

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

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# Overview of presentation

- Overview of context and concepts
- Critical theory and criticality
- The humanist tradition in education
- Four questions about contemporary secondary and VET teacher education pedagogies and learning

# Overview of Context and Concepts

## Focus on two crucial issues:

- the most effective means of managing and structuring pre-service and in-service teacher education at USQ for people 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

# Overview of Context and Concepts (Continued)

- “Struggling for purchase” relates to the authors’ efforts to enlist potentially powerful conceptual lenses in developing programs that graduate value and that help to strengthen a marginalised field in (teacher) education
- Distinction between *fet* (a USQ former faculty department) and VET (a national bureaucracy/industry/system)

# Overview of Context and Concepts (Continued)

## Three sets of guiding concepts:

- criticality and critical thinking (Barnett, 1997; Freire, 1970, 1973; Habermas, 1972, 1973)
- the humanist tradition in education (Dewey, 1916, 1938)
- reflective and reflexive practice (Schön, 1983, 1987; Usher, 1987)

# Overview of Context and Concepts (Continued)

- Schön's (1983, 1987) focus on professional learning through critical reflection on one's own practice
- Usher's (1987) distinction between:
  - “reflective awareness” being “concerned only with surfacing and analysing the past”
  - “reflexive awareness” implying “going beyond this and actually changing the theoretical underpinnings of action” (p. 34)

# Critical Theory and Criticality

Should a connection with VET be used to leverage *fet* back into prominence?

Critical Theory suggests that we should be concerned.

VET is :

Rational model of Curriculum Development, in the form of competency based training (CBT), and is therefore prescriptive.

First lens: Freire (1970)

Second lens: Habermas (1972, 1973)

Third lens: Barnett (1997).

# Critical Theory and Criticality (Continued)

Freire (1970) warns of Education:

- That oppresses
- That keeps the status quo by not asking questions which engender dialogical and problem solving processes
- That “deposits” knowledge (banking education)
- That inhibits individuals from fulfilling their own potential
- That fosters the knowing of reality on a superficial level



# Critical Theory and Criticality (Continued)

Habermas (1972,1973)

- cannot separate purpose action from consensual norms and grounded intersubjectivity (values)
  - VET puts purpose action (CBT) ahead of interpersonal relations
- warns of intrusion of the state without critique
  - VET dictates to citizens how and what they will be trained in
- calls for “exhaustive controversy in relation to public opinion informing the state”
  - VET tends to consider only the opinions of politicians, bureaucrats and industry

# Critical Theory and Criticality (Continued)

Barnett(1997)

- If we are to reflect critically, it has greater success in doing so in a world which is not fragmented
  - VET is considered fragmented because it only focuses on 'knowing how'

Barnett warns of producing knowledge for doing at the expense of knowledge for reason.

# The Humanist Tradition in Education

A lens that emerges from this VET practitioner's 'theory-in-action' or 'grounded theory'

Proponents of the humanist tradition "emphasise the role of learning as the means through which individuals maximise their potential"

(Tovey & Lawlor, 2004, p. 69)

What insights can a humanist perspective bring to this discussion – or dialectic – about the positioning – or purchase – of VET teacher education in the university setting?

## The Humanist Tradition in Education (Cont)

In *Democracy in Education* (1916) and *Experience and Education* (1938), John Dewey proposed a theory of education founded in authentic human experience where:

- Education is development
- Human experience is the foundation platform of learning
  - Shared, social or conjoint activity is its realisation.

(cited in Bowen & Hobson, 1987, pp. 167-168, 197)

## The Humanist Tradition in Education (Cont)

Dewey dismissed the traditional liberal education of the day, which he accused of:

- Demonstrating an elitist tendency to “make abstractions substantive” (cited in Bowen & Hobson, 1987, p. 168)
- Being founded on notions of scholarship and mastered subject matter not grounded in the learner’s own experience
- Serving to impede rather than to promote learning.

## The Humanist Tradition in Education (Cont)

Dewey posited an *experimental and experiential* approach to educational thought, focusing on the activity or process of thinking as a critical enquiry based on the scientific method.

For Dewey, this process of thinking is the “method of an educative experience” that is “identical with the essentials of reflection” (cited in Bowen & Hobson, 1987, p.194).

## The Humanist Tradition in Education (Cont)

Dewey saw learning as an “essentially social process” (Dewey, 1938, p.58) 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)

Importantly, Dewey maintained that learning that is *instrumental* has the intrinsic value of being a means to an end, whereas *utilitarian* learning is learning that is irreflective and serves “pecuniary ends” (cited in Bowen Hobson, 1987, p. 193).

# Four questions about contemporary secondary and VET teacher education pedagogies and learning

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



## Four questions about contemporary secondary and VET teacher education pedagogies and learning (Continued)

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

## What are the purposes of education?

Not surprisingly, Dewey maintains that the purposes of education are – and should be – infinitely varied.

What is important in a democratic society 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 other than truly their own” (cited in Bowen & Hobson, 1987, p. 182).

# What are the purposes of education? (Continued)

- Education for  
Citizenship/  
Conscientisation  
(Freire, 1970)

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

- The 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 (Eraut, 2002; cited in Lindell & Stengstrom, 2004, p. 4)
- The importance of “*praxis* that is the connection of learning with real life situations” and that is “not tied to a particular educational theory” (Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993; cited in Chappell, 2003, p. 8)

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

- “Constructive alignment” (Biggs 1999) and appropriateness to different purposes and settings (Cullen *et al.*, 2002) as a key guiding principle (cited in Chappell, 2003, p.4)
- Theories which guide and inform practice (practitioners’ theory-in-action), and in particular practice *problems* rather than practice *per se*, as a starting point for curriculum development (Usher, 1987)

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

- The development of criticality within students
- Fostering critical thinking in the broader sense - knowledge, self and the world

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

- Dewey (1916) advocated using a “critical outlook and survey” to “ensur[e] 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)
- Critical reflection seeks to generate new understandings and possible means of change, is reflexive and links criticality with reflection and self

## How does the reflective and reflexive practitioner contribute to implementing those pedagogies and learnings? (Continued)

- Reflexive practice includes efforts to change “the theoretical under-pinnings of action” (Usher, 1987, p.34) and an ongoing interrogation of the effectiveness of pedagogies and learnings
- Reflective and reflexive practice is vital to ensuring the interdependence of theory and action and to maximising the prospects for educational provision ‘making a difference’



## What do those purposes, pedagogies and reflective and reflexive practices mean for envisioning and enacting *fet*/VET at the University of Southern Queensland?

- Selecting content for the *fet* curriculum, andragogy and assessment with an eye for debate (dependent on student and lecturer dispositions)
- That curriculum, andragogy and assessments should be learner-centred, holistic, interconnected, experiential, experimental, growth-enhancing, situation focused, problem-based and directed at theory-in-action

## What do those purposes, pedagogies and reflective and reflexive practices mean for envisioning and enacting *fet/VET* at the University of Southern Queensland? (Continued)

- Wider applicability of such issues as globalisation, late capitalism, commodification of different kinds of skills and public and private benefits and costs of lifelong learning
- For the authors, criticality, critical thinking, the humanist tradition in education and the interdependence of reflective and reflexive practice 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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# Thankyou forparticipating!

- Meow!

