

Lifelong Learning Journeys on the Move: Reflecting on Successes and Framing Futures for Australian Show People

Geoff Danaher

Division of Teaching and Learning Services, Central Queensland University,
Australia

Beverley Moriarty

Faculty of Education, Charles Sturt University, Australia

P. A. Danaher

Faculty of Education and Centre for Research in Transformative Pedagogies,
University of Southern Queensland, Australia

Paper presented at the 5th international
lifelong learning conference,
Rydges Capricorn International Resort,
Yeppoon, 19 June 2008

Abstract

This paper reflects on the successes and contributes to framing the futures of and for Australian show people as lifelong learners, drawing on qualitative interview data and analysis of their periodical *The Outdoor Showman*. Their lifelong learning journeys on the move are innovative and empowering, yet also vulnerable to capture.

Overview of Presentation

- Introduction: focus and argument
- Australian show people's past lifelong learning journeys
- Australian show people's present lifelong learning journeys
- Australian show people's future lifelong learning journeys
- Possible implications for lifelong learning journeys on the move
- Focused discussion

Introduction: Focus and Argument

- Travelling agricultural shows a rich part of Australian cultural history
- Yet show people placed outside this national narrative in relation to educational provision
- Establishment of Queensland School for Travelling Show Children in 2000
- Data taken from semi-structured interviews with show people in selected years from 1992 to 2003 and from articles in *The Outdoor Showman*

Introduction: Focus and Argument (Continued)

- Australian show people's lifelong learning journeys on the move are both innovative and empowering and yet vulnerable to capture
- Broader field of literature highlighting richness of opportunities for informal learning and difficulties of conventional education in catering to specialised circumstances
- Research design was qualitative, interpretivist, phenomenological and poststructuralist; data gathering 1992-1995 and then again in 2000; thematic data analysis

Australian Show People's Past Lifelong Learning Journeys

- Important to note the risk of presentism (Kuklick, 1999) and the potential for progressivism (Foucault, 1991) in a linear periodisation
- “...their great capacity for hard work, their grim determination to succeed under very harsh conditions, their morality and integrity in dealing with those who worked with them, and despite fierce competition, their compassion towards those going through hard times who needed a hand up” (Morgan, 1995, p. xvii)

Australian Show People's Past Lifelong Learning Journeys (Continued)

- “...the choices that were available to the parents were basically zilch....[The children] just went from school to school and there was no continuity or gauge on what the kids were doing, so they got to a certain age and lost interest very quickly” (show parent, 1992)
- “I don't know how the parents managed with the correspondence. I couldn't have done it. I think you've got to have a lot of patience to do correspondence with your own kids. I mean, to be a mother and a teacher, and the kids just saying, 'Well, I'm not doing it'. If you're a teacher, you can say, 'Yes, you are', but if you're the mother you just don't seem to be able to do anything about it. I've seen plenty of people nearly fall apart trying to do correspondence. It must be really hard” (show parent, 1992)

Australian Show People's Past Lifelong Learning Journeys (Continued)

- “The thoughts of a young boy that take me back to when as a Showie kid going to school, inundated with questions about the show. What’s the best ride? The fastest one? Will it make me sick? What’s your dad got at the show? The questions that went on. I felt important, commanding this unbelievable respect from kids that normally wouldn’t give me the time of day” (Osborne, 1997, p. 21)
- “Mickey Taylor...had a great learning ability for someone who never attended school[;] he learnt to read[;] he always said if you can read you can teach yourself anything” (Taylor, 1998, p. 43)

Australian Show People's Present Lifelong Learning Journeys

- Present lifelong learning journeys
- Queensland School for Travelling Show Children
- 'Normalising school experience'
- Perhaps extending educational opportunities for adults – night literacy classes
- Generating positive media interest

Australian Show People's Future Lifelong Learning Journeys

- Possible future learning journeys
- Economic uncertainties
- Competing pleasures
- Greater access to tertiary education
- Sustain connections with rural and regional communities
- Greater flexibility in moving in and out of show circuit

Possible Implications for Lifelong Learning Journeys on the Move

- “I think anything that allows us to demonstrate and to quantify, in both the quantitative and the qualifiable sense, that this...has value and this adds value, and it should be identified and treasured and promoted. Because, at the moment, a lot of the stuff that we’re doing runs off the heart factor; it’s a cardiac assessment rather than being a cerebral assessment. I think this is the nature of community and the nature of the body politic these days...that’s all very interesting.” (educational official, 2003)
- These words evoke struggle to disrupt decades of educational neglect; focus on school as current artefact of aspiration for alternative provision; and suggest possible future iterations of the school as a model for such provision

Possible Implications for Lifelong Learning Journeys on the Move (Continued)

- “I think the school’s come a long way, and it takes time. Like any school when they first bring in their first years of little kids, it takes time to actually adjust and get used to the routine. I think we’ve all got used it now and the way the system’s going, and it’s going along really well.” (show parent, 2003)
- These words emphasise how lifelong learning policy and practice are situated in, and potentially complicit with, wider political factors and forces that are often homogenising and controlling rather than working to value diversity and heterogeneity.

References

- Foucault, M. (1991). Questions of method: An interview with Michel Foucault. In G. Burchell, C. Gordon & P. Miller (Eds.), *The Foucault effect: Studies in governmentality* (pp. 73-86). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Kuklick, H. (1999, July). Assessing research in the history of sociology and anthropology. *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 35(3), 227-237.
- Morgan, B. (1995). *The showies: Revelations of Australian outdoor side-showmen*. Mitcham, Vic: Author.

References (Continued)

- Osborne, L. (1997, July-September). Behind the loudspeakers, toffee apples and fairy floss. *The Outdoor Showman*, 405, 21.
- Taylor, L. (1998, July-September). The early show days. *The Outdoor Showman*, 409, 7, 11, 43.

Thank you for participating!

- Meow!



Focused Discussion

- What other ways might there be of understanding the show people's lifelong learning journeys?
- How do you see changes in experiences and understandings of lifelong learning for different groups and individuals?
- To what extent do you support the analysis of lifelong learning as innovative alternatives liable to capture and control?
- What are some [other] good questions for focused discussion of this paper?