

*Pedagogy, Culture and Society Seminar,  
University of Manchester, 24 February 2007.  
'What Pedagogy Means to Me'*

## **From Curriculum to Pedagogy and Back Again: knowledge, the person and the changing world**

### **Lyn Yates**

I'm grateful to the journal for the opportunity to be here, and to be taking part in this lovely symposium, but I initially felt a bit of a fraud, in that I felt I could more readily talk about 'what curriculum means to me' or 'what education means to me' than 'what pedagogy means to me'. Of course, these terms all bleed into each other, and I'll talk about that in a minute, but I want to start by talking about why this initial hesitation. (And of course too all these reasons are historically and geographically specific.)

Part of my reaction to the term is a reaction to my sense of who uses this term and who doesn't. In my experience teachers and parents don't like the term 'pedagogy' and identify it with academic pretentiousness. That's not necessarily a good reason not to use it – as people who've gone through the battles in the 70s over non-sexist language know, words come into play for a particular reason, and when the journal changed its name it did seem to me at the time like a good strong and appropriate title for what it was trying to do – 'pedagogy' suggests there is something bigger and more complex to be considered than terms like 'teaching and learning' or 'effectiveness' that conjure up a different sense that what is involved is something that is straightforward and everyday, and that everyone can judge how well it is happening.

But for me too, even in the academic arena, 'pedagogy' seems particularly identified with some camps rather than others. In education in Australia at least I associate its rise either with cognitive science-based maths and science people who like to talk about 'pedagogical content knowledge', or in the curriculum arena with those who come from English and literacy studies rather than sociology or philosophy (and who align with the US form of reconceptualist curriculum studies). In the 1970s and 1980s when I was working on

feminism and education, it seemed to me that feminist theorists working in faculties outside Education (especially English) had seized on the term ‘feminist pedagogy’ as a way of saying theirs was a quite different and more serious theoretical type of intellectual engagement with teaching and learning and their effects than the sort of low level practical work those who worked in Schools of Education engaged in, and their reference lists reflected a similar disdain for anything produced by Education academics.

All of that is a kind of starting aside, because I’m interested in why, at particular times, we begin to name things in particular ways. In the 1970s it seemed to me, there was more focus on curriculum and knowledge (*Knowledge and Control*, new curriculum journals); whereas in the 1980s, we got ‘effective schooling’, and ‘pedagogy, culture and society’ as an alternative take on that particular narrow view of teaching and learning’.

In my own work I’ve identified more with curriculum or ‘education policy and practice’ as the descriptor for my area of interest rather than ‘pedagogy’, even though the phrase ‘pedagogy, culture and society’ might be equally be a synonym for what I am interested in. ‘Pedagogy’ can include attention to the person and subjectivity, and the world and culture, and even policy and institutions, but it seems to put the emphasis particularly on the interpersonal instructional act. The policy documents that govern schooling in my own state define ‘pedagogy’ as ‘the study and practice of teaching and learning’, but go on to elaborate this in this way: “especially the conscious use of particular instructional methods such as constructivism which focuses on the active role of learners in constructing new knowledge and understanding based on what they already know and believe”. That is, the instructional act seems to be at the heart of that definition, although there is also a much stronger emphasis than there might once have been on the nature of the learner. By contrast, to my mind, ‘curriculum’ calls up different issues: issues about *what* is being conveyed (or is intended to be conveyed).

In terms of the journal, and today’s topic, in some ways the heart of the issue for the past half-century in particular is about putting together these different things: just how do we today bring together a focus on society and culture, knowledge, institutions, instructional methods and embodied and diverse learners, and social change? I think it’s relatively easy today to give critical readings of particular pedagogies at work, but hard to get a take on pedagogy in these times that hold all these things together.

The three issues for pedagogy that I think are particular historically specifically difficult now are these.

1. **The focus on the learner and on diversity.** Since the 1970s, we have been forced to take seriously the way in which students (and indeed teachers) are persons, not just minds. Gender, culture, religion, class, disability, habitus, language - in other words, difference, emotion, embodiment, are just some of the things that have come on the agenda and are not easily pushed off, because they are tied to social movements and global changes and movements.
2. **New times and the problem of what pedagogy is meant to convey.** Education's relation to culture is now seen to be not just about reproduction or selection of 'the best that *has* been thought and said' but about preparing for a world that will be different from the past. Governments and economists speak this language, and so do parents and left sociologists - it's a universal mantra but not an homogeneous one, in that emotionally as well as intellectually, it is difficult to come to grips with or be consistent about what we are trying to maintain and what kind of change is important. The problem of what is the appropriate content of education is not even simply an argument about different political visions, but about contending conceptions of what knowledge and learning looks like (as well as debates about mode 1 and mode 2, and competencies and capabilities, academic disciplines themselves are evidently changing).
3. **Selection/certification as a frame for the instructional activities.** What takes place in pedagogy, at least in its institutionalized forms, is never simply about the intrinsic content of that engagement, but also about how that instructional act is placed and seen in relation to competitive selection, certification and so on. Since the middle of last century there has been a heightened public attention to this, heightened to by trans-national comparative agencies and projects like IEA and PISA; as well as an ongoing struggle with the intractable issue of social inequalities.

Because all these things are in play, we find one minute a policy or a teacher or a parent is worrying about standards and how things measure against previous years; and another

minute worrying about values and citizenship and the problem of the dissolution of community.

In the rest of this talk I want to take two examples of areas I've worked on in relation to pedagogy (feminist pedagogy and vocational pedagogies) to try to illustrate a bit more what is going on, and what is being thrown up as issues for thinking about pedagogy now.

Although I said my initial reaction to today's title was that I didn't have a lot to say about pedagogy, when I looked at my writings over the years, I'd used this term more than I'd realized, including in my first article for this journal when I wrote with two of my graduate students an article called 'Voice, Difference and Feminist Pedagogy' for a journal that was then called *Curriculum Studies*.<sup>i</sup>

The article was about our first attempt to teach (actually team teach) a women's studies course as part of a Master of Education (it was called 'Theory and Practice of Non-Sexist Education') and why it had been so miserable for everyone concerned, and it encapsulates one early version of the dilemma I want to talk about today. Four reasonably experienced academic staff were involved in that course, and eager to develop a new course in that area – but we soon found that 'pedagogy' was understood quite differently by each of the four. One staff member was strongly influenced by experiences in adult women's groups with consciousness-raising. Her way of teaching was to spend a number of weeks of general communal un-structured discussion, from which issues would gradually emerge, and lines for reading into the literature would be built from that. (This approach was also popular with those influenced by Paulo Freire's concept of critical pedagogy) The three other teachers in the course had more agreement about the need for a course outline and reading lists, but were little agreed on what the substance of that reading and those topics should be – we came with different disciplinary backgrounds (sociology, anthropology, curriculum studies) and different political commitments (liberal, Marxist, radical). Students in the course were similarly divided. Some felt there wasn't enough theory and scaffolding; others felt that the course wasn't sufficiently open to their own definition of what issues mattered. We limped along, and never tried doing that particular course in that particular way again.

I came into the study of education in the 1970s, a time when there was a widespread new attention to the political nature of the content of education. It was a time when theories of the

social construction of knowledge and Kuhn's work on science were attracting a lot of interest; when students in Paris had rioted on the streets; when popular tracts from Illich, Freire, Barnes, and others were published by Penguin and sold in general bookstores; when the Open University and the University of East Anglia were throwing out new challenges to ways of doing education and education research in the UK; and when, in my own state, new approaches to curriculum via general studies and via community participation in schools were being taken up – promoted not only by the teachers' unions, but supported by government grants for school-based innovations, especially in disadvantaged schools. Between 1968 and 1979, four new academic curriculum journals were founded – one each in the UK, Canada, USA and Australia. Sociologists and philosophers fought out whose way of thinking about curriculum should be given prominence.

What seemed new or lively about these movements was that the classroom and the educational exchange came under new scrutiny (ie not just data about inputs and outputs). The popular sociology of education text of the time was *Knowledge and Control*, and what the contributors were interested in was the way in which big cultural forms of power and ways of seeing were being writ in students, and, equally how different forms of student identities were or were not allowed to become part of this knowledge. So it was a move that wanted to look closely at what went on in particular pedagogies, but that wanted also to bring in a bigger social and historical picture as a way of understanding that, and a closer look at the subjectivities of students too as a way of thinking about the educational exchange. It was a way of thinking about education that gave priority to questions about what knowledge was being valued (and whose knowledge was being valued) both in the broad curriculum and in the teacher/student relationships; and it focused on what was happening in pedagogy as something that was fundamentally important in relation to the form of the culture, power and inequalities, and the shaping of individual identities.

*Knowledge and Control* threw up questions about whose or which knowledge was being valued and sanctioned by schooling, and it raised these issues both for the disciplines and also for the interplay between teacher and learner. In Women's Studies, as in the course I described, these initially at least led to some very divergent ways of doing pedagogy. One way started from the students and went inwards. The other went to existing disciplines and universities and looked for different intellectual tools and concepts: what would history or science look like if you took women's experience as centrally as you took men's experience?

I think the class we wrote about was one illustration of how it is not easy or even possible to proceed on both fronts fully at the same time. Another nice example of that was the article by Magda Lewis and Roger Simon on ‘A Discourse Not Made for Her’ about the tensions that emerged in a class that was intellectually about feminist concepts but in which women felt marginalized.

In this line of thinking about pedagogy that has been opened up since the 1970s, we have new ways of focusing on *a central issue for pedagogy: the dynamic between who students are* (and different kinds of students are) and *what they are being drawn into*. Focusing too heavily on one or other side of this interaction is a trap that teachers, academics and policies can all fall into. This is where the work of Basil Bernstein was so important in opening up schematically the issue of the relationship. But this line of inquiry about pedagogy has raised issues about the intractability of difference and inequalities as issues for pedagogy. As Marie Brennan put it in a recent conference paper<sup>ii</sup>: the pedagogic responses to the problem of inequality has tended to one of three solutions, none of which adequately resolves both recognition and distribution elements of social inequality.<sup>iii</sup> They are (1) Give the kids the codes; (2) Stuff the codes: give them intelligent relevance; (3) Give them enriched vocationalism.

I think the lines of work I have been looking at here have been strong in showing the intractability of inequalities and differences as issues for pedagogy: have strengthened sensitivity to differences, have been important sources of unpicking who is being silenced and taught that they are worthless in the exchange, and there’s a lot more I could say. But apart from the difficulty of finding a particular good way forward from all this, I think the legacy of this line of work has broadly left two other conceptual weaknesses in its encounter with pedagogy.

First, I think this approach is much stronger in focusing on particular incidences (either a curriculum content, or an teacher/learner exchange) and showing their problems, but has not had a lot to say about intellectual (or even identity) development over time – to look at pedagogy as a program of work that builds over time ways of being able to operate and identities. (Bernstein’s early work remains an exception here<sup>iv</sup>.) Secondly, and related to this, I think the tendency of this critical pedagogy approach (glossing over the enormous differences in different strands of it) is to treat the task of pedagogy as if it were the same as

a voluntarily entered political group. There has been a lot of focus on what messages we should be trying to generate, and not much on what should be the limits or distinguishing features of a *pedagogic* encounter.<sup>v</sup> And this is an issue that is evident in a different way in the second area I want to talk about, vocational pedagogy.

In 2000 I moved to a university which was dominated by adult and vocational education. In the arena I entered there, in keeping with certain traditions of adult education, ‘learning’ and ‘the learner’ were the terms that mattered. There was a sense that to focus on ‘pedagogy’ (or curriculum) was to assume a schoolie’s view that all education needed to follow the pattern of a teacher telling a learner what they should know and assessing how well they measured up in terms of what that teacher wanted them to learn. What people working in this area wanted to focus on was workplaces and learners; what it didn’t want to focus on was pedagogic acts.

But ‘vocationalism’, has been a growing agenda for schools and universities as well as more traditional areas of vocational training. You will find statements about vocational competencies and capabilities as intended outcomes built into documents for schools and universities as well as technical colleges. So with some colleagues from UTS I worked on a 3 year project to investigate what we called ‘pedagogies of the new vocationalism’: *Changing Work, Changing Workers, Changing Selves: a study of pedagogies of the new vocationalism.*<sup>vi</sup> In the project, we started from the background academic and policy papers that kept talking of the needs of these times, for particular kinds of new workers who could go on re-shaping themselves; and also the way in which education today was being done across many different kinds of institution. So we took two areas of vocational preparation, information technology and hospitality studies, and five different kinds of education setting: schools, technical college, community college, private provider, university and set out to describe empirically just what current pedagogy in this area looks like.

Now there are many things I could talk about that we found from this project, and I’ll just mention a few of them. At the school level, we studied classes where students could be assessed both for the industry recognized vocational qualification, and also for the higher school certificate whose score counted for university entrance. But to do so, we saw, required teachers to try to juggle two different concepts of what knowledge looks like and what pedagogy and assessment looks like. For vocational purposes, in the current industry-

recognized Australian Qualifications Framework, knowledge is observable competence. Teachers have to be accredited as trainers and are expected to tick off what is being learnt for each student – a long list – and students are assessed as ‘competent’ or ‘not yet competent’ (that is, no grading is involved). For HSC, the certificate that counts for university entry, it is assumed that knowledge is something displayed in writing and language and as pointing to an underlying hierarchy of intelligence, and assessed via examinations that are scored to produce a distribution of those more and less worthy to attend university. The authority of the teacher as a conveyor of pedagogy in the first case comes from their workplace experience and accreditation; and in the second the authority for what counts as knowledge is delegated from universities. We watched the teachers juggling these different conceptions of pedagogic practice, drawing on their own histories and judgements about who the students were and indeed who they themselves were.

In the project overall we found different things were being done in different settings, not surprisingly, as there is a difference to the pedagogy available to those teaching or learning in a compulsory institution where younger students are present, and where teachers have a particular duty of care; and those entered voluntarily by adults who make some choice of where they study and what they want to get out of it. But we also found some common trends, that are pertinent to our present discussion. One thing was that, to some extent, all of the teachers and trainers were conscious of operating in a situation where they could not simply replicate the teaching they themselves had experienced, that the workers/identities they were being asked to produce today were different. For example, in the private hotel school, the principal had trained in a European old-style hotel-based residential training, but he was in the process of not only doing university study himself, but ensuring that students at this school gained qualifications that were recognized by other types of institutions outside the industry. They all to some extent spoke the current rhetoric of needing to produce young people who were flexible, got on well with others, could go on training and learning. That is, in this formerly most concrete of arenas of education, there was a consciousness that the aim of the pedagogy was not simply to produce skills or knowledge or competencies, but to produce a certain type of person who would fit the world in a certain way. (And, as an aside, I think this is one of the reasons that the education of boys has become a contemporary issue for pedagogy. Boys are less certain about wanting to be a different sort of person.)

One further interesting thing we noted across this project was that the pedagogy or technology of instruction that was most widely used, was a form of work experience or work project or work simulation. Both students and teachers tended to judge pedagogy as good to the extent that it seemed 'real' or 'authentic'. In fact, being in work as a student or replicating work (or a work team) is never the same as doing work as a worker, but the focus in this area was failing to take seriously vocational pedagogy as pedagogy. Indeed we also found that while the talk about the project treated the workplace as the location of what was real for pedagogy; assessment frequently was done by the education institution with little reference to that workplace. Moreover the popularity of project-based pedagogy took little account of the demands this places on learners (or subsidy it requires from learners) and the greater ability to do this by middle-class students (and in some cases women).

So to sum up, what pedagogy means to me is the way we bring together broad intentions about what is to be learned or developed with particular kinds of learners in particular historical, national and institutional settings. The issues that I think have make this hard to deal with in present times are:

1. the problem of reconciling recognition and distribution in relation to our greater sensitivity to diversity and embodied learners (or, in other words, 'recognition' strategies often tend to work against selection/ certification);
2. the problem of reconciling concepts of education based on comparative measurement and standards that look backwards, with concepts of new times and a desire for young people to enter the changing world with a new kind of preparation and persona;
3. the continued divergence of cognitive and culturalist approaches to pedagogy and knowledge and identity.

## Notes and references:

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- <sup>i</sup> McLeod, Julie, Yates, Lyn and Halasa, Karen (1994), 'Voice, Difference and Feminist Pedagogy', *Curriculum Studies* 2 (2), pp.189-202. See also Yates, Lyn (1994), 'Feminist Pedagogy Meets Critical Pedagogy Meets Poststructuralism' (review essay), *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 15 (3), pp.429-437.
- <sup>ii</sup> Brennan, Marie and Lew Zipin, 'Generations of Social Justice in Australian Schools?', Paper presented at the annual conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education, Western Sydney Nov 2005.
- <sup>iii</sup> These ways of naming contending visions of social justice were coined by Nancy Fraser in her book *Justice Interruptus* (Routledge, New York). Julie McLeod and I have shown how different school trajectories perform in relation to these in an article, Yates, L. and McLeod, J. (2000), 'Social justice and the middle', *Australian Education Researcher* 27 (3), 59-78, and a forthcoming chapter : McLeod, J. and Yates, L., 'Class and the middle: schooling, subjectivity and social formation' in L. Weis (ed), *The Way Class Works* (Routledge, NY).
- <sup>iv</sup> It was one of the reason I embarked (with Julie McLeod) on my own longitudinal study of young people going through their entire secondary school years, McLeod, J. and Yates, L. *Making Modern Lives: subjectivity, schooling and social change*. (State University of New York Press, 2006). But even in that we found it impossible to maintain a close view of the actual curriculum and learning experiences alongside the perspectives of the development of identity in the context of particular schools.
- <sup>v</sup> I've discussed this issue of differentiating pedagogy from life in a forthcoming review of Marjorie O'Loughlin's *Embodiment and Education*, to be published later this year in *Education Philosophy and Theory*.
- <sup>vi</sup> This was a project funded by the Australian Research Council, and the research team consisted of Clive Chappell, Nicky Solomon, Mark Tennant, Carolyn Williams and Lyn Yates. Publications related to the project include
- Chappell, Clive, Rhodes, Carl, Solomon, Nicky, Tennant, Mark and Yates, Lyn (2003)  
***Reconstructing the Lifelong Learner: pedagogy and identity in individual, organizational and social change***. (Routledge, London and New York)
- Chappell, Clive, Nicky Solomon, Mark Tennant, Lyn Yates (2003)  
'Changing work, changing workers: Pedagogies of the new vocationalism', published in *Proceedings of the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference of Researching Work and Learning*, University of Tampere, Finland, July
- Chappell, Clive, Solomon, Nicky, Tennant, Mark, Williams, Carolyn and Yates, Lyn (2005)  
***Changing Work, Changing Workers, Changing Selves: a study of pedagogies in the new vocationalism. Report to participants***. OVAL Research, University of Technology Sydney. (80pp)
- Tennant, Mark and Yates, Lyn (2005)  
'Issues of identity and knowledge in the schooling of VET: a case study of lifelong learning', *International Journal of Lifelong Learning* 24 (3), 213-225.
- Yates, Lyn (2006) 'Vocational subject-making and the work of schools: a case study', *Australian Journal of Education* 50 (3) 281-296.