do not learn – it is the teacher’s character which is to blame. Thus, teachers who are themselves not able to respond to fast changing global, economic and social processes and to inspire learners to follow suit are somehow failing in the global project.

The training discourse of the competent craftsperson

In Britain and elsewhere, we have lists of skills that student teachers are expected to acquire, to develop to a particular standard and to display (often for assessment purposes). Such lists often form the basis of curricular decisions about what should be covered during initial education programs and in effect define the ‘good teacher’. They rely on the discourse of the competent craftsperson, suggesting that it is possible to acquire, develop to a particular standard and demonstrate a set of competences and standards as set out in such documents. But so-called standards have been criticised for a wide range of reasons, not least because they fail to indicate what a ‘good enough’ teacher, to paraphrase Winnicott, might be.

The idea of the competent craftsperson has been linked both to such lists of ‘practical’ approaches to teaching and to broader models of teaching and learning. For example, Smyth (1995) suggests that they reflect broader moves towards regarding teaching as the instillation of ‘basic competencies’ in young people while Stephen Ball (1999) aligns such competence discourses with managerialism and anti-intellectualism. He suggests too that they are related to the exercises in performativity of inspection and league tables which are such an obsession in the whole of the educational scene in the United Kingdom and other developed countries today. In some ways, there is a generous assumption that learning to teach is acquiring a set of skills such that anyone might acquire that set of skills, given the right ‘training’. And – most importantly – once acquired, one is ‘competent’, regardless of changing circumstances. But there are other, less helpful consequences.

First, there is the issue of universality. There is an assumption that the ingredients of ‘good teaching’ can be set down so that – once acquired – anyone can be an effective teacher. The problem is the assumption that sets of generalised skills can be learnt which are applicable regardless of the individual teacher or the situations in which they find themselves. This is not supportable. For example, Michael Eraut’s (2004) work demonstrates that, even for experienced workers, what counts as competence
will change over time. He argues therefore that we should conceive of competence as a moving target, rather than a universal set of skills.

Second, the discourse prioritises skills and knowledge which reside within individuals rather than dealing with complex issues of educational processes – what Bernstein (1996) calls the macro–micro issue. He suggests that the competences discourse leads to misdiagnoses of perceived educational failure so that these failures become the fault of individual students and teachers (Bernstein’s ‘micro’ considerations) rather than requiring an analysis and reform of social conditions (‘macro’ considerations). Smyth (1995) suggests that such approaches result in “the unfounded and unproven claim...that the current batch of economic problems can be blamed on teachers who have been less than diligent in the discharge of their duties...” (p. 2). Again the Learning Futures discourse has a tendency to suggest somewhat uncritically that educators can be responsible for equipping learners for uncertain futures and that any failing so to do is because the educators do not have adequate skills and knowledge.

Third, such lists suggest that these are the skills and qualities which teachers must have. They foreclose on two related but hidden possibilities: first, that such lists are a selection of skills and attributes from a much wider list; second, that those skills and attributes have been selected by certain groups with very particular interests. In other words, lists appear to be ‘objective’ and ‘neutral’ with little indication of the political interests involved in their construction.

As far as ongoing pedagogic learning is concerned, one has to acquire what appear to be externally fixed and stable skills, understandings and areas of knowledge based on certain assumptions about what makes a ‘good’ teacher and ‘good’ pedagogy. Any notion of learning is restricted to individuals who need further to develop their competence to overcome any local difficulties through, for example, learning new teaching and assessment methods or developing new facilitative skills and techniques. Furthermore, the separation of skill (something acquired) from practice (something to which skill is applied) is based on an inadequate conceptualisation of both skill and practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

An additional problem is that individuals bring about transformations in the workplace through remaking practice (Billett & Somerville, 2004). If skill (and therefore practice) is prescribed through lists of reified competences, how is it possible for individuals to transform the workplace in relation to constant change, of which so much is written? Perhaps more relevant for this discussion, what are the opportunities for teachers as producers of knowledge within this discourse?

The reflective practitioner
The discourse of the reflective practitioner has come to dominate much of the literature on postcompulsory and higher education teaching, although it sits somewhat strangely alongside the competences discourse. Usually the discourse emphasises the “skills needed to reflect constructively upon continuing experience as a way of improving the quality and effectiveness of one’s work” (Moore, 2004, p 100). Teachers are encouraged to evaluate their own classroom performance in conjunction with student behaviours, performance and achievements. The focus here is on learning – both teachers’ learning and students’ learning – in the past and for the future and the essential vehicle for that learning is ‘reflective practice’.
In some ways, this discourse appears to offer more possibilities for pedagogic learning than the previous two. For example, it takes account of “the messy complexity of the classroom” (Goodson & Walker, 1991); it offers a way to include a wide range of approaches and practices; it even enables teachers to admit to intuitive judgement. But it may have more in common with the competences discourse than at first appears.

First, although not intended in this way by Schön (1983, 1987), the discourse of the reflective practitioner as taken up in the educational and much of the professional development literature focuses on the individual teacher as the location for learning – in difficult situations, the teacher has to sort out how to negotiate complex bureaucracies, conflicting demands, other colleagues, accountability regimes, etc. Second, again not as intended by Schön, at its heart is the suggestion of the unitary, rational, ideal teacher who, through her focus on ‘self-improvement’, is able to overcome any problems. Third, it situates blame – a word that I have so far avoided but that applies also to the other two discourses – fairly and squarely on the individual teacher for failure to ‘reflect’ adequately. Fourth, the business of reflection is taken literally – there are ways in which it appears to have “become a technique to be applied to situations, or even a competence to be practised, rather than conceived as an embedded and embodied part of practice” (Edwards, Nicoll, Solomon & Usher, 2004, p. 57).

Once again others have provided comprehensive critiques of this kind of discourse. For example, Tara Fenwick (Zukas, Fenwick, Harris, Jarvis, Malcolm & Pratt, 2003) has written about what she calls the ‘soft’ regulation of teachers through the use of ‘teachers’ professional growth plans’ in Alberta. Such growth plans (and we will be familiar with the idea, if not the name, perhaps through our own experiences) bring about teachers’ internalising of rational, goal oriented practice and reflective self-regulation. They enable the institutionalisation and policing of reflection.

In much the same way, reflection has been institutionalised elsewhere. For example, in the United Kingdom, individuals applying to become a member of the Higher Education Academy have to engage in a particular kind of reflection (indeed, the criterion for successful membership), instead of submitting a curriculum vitae. They have to participate in a particular form of discourse that “demonstrates reflection”. Edwards, Nicoll, Solomon and Usher (2004) examine the core values of the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, the predecessor to the Higher Education Academy, and suggest that:

…as academics re-fashion their practices within this rhetorical framework, drawing upon the categories for self-description provided, they are, to a greater or lesser extent, internalising a normalising gaze, shaping their identities accordingly, thereby coming to understand themselves and act in these terms.

(p. 59)

So thus far I have explored three discourses of the ‘good’ teacher and tried to show some of the challenges that arise when we reconceptualise teachers’ learning in this way. These are not new insights but this exploration suggests that our current discourses about educators and pedagogic learning are too restrictive, even where they are (at least initially) liberal responses to earlier discourses.
In order to try to move beyond such discourses to look to the future of the education of educators, I offer insights from a paper by Lave (1996) in which she conceptualises teaching as ongoing socially situated practice. Her central argument is that research on how to improve learning always seems to result in investigations of teaching – and particularly “instruction” or depersonalised guidelines for the teaching of “specific lesson-like things”. But she also argues that this leads to a disastrous shortcut in which the teacher is taken out of teaching, reducing teaching to “curriculum, to strategies or recipes for organising kids to know some target knowledge” (p. 158). Her solution is to address questions about teaching by focusing on learners’ learning and to treat both teachers and learners as located participants with relations with each other. She also suggests that we have to look at the effects of teaching on teachers as learners. This notion of teaching as ongoing socially situated practice therefore contradicts the broad agenda for Learning Futures. Despite the rhetoric of contemporary global society, pedagogic arenas and settings are highly situated and questions of teaching rely on understanding the relations between teachers and learners in situated contexts.

**Power, Resistance, Identity and Knowledge**

To return to the theme of Learning Futures, I want to flag four issues which seem to me to be central to the questions that we should be asking, if we are to build an understanding of educators’ pedagogic learning as workplace learning for tomorrow: power and purpose; questions of compliance and resistance; a view that pedagogic acts are acts of identity construction; and a perspective on pedagogy as knowledge construction.

*Purpose and power*

Questions of power and purpose are highly significant in discussions of workplace learning and these questions can fundamentally change the nature of workplace learning, rather than simply affecting its distribution. For example, in researching the modernisation of a vocationally oriented educational organisation, Anderson and Anderson (2004) argue that the main source of tension for this organisation going through massive change is the “differing perspectives of managers and teachers respectively on what constitutes the primary tasks for the teachers and the conditions for performing these” (p. 12). They suggest that there used to be mutual understanding as to what the main tasks for teachers were and the conditions necessary to execute them; now, they propose, there is a culture where management and teachers disagree on these central issues. They explore the ways in which, within this context, social meaning is negotiated in this organisation, recognising that this always contains a simultaneous renegotiation of power relations. They examine what they call counter-power – “the ways in which subcultures often develop a world of symbols that primarily serves as a defence against the techniques of power brought into play by others”. These defences – which might be seen as non-learning – are actually forms of learning to make work function, despite an inadequate organisation of the work. In other words, if we are to understand pedagogic learning, we have to confront these issues of power and purpose in relation to educators as well as to learners.

*Compliance and resistance*

Related to questions of purpose and power are always questions of compliance and resistance. I begin with one version of compliance – what might be called ‘pragmatism’ – before considering resistance. In undertaking a project on schoolteachers’ learning and professional identities, Moore, Edwards, Halpin and
George (2002) identified a range of responses to interventions, commands, government dictats and so on which might be labelled “pragmatic”. They suggest that teachers do not engage in an oppositional stance but instead talk in terms of “subverting” the new orthodoxies through what might be called “pragmatism”. When they explored what teachers meant by “pragmatism”, they suggested a taxonomy of discourses of pragmatism: contingent pragmatism; principled pragmatism; and what they called discursive or ideological pragmatism.

“Contingent pragmatism” refers to the ways in which teachers embrace particular pedagogies and philosophies according to specific circumstances that may change with time or location. For example, teachers would adapt to contingencies that they felt forced them away from their own versions of the ‘good’ teacher towards other versions with which they felt far less comfortable and they did so with reluctance and discomfort. In the case of “principled pragmatism”, teachers adopt introduced changes into their existing practices more deliberately and proactively than is the case with contingent pragmatism so that changes “become” principled over time, even if contingent initially. With discursive or ideological pragmatism, Moore, Edwards, Halpin and George note that pragmatism has a value in its own right. Pragmatism here becomes an achievement in itself – an ideology which has at its centre a so-called opposition to ideology – what might be called a kind of ‘Third Wayism’.

Although pragmatism appears to be the most frequent response to interventions, other kinds of responses can be observed. Because pedagogic workplaces, like other human arenas, are characterised by power relations, disharmony and conflict, participants may well be resistant to, as well as compliant with, organisational, social and occupational expectations. Furthermore, pedagogic identity might well be constructed as much through conflict and resistance as through pragmatism, consensus and conformity. Through an analysis of teachers’ interviews using Rogoff’s (1995) three planes of learning (apprenticeship, guided participation and participatory appropriation), we showed how a ‘fractured’ pedagogic identity is constructed with both compliant and resistant elements (Malcolm & Zukas, 2006). There may be incongruities in the ways in which the purposes of workplace activity are conceived by the individual teacher but the relationships of power within which teachers and their pedagogic workplaces exist also act as a kind of faultline along which pedagogic identity can be split.

**Pedagogic Acts as Identity Construction**

Another way in which work on the pedagogic workplace might offer insights is the focus on pedagogy itself and its role in identity construction. Beckett and Gough (2004) researched trainee paediatricians who were beginning teaching by conducting clinical tutorials for groups of medical students, in order to understand how teaching could construct professional identity. They noted that a whole range of relational constructions already existed: clinical knowledge around the bedside; interpersonal relationships across students, patients, families and the tutor; a “drilling down” of professional transformation from medical student to doctor; and a “drilling up” from the situated learning that takes place at a bedside in a busy hospital. They suggested that, as their trainee paediatricians “transform” the identities of their learners from medical students to doctors, they themselves are “re-forming” their own identities and in effect guiding their own self-construction.
This question of identity construction is an important element of workplace learning. Pedagogic acts are acts of identity construction, both for pedagogues and for learners (as with Beckett and Gough’s [2004] medical students). However, pedagogic acts are not necessarily the domain of experts alone, as Fuller and Unwin’s (2004) work on young people shows. They asked apprentices to keep learning logs in which they were asked if they had helped anyone learn that week. Apprentices spent significant amounts of time helping colleagues – both fellow apprentices and older workers – to learn in the workplace. They did so by showing others how to do a task and by explaining how to do something, as well as by giving information and working on problems together. Whilst identity was not the focus of Fuller and Unwin’s paper, these acts of pedagogy were probably highly significant in the construction of worker identities.

This challenge to the conventional notion of apprenticeship as a linear journey from novice to expert in which ‘old timers’ mould their successors suggests that, if both teachers and learners are engaged in pedagogic acts in both pedagogic and other workplaces, then we need to explore more deeply the ways in which pedagogic learning constructs pedagogic identities not just for teachers but for learners as well.

**Pedagogy and knowledge construction**

In the pedagogic workplace, Janice Malcolm and I have been concerned for a long time about the separation of what we have called disciplinary from pedagogic knowledge so that pedagogy becomes a matter of ‘teaching and learning’ rather than an aspect of knowledge production itself. We see this most clearly in universities where the ‘real’ knowledge production goes on through research, whilst ‘teaching and learning’ are somehow about something else.

We have argued that treating pedagogic knowledge as a ‘how to’ question means that questions of ‘what’ and ‘why’ are left on the shelf. But if we understand pedagogic knowledge as knowledge construction in its own right, and teaching as the co-construction of learners’ and teachers’ knowledge in practice, as Jean Lave (1988, 1996) intimates, then we have something that resembles much more closely an understanding of the classroom as the pedagogic workplace. This view of pedagogy as knowledge construction is not new; critical adult educators have made this point many times before. But, compared to the discourses of the ‘good’ teacher that I wrote about earlier, it offers a view of pedagogic learning that is situated in practice and that engages much more critically with pedagogic identity and knowledge production.

**Conclusion**

The optimism of Learning Futures is refreshing but, as with other discourses, the implicit assumptions about educators should be given careful critical attention, not least because of the need to address the interpenetration of persons and contexts for this work. Whilst considerable attention has been given to global contexts, existing discourses of the ‘good’ teacher have also to be addressed. Broader issues of power, identity, knowledge and resistance have also to be taken into account. One way of doing this is to look to what might be called pedagogic learning in the pedagogic workplace, to illuminate our understanding of the education of educators for Learning Futures.
References


