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6. FINDING PRAXIS?

The impetus and motivation for this book began with a group of education academics sharing ideas about *praxis*. Writing the book involved many rich and enjoyable discussions about the nature of *praxis* and about how crucial it is to education. Each of us shared our passion for our own particular area of interest in education, and together we considered how the promotion and development of *praxis* would enhance educational experiences and outcomes for learners. It was a wonderful time, academically stimulating and engaging.

As we proceeded, however, we became aware of two anomalies in our discussions: (1) they were often theoretical, and; (2) they focused on the educational practices of others. Regarding the first: the theoretical tenor of the discussion was probably not surprising given that this was the work of a group of academics, whose work is often theoretical, and given that theory development is as crucial for advancing educational ideas as it is in any other field. The issue for us was that *praxis* is a form of action, not just thinking or theorising about action (see Chapter 1). If it does not involve action then it is not *praxis* and our academic discussions risked diminishing the 'doing' quality of *praxis*. In this chapter we will not devote a great deal of space to theory, not because we do not value theory, but because we want to present a very practical account of our particular journey in trying to understand and develop our own *praxis*. The theoretical framework for this book is outlined in the first three chapters and we situate this report within that broader theoretical framework.

Regarding the second anomaly: as education academics, our work often centres on the activities of schools and the professional tasks of in-service and pre-service teachers. We became concerned in our discussions that while we were making a case for teachers to engage in *praxis*, we were not necessarily turning this same lens on ourselves. Given that *praxis* is "morally-committed action, oriented and informed by traditions in a field" (see Chapter 1), it might be argued that we would be acting unethically if we did not, firstly or simultaneously, examine our own teaching as a form of *praxis* before presuming to offer advice about the *praxis* of others.

With these two overarching concerns in mind, we set out to explore *praxis* in our particular context – pre-service teacher education. As we began to consider our actions as tertiary teachers, we continued to read and reflect to help us articulate and understand the moral tenets that underpinned our teaching *praxis*.

This chapter presents a case story of our interaction with some of the literature, our exploration of our intentions and self-understandings, and some of the implications these ideas require of our action as educators. As our exploration proceeded, we were faced with tensions and constraints that impelled us to consider how we would act and to question our prior actions. Our chapter is a shared account of tertiary teachers trying to engage in *praxis* within the constraints of a university degree program. In presenting this account of our journey, we have been particularly aware of some of our short-comings and at times have felt quite vulnerable, but we have come to see this exposure as an integral part of exploring our teaching *praxis*.

This chapter is the story of that process and the themes and issues that emerged. Peter alluded to these aspects in a contribution to a shared blog (weblog) called 'Finding *praxis*' that we created to record our reflections along the way. The online blog will be described in the section 'The exploration'):

> *Although we have sketched some broad parameters for our journey ahead, there is a real sense of mystery and uncertainty about what experiences lie before us. It is possible that we may experience a 'break-through' or 'earth-shattering' moment, but we may not, and so I think we need to try and identify how we are becoming more conscious through the moment-by-moment experiences of the mundane and ordinary. I think the difficult process of trying to see the ordinary as extra-ordinary and the seeds of the spectacular amongst the routine is important – indeed critical. Those 'aha' moments are important and worthy of study, but they are indeed rare, and the ongoing realisation of praxis is deeply interesting.*

As we began to consider the routine activity of our teaching practice we had no script to follow and our course was not mapped. However, we were influenced by the principles of phenomenology and hermeneutics in the interpretation of our lifeworlds as tertiary teachers and in the interpretation of the lifeworld of the pre-service teachers with whom we work. We believed that a phenomenological perspective would contribute to our understanding of the taken-for-granted practices that shape our *praxis* and that the discovery-oriented and inductive nature of the phenomenological approach would enable us to find unforeseen and emergent insights into our practice and *praxis*. Likewise, the hermeneutical perspective would also help us to be responsive to emerging themes and relationships. This responsiveness was important to our exploration because of the tentative nature of our analysis and interpretation of our *praxis*.

Histories

As we present the case story of our search for *praxis*, we are aware that our journey did not begin at our first meeting. As relatively recently arrived teachers in our regional inland university, we were becoming Charles Sturt University teachers, shaped by the practice architectures our university has already constructed. Nevertheless, we are equally aware that we were forming our own particular roles

as teachers out of our own acts and deeds. It is clear that our unfolding experiences were shaped and pre-figured by our histories and we continued to make connections between our past, present and future as university teachers. With this in mind, we briefly present a synopsis of our backgrounds to help readers understand a little of our context and backgrounds.

Helen

I work mainly with pre-service primary and secondary teachers as an information technology educator. I came to my current position after many years of teaching computer education in secondary schools. As a secondary school teacher, I had many fruitful discussions with colleagues about balancing the here-and-now (the pragmatic) with the responsibility to provide the best possible opportunity for learners to learn. However, as a teacher educator in a university, my concerns about *praxis* have shifted in compelling ways that have provided an imperative to explore my *praxis* in greater depth. My interest in the notion of *praxis* stemmed partly from reflecting on the evaluations my students submit at the end of each teaching session. These gave me insights into my own practices and the disjuncture between what I was espousing as 'good teaching practice' for students and my own practice as a university teacher. I became aware of my own teaching in the sense that I began to see my teaching from the perspective of my students and I began to wonder about a kind of hypocrisy in my actions. In an environment where it might be expected that teaching decisions are supported by theories, I appeared to be acting contrary to the theories I was espousing.

I had a further concern about inherent messages I may have been conveying to the pre-service teachers I was teaching. The following narrative is just one example. In an evaluation of one subject I teach, a student referred to my lack of feedback on an assignment. I agreed that this was true; I had provided little feedback. I knew this and had known it at the time, but had not considered that it was the kind of practice I should question. It was only after reflecting on the student's comments that I began to ask some questions I needed to have answered. First, my reason for not providing feedback was that I believed students just wanted to 'jump through the hoops' and that they regarded assessment simply as a necessary evil. This presupposed that I also believed that real learning only took place in other places in the subject and not in the assessment. If this were so, then my practice was not aligned with what I was espousing: that assessment is a learning opportunity. This led me to scrutinise the assessment tasks in all the subjects I taught and to explore my *praxis* to find a closer fit between my teaching practices and what I encouraged in pre-service teachers. Newman (2006, p. 153) cites Brookfield's (1995) notion of 'critical-incident analysis' in which a critical incident is held up to scrutiny so its significance can be exposed and examined, and so the analyst can reach a deeper understanding of why they deemed this particular incident to be critical and to 'identify the values that underpin actions' (Newman, 2006, p. 154). The issue of feedback on assignments had been made 'critical' for me by this student's evaluation comments, and it allowed me to discover how I

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could better realise my views and values through my teaching, in this case by giving richer feedback on students' assignments.

Peter

I am a university mathematics educator working primarily with pre-service primary and secondary teachers. My main area of interest is the affective dimension of learning. When I began working with pre-service primary teachers in their initial teacher education programs in mathematics education, I was surprised at the negative attitudes that many displayed towards mathematics. This led into my doctoral research that explored the affective responses of pre-service primary teachers to mathematics. One particular finding that stood out for me was the critical role that these students' previous mathematics teachers had played in forming their largely negative perceptions, beliefs and feelings about mathematics. It was confronting to realise that as a school mathematics teacher I had probably inadvertently caused some students to develop beliefs and attitudes about mathematics that were similarly not positive or enabling. This disconcerting revelation pierced at the heart of what I perceived my role to be. As I had moved into the role of mathematics educator, I had certainly experienced feelings of uncertainty and dissonance, and I came to recognise that I was not just a teacher of skills and knowledge, but that I also had a significant role in shaping students' beliefs, values, attitudes and feelings. This revelation brought to the fore the moral and ethical dimension of my practice that I have since reflected on and written about (Grootenboer, 2006). It continues to focus my attention in my teaching as a university teacher educator, and has shaped the inquiry into my *praxis* presented here.

ANALYSING TAKEN-FOR-GRANTED ASPECTS OF TEACHING PRACTICE

There is a certain inevitability about the practices of teaching in formal learning environments. When teachers and learners enter a shared space there is both an inevitability and an expectation about what will occur. There is a pattern and predictability to the behaviours in which both parties – teachers and students – are expected to 'stick to the script'. As these practices are repeated, they become routinised, anticipated and something like 'second nature'. Their continual practical success guarantees their reliability and they become habitualized as recipes – a 'guaranteed formula' for success. In teaching, the repetition of routines that reliably produce expected outcomes can diminish *praxis* to *poiēsis* – that is, it can diminish morally-committed action that is informed and oriented by tradition to instrumental action aiming only to produce reliable results (see Chapter 2). The disposition of *phronēsis* (to act wisely and prudently, guided by practical commonsense) is replaced by the disposition of *technē* (to produce an expected result). This transformation of *praxis* to *poiēsis* can occur for teachers simply by virtue of past success and established routines. The successful employment of a

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particular set of actions may mean that the practitioner no longer needs to consider a particular kind of situation as new or different, nor to require new ways of acting.

Under such conditions, which we might describe as a '*technē* experience', practitioners might behave as if they 'know all there is to know' in relation to a particular practice. The '*technē* experience' includes the repetitiveness, the sameness, the automation and the routine that subsequently flow from adopting this perspective. If technique is thought to have been perfected, there is no reason to seek new solutions or to examine the particular, different and unique conditions of practice in this or that particular case, in this or that particular time and place. If the practice 'works', the practitioner may believe, then they can repeat past successful acts and that each time things will be the same, with the same outcome. Under such conditions, there appears to be no need to examine the taken-for-granted. For teachers with these beliefs there may also be a certain expectation that nothing changes between teaching/learning events and that it is possible to repeat behaviours without unforeseen outcomes. The conditions of practice are also assumed to be unchanged.

This kind of experience of practice may also entail an assumption by teachers that others in the shared space – particularly students – will accept and comply with past and expected ways of behaving. There is an expectation that the meaning of the behaviour will be known and that this meaning will be accepted without question by all participants. It is only when something novel occurs that the individual is made aware of the deficiency in their personal 'stock of knowledge' that previously had been taken-for-granted (Schutz & Luckmann, 1974, p. 8). This stock of knowledge is an expression to explain prior experiences. The unexamined ground of practice remains taken-for-granted as routines and patterns of behaviour while ever the mechanical devices and techniques (*technē*) used continue to result in anticipated outcomes.

The perspective of *praxis*, however, requires a different way of looking at things. In *praxis*, the unexamined, taken-for-granted ground of practice is examined. Without the exploration, the ground remains taken-for-granted. In *praxis*, the everyday and perhaps unspectacular moments of our teaching practice are opened to scrutiny and exploration. In Chapter 4, Smith referred to three qualities that Dewey (1933) believed underpin a *praxis* stance or a disposition towards *praxis*. (A similar way of describing the *praxis* stance is that given by Edwards-Groves in Chapter 8 as a '*praxis*-oriented self'.) One of the qualities identified by Dewey that was particularly relevant for us was the quality of open-mindedness, that is, the ability to consider perspectives other than one's own. We believed that by approaching our journey of finding *praxis* from a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective we would demonstrate an open-mindedness that could not only expose our shortcoming but also allow us intersubjectively to encounter the lived experience of others – that is, to encounter their subjectivities as they engaged with ours in a shared encounter and a shared experience.

In attempting to understand the nature of the *praxis*-oriented self, Peter made an early contribution to our blog (see below for description of 'The exploration'), in which he questioned how we could investigate our *praxis* while also being

immersed in our own *praxis*. Peter's insight suggested that this was going to be a difficult and yet eventful journey:

> *I wonder how we can imagine this idea of developing the self that teaches – the 'praxising' person. I think this is a big topic that warrants thoughtful consideration. All of the faith traditions seem to include a dimension that requires some sort of inner journey, and perhaps there is something to be learned here. Often this seems to include times of solitude and reflection – a time away from our practice. Praxis can only be realised in action, and so I am not suggesting the monastery-type lifestyle, but it seems very difficult to remove oneself from the humdrum of our practice in order to rejuvenate/refresh something so we can 'praxis'.*

In other words, in looking for what counts as *praxis* for a teacher in an education faculty, we were reflecting and becoming reflexive about our own *praxis*. In this state of being critically conscious of our *praxis*, we attempted to identify, question and analyse the ethics of our teaching practices. This involved scrutinising our ideologies and values, and the taken-for-granted – those aspects and qualities that influenced and constrained our ways of thinking, feeling and acting as teachers. This involved taking a step back and attempting to distance ourselves from the personal nature of the landscape we were inhabiting along with our students and being dispassionate about our practices in that landscape. In doing this, we trusted that exposing our practices to others would allow us to gain insights that might be uncovered and revealed by the critical discussions that would follow.

IN LOOKING FOR *PRAXIS*, WHAT WERE WE LOOKING FOR?

In Chapter 1, Kemmis and Smith defined *praxis* as "morally-committed action, oriented and informed by traditions in a field" (p.2). This, then, defined what we were looking for, but our immediate concern was about more tangible things. If we were looking for *praxis*, what would it look like? And if we saw it, would we recognise it? How would we know? We were saturated in the theoretical machinations of *praxis* as morally informed practice, but were more perplexed about how we might notice it within ourselves, let alone others. It became clear that *praxis* cannot necessarily be seen or heard because any given action or practice can be moved or enacted from a range of different motivations. Hence the same teaching behaviour could be a form of *technē* or *praxis*, or more likely, some complex amalgam of positions and strategies. This was a profound moment, for in this relatively simple quest we experienced at a very personal level the complex and difficult agenda we were promoting for others.

We understood in more than a theoretical way that a commitment to scrutinising our own practices would require a personal dedication to community and collegiality, reflection and self-disclosure if we were to explore the moral intent of our actions. Furthermore, we realised that this sort of journey could only begin with a sense of trust and mutual respect. For our small group this characterised our

relationships and it emerged as much through shared meals and coffee as it did through our more formal interactions.

Peter further wrote in our 'Finding *praxis*' blog (see below for description of 'The exploration'):

> *I see us as "searching for praxis" or "journeying towards praxis development" or something like that, because, as has been highlighted by Stephen (Kemmis) and Helen, it is not arrival that is important but the "exploration towards". It is trying to be more conscious of and deliberate about pedagogy as praxis. To me this will be rooted in our experiences, and I'm hoping that our collegiality will help me see and think about those experiences in a deeper and more morally-conscious way. I also hope that we reflect upon our shared experience in some way – not just as a collection of individual experiences, but somehow capturing the complexity and richness of our togetherness. I'm not sure how we can do this but perhaps it will involve times of "looking back" and trying to specifically focus on certain features of our shared work, practice, praxis and humanity.*

THE EXPLORATION

The journey we describe in this chapter centres on our attempts to begin a process of *praxis* development in our own tertiary teaching. The events took place over a ten month period that included two semesters of teaching in 2006 and 2007. Our exploration was built around three sorts of activities that were bound together and synthesized by continuous thought and conversation: reading, discussing and acting in our role as tertiary teachers. Formal and informal discussion was central, in face-to-face situations and through a shared online blog (weblog). The blog provided a communication space that enabled us to see and read the contributions of all participants and to respond to the text and graphics in our own time and place. Being part of a discussion that was not dependent on time and space gave us immense freedom to reflect and to keep up with the discussion.

In this account of our journey we draw on all of these three types of activity and give readers some insight into our thinking, struggles and the issues we faced. Our account is not a recipe for others to follow, but rather a very situated and personal story of how we tried to enter the potentially-treacherous space of collegial self-review searching for morally-informed *praxis*. Indeed, it seems to us that to regard what follows as a recipe or method for *praxis* would immediately be to risk changing it into a form of *technē* or instrumental action to produce an external product. As Kemmis and Grootenboer suggested in Chapter 2, *praxis* is a process of self-formation that changes the person who acts.

How did we go about it?

Our exploration involved a range of reflective collegial activities. This chapter has been written by two of the participants, but other colleagues were involved to

varying degrees. In short, we listened and told teacher and student narratives in corridors, informal discussions and formal meetings. Our online blog provided a further venue for critically reflecting on these stories. We created communicative spaces for collaborative reflection. We started writing and exchanging scripts about our teaching and events where we were conscious of our *praxis* or occurrences that challenged our attempts to enact *praxis*. At the same time, we read the work of some key writers in the literature of *praxis* (for example, Dunne, 1993).

There were many instances when we attempted to make meaning of a situation using metaphors as a way of interpreting the experience. One metaphor from the blog that created some excitement was that of a bike spoke in helping us to grapple with the many tensions that characterized our professional landscape. Initially we spoke disparagingly about the unavoidable and seemingly oppositional forces that constrained our attempts towards *praxis*. Theoretically we were not unaware of these sorts of tensions, as has been discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 in this volume. We noted that the discussions about these external constraining influences appeared to lead to a sort of inactivity or paralysis because of events and decisions apparently beyond our control. However, we came to view the tensions differently through the metaphor of the bike spoke. A bike spoke is a relatively flimsy piece of metal but it functions well because it is held in tension with the other spokes around the wheel. The tension keeps the wheel centred and able to function but without the tension the wheel collapses. So we saw the parallel with our situation for two reasons.

First, such tensions keep us from extremism and perhaps from being captured by our own agendas without due consideration for our colleagues, community, students and the profession at large. Second, such tensions mean that *praxis* is required. If the professional landscape was free from tensions and competing agendas, there would be no need for morally-informed practice because the decisions required would be straight-forward and the action steps clear-cut. On a well-charted and issue-free journey, *technē* is sufficient – in fact probably desirable, because it takes away the opportunity for unnecessary moralistic vacillation. In our journey, however, the dilemmas, the uncomfortable feelings, the sense of unease, the critical incidents, and the occasional clashes of personal beliefs and ethics all created an essential tension. For our wheel to spin in a balanced way, the spokes could not be slack. Without tension, there would be no issues and no need to explore the taken-for-granted. These tensions will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

The tension-filled nature of our teaching context was inevitable, but our responses were not and the choice to do nothing seemed morally indefensible. With this in mind, Peter encouraged us in our endeavours in one of the early blog postings:

> *Fellow journeyers, I'm expecting that we will be different (better?) in a few months time! In fact, I'm sure we will be different, but I'm hoping we will be more aware of the changes and that we might be better 'praxisers'.*

THE TENSIONS OR ISSUES

In this chapter, we explore a number of issues that relate directly to our experiences (and not necessarily to the experience of others). We can make no definite claims here about others' experience, though we assume that some of our experiences may resonate with others. We noted that our journey towards *praxis* was charted in a terrain characterised by tensions. These included the tensions between:
  – integrity and pragmatics;
  – teacher and students, humans in a shared space;
  – teacher and students in separate time and space;
  – *technē* experience and sincerity;
  – acting morally or acting moralistically, and
  – enacting *praxis* and explaining our practices.

We have deliberately called these issues *tensions* rather than *problems* because we came to view each pair of terms not as opposed ideas each intending to overthrow or obliterate the other, but as poles held in relation with one another by stresses that kept us from extremism. As poles, they defined a space that demanded morally informed action – that demanded *praxis*! Below we discuss each tension in turn, although they did not arise and we did not necessarily identify them in the order in which we discuss them here. In each case, the tension is illustrated with a particular example from our shared experiences and often we cite the *praxis*-focused questions that piqued our thinking, and that still remain open and conscious-raising for us now, as we continue the exploration of our *praxis*.

Integrity and pragmatics

There exists an area that could best be described as the pragmatics of teaching: the expedient, the means to an end, the purely technical solutions to problems that arise during the event. These are the solutions that are perhaps *easiest* to explain, in terms of logical explanation, but *least easy* to explain in terms of a philosophical perspective or *praxis*. Perhaps it is a combination of practice (i.e. *technē*) and pragmatics that drive the immediacy of teaching that seems to work in opposition to *praxis*. Could *praxis* be *technē* and more, that is, good technical and pragmatic skills + the moral, ethical concern that underpins decisions? It seems to us that *praxis*, as action, enacts the ability to 'think on your feet', enacts the capacity to evaluate what is happening as it unfolds, and enacts the theory that underpins one's actions.

One of the first tensions we noticed in our teaching was an apparent mismatch between some of the material we presented to our pre-service teacher education students and our own modes of teaching and acting. A specific example of the contradiction was apparent when trying to explain the theory and principles of constructivism in a formal lecture setting. This teaching strategy created a disparity between what was being espoused and what was being enacted. So why did we find ourselves doing it? Why did we act in contradiction with the constructivist

principles we were espousing? Why this perversity, this seeming contrariness, this disparity? When we examined these questions we came up with pragmatic answers, such as the session being scheduled in a lecture theatre, large numbers of students, it was easier this way, there was less need for organisation of students and resources, less preparation involved for the teacher. Our university timetables distinguish different types of session as 'lectures' and 'workshops'. The taken-for-granted text suggests that lectures will be teacher-centred and that workshops will involve student-centred activities. Locking ourselves into these assumptions allowed our teaching decisions to be rationalised by 'pragmatic' concerns.

On the blog, Helen described an instance of the tension between personal human values and institutional bureaucracy that has potentially far-reaching consequences.

After teaching in one of the computer rooms, I encountered students waiting for their next class. Their teacher had not yet arrived to take the class. University regulations require that students may not be left alone in a computer room without supervision, so I asked them to wait outside a locked door until their teacher arrived. My underlying sense of ill ease meant that I was in a relationship with these students and I was communicating a lack of trust in them, an expectation that they would not be honest or 'do the right thing'. How will this expectation be played out in other situations and contexts when I want them to know that I do trust them and when I espouse the values of teacher/student relationships based on trust and respect? What does it say to the students and how can I expect them to believe me, when I say I respect them, that there is mutual-ness in the teacher-learner relationship? What does it also say about how they will approach their students when they come to teach in the school environment? Will they say they trust them and then lock the door at lunch time so the students are not able to use the room without a teacher present?

A particular aspect of teaching in computer rooms that gives cause to stop and think is the topology of the room, the configuration, the layout and placement of the resources and students, and the expectations and constraints these impose on the teacher and the students. Schatzki (2002) refers to the 'spatial relations' and 'how artifacts enable and constrain one another's actions depends not just on their physical properties, but also on the organization that human activity imposes on them' (p. 98). In a computer learning environment, the topology is often such that it restricts collaborative learning or makes collaborative learning difficult. Unlike a 'normal' classroom with tables and chairs that can be re-arranged, the computer teacher is locked into an existing topology because she cannot re-arrange fixed computers and power outlets, data projector, scanner and printers. The topology is 'prefigured' and pre-arranged in a practice architecture (see Chapter 3) in which these resources are screwed down and fixed in place. Both the teacher and the students are bound by the placement of teaching and learning resources. In this situation, with these conditions of teaching and learning, the following questions are raised in relation to the 'spatial relations' of computer learning environments:

– How do the classroom configurations of furniture and resources influence the learning?

   – How does the configuration position the teacher and students?

   – Who is privileged and why?

   – On what basis is the topology determined?

   – Is there a rationale for the topology based on learning theory, or is it determined by other circumstances, such as comfort, shape of room, position of power outlets?

   – Is the topology an architectural decision or a design decision?

   – Who makes these decisions?

The computer teacher is faced with the tension of the fixed topology of the room and the potential clash with their preferred way of teaching. The set configuration of the room also potentially influences the nature of the teacher/learner relationship. The dilemma for the teacher is how to maintain integrity amidst the fixed configuration and architecture of the room that dominates and determines the pragmatics of actions. How is the teacher able to teach over and around the fixed placement of furniture and resources with no possible choice in re-arranging furniture and providing alternative learning spaces for students? A final question in this section relates to the next tension and provides a link to the tension of humans in a shared space, that is, who occupies the dominant space and 'drives' the actions within the space?

Teacher and students, humans in a shared space

Although learners are the chief actors in the drama of learning, each Being is also a member of a human family (Kidd, 1973) so any individual experience is never truly just one person's experience, it is inexplicably linked to the social. Humans are in constant interaction with their surroundings and "these interactions constitute the framework of all experience" (Dewey, 1933, p. 36).

In reflecting on relationships with learners, qualities such as understanding, patience and generosity come to mind. Enacting these virtues is quite a challenge when many students in a computer learning environment insist on personal attention. It is very difficult, as a teacher, to be *understanding* when learners are not understanding about the demands on the teacher's time, and when they expect and demand instant teacher-focus. It is also difficult to be patient after explaining something to a class in different ways and then to have students want it explained again to them, individually, because during the earlier explanations their attention had been elsewhere while they were listening to music via an earphone, or sending a text message on a mobile phone, or checking their email on the computer. It is difficult to be generous when students have their own agendas (they are people too) and seek to strengthen their position by attempting to undermine other students or the teacher. Like it or not, learning institutions are halls of power. Hence, the tension and the need to remind ourselves that teachers are also people.

This shared situation is spatial, temporal and social. Teachers are learners too, so, from an existential perspective, the journey of learning is a shared journey.

From a physical perspective, teachers and students are confined within rooms and buildings they share. All participants are influenced by the topology of the room, the placement of furniture and resources. Teachers and students are bound by the university regulations and each has expectations of what will take place within the shared space. Members look for behaviours that will remind them that everyone is following the same script. "I share (an everyday) reality with other men, with whom I have in common not only goals but means for the actualization of these goals. I influence other men and they influence me. The everyday lifeworld is that reality in which reciprocal understanding is possible" (Schutz & Luckmann, 1974, p. 35).

The work of Paolo Freire (for example, Freire, 1972) has been influential in the field of teaching and learning, and we were drawn to his notion that the teacher should be a student among students. However, as Stephen Kemmis remarked on our 'Finding *praxis*' blog, being accepted as a fellow student by our own students requires a difficult action of positioning, and may not even be possible:

> *What is it that makes me seem distant from their lives, their stories? How can I find a way around or under or through the barriers that separate us? Can I assure them that our relationship is really one of mutuality, of co-learning, of collaborating in the project of their education, or will the regulatory discourses of university teaching, learning and assessment mean that we remain on opposite sides of a fence – implacably opposed in the dualities of teacher and learner, assessor and assessed?*

We come into the learning situation with a past and a future that is with us in the present. Our future is what we are mainly concerned about; it contains the anticipation, the expectation of something from learning, dreams, hopes, aspirations. We are limited by the shared space we occupy and the constraints of the university system. This limitation sets up a tension. Because we conform to the expectations conventional for these shared spaces, we are able to live up to the expectations of others sharing the space. If we do not, then we risk wasting our time and theirs.

The existentials of corporeal, temporal and spatial relationships clash when teachers and students are waiting outside a room for another class to vacate the room. Together, sharing that 'waiting' space, teachers become aware that they are not students, and students that they are not teachers, and that there is a corporeal, time, spatial and relationship distance and difference between them. Newman (2006, p. 173) says "We can disrupt another person's orderly universe simply by being there." Helen wrote in the blog about the experience of waiting outside the room for the class to begin:

> *It is painfully evident that I am a trespasser and then I become aware of myself, my behaviour and being able to overhear their conversations, as they too are aware of my presence and my being able to hear them. If I talk to them, what do I talk about? They become the owners of the territory, they have territorial rights and I take my cue from them; it is only in the classroom that I have authority. Outside I am a person, but I carry a tag, I*

am a teacher and in a few minutes I will transform into being the facilitator and assessor of their learning.

The tensions that emerged as we reflected on our teaching were not limited to teaching that occurred in a shared physical space. We also work with students through distance education (DE), and there are tensions in that setting, too.

Teachers and students in separate time and space

In the distance education (DE) mode, we have experienced a unique way of relating to students in assessing their assignments without having met or taught them. Outside of face-to-face teaching, there are many related activities (such as preparation, designing the subject outline, developing assessment tasks, gathering resources, referring to texts and to the literature, student interviews, setting up online activities and contributing to online forums for students). These activities influence the relationship between teacher and students and are an integral part of *praxis*. Hence, it seems restrictive to limit our discussion of *praxis* only to face-to-face teaching and to classrooms where time and space are shared. The culture of the classroom and the behaviours within them may be the main focus of this book, but the distance education component of our teaching is significant.

Peter wrote in our blog:

I was struck by the distinction between technē – which focuses on 'what you do', compared to praxis with its focus on 'who is the doer'. It seems to me that as we prepare for our teaching we need to spend at least as much time preparing ourselves – as a sort of embodied curriculum – as we do preparing our material. Perhaps praxis is about the complex connection and interplay between the self that is teaching and the material being taught (and the students of course). Even as I write this I see the folly of not including the students in the loop, but I guess we have more direct control over the first two.

We were also aware of the effects of the policies and regulations of our university as they are played out in the relationship with students; not just in the classroom and in interactions with students in the same space, but also in distance teaching. Can *praxis* also lie in action that crosses the separations of time and space in distance teaching or is it restricted to face-to-face teaching? This question highlights once again the *relational* nature of teaching and learning, and how a kind of retreat to *technē* might be perceived as a way to cope with the tensions that arise when teacher and student must meet and interact across these separations. *Praxis* is called for, we believe, in such a tension-rich environment.

Technē experience and sincerity

Contributing to our shared blog forced us to consider our teaching, the way we approached it and what we think we are doing when we are interacting with

students. *Technē* suggests that teachers are machines with numerous well-tried and tested strategies – even if these strategies also lack heart. We would like to have experiences with students that truly reflect the potential we have to act as humans when we interact with others and to attempt to understand their personal journey of learning and our role in their journey. Are we actors with a script – the script – when we are devising a lesson plan, a set structure for our teaching sessions? There is a further tension here – the tension of providing a structure versus determining what is to happen in the session.

In our shared blog Helen wrote:

> *As I put into place strategies to 'get to know' students' names as quickly as possible, I wonder what I am doing. Am I really reaching out to another human, just as I would remember a name of a person I have met socially as an acknowledgment of their self, their individuality? In social situations (where there is no assessment and no imbalance of the relationship as there is with student and teacher) when someone I have met previously doesn't remember my name, I feel slighted, as if I am not important enough for that person to remember my name. Further I want to say to students: "you are not a collective and I want to know each of you by name and to recognise your face". But is this really why? Or do I want to know their names so that when the assignments come in, I am able to put a name to the work submitted and in some form be influenced by my personal experiences with that student? Why does it make it harder to assess the work if I don't know them, as happens with distance education students? Is my wanting to know their names truly an acknowledgment of their separateness and selfhood, or is it a strategy a teacher can use to assist with behaviour management and assessment? I assume that students want me to know who they are and so, on some level, it just seems the human thing to do, to want to remember a person's name, a person who will be sharing experiences with you for a period. But is this just a technique that seems to work for giving students a false sense of your interest in them? Does it become a part of our 'bag of tricks'?*

Allied to these concerns is the moral dilemma inherent in teacher education of trying to develop, but not demand, certain values and practices that are perceived as desirable (or even essential) in teaching and teachers.

Acting morally or acting moralistically

Central to the venture that has underpinned this chapter is the tension between acting morally and acting moralistically. This is a bind that is peculiar to teacher education where we are teaching new teachers how to teach. In this position, we promote certain kinds of educational knowledge, values and practices and aim to undermine or dismiss other perspectives on teaching. We want to promote *praxis* as the foundation of good teaching. But what right have we to impose a particular form of *praxis* (our interpretation of *praxis*) on our students in their role as

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teachers? Newman says (2006, p. 11) we may be "laying out unwanted futures". We believe it may be arrogant and presumptuous of us to prescribe a *praxis* of our own interpretation. We were concerned that we were imposing our form of *praxis* on our students and thereby "laying out unwanted futures" or futures that would take our students on a particular path. We were cognisant of the potential we held in our hands to influence their thinking in relation to teaching, but we were equally cognisant that there might be other possible alternatives. Newman suggests that we should teach our students defiance: to question, to scrutinise and to be in a position to be heard, noticed and taken seriously. We should teach them how to analyse problems and to empower them to take these problems to others. Beginning teachers are hardly in a position of having their voices heard – perhaps they are quite the opposite, on the bottom rung in the hierarchy of roles in the profession. We recognised that we also needed to attend to this tension: to be able to regard our students as our equals in their status as persons, as Others, even while we regard them as novices in teaching. Perhaps that is why it is incumbent upon us to teach them their Otherness and their equality, by teaching them that they can defy us and be themselves, doing their best in their way.

A further consideration in the tension of acting morally or acting moralistically relates to the question of freedom. Newman (2006, p. 109) cites Jean-Paul Sartre who argued that in exercising freedom we restrict the freedom of others. In the context of our freedom to impose a particular form of *praxis* on our students, perhaps, in Sartre's terms, we thereby impinge on the freedom of students to choose their preferred form of *praxis* for learning – their "morally-committed action, oriented and informed by tradition" in their own learning. Since, as university teacher educators, we also supervise some of our students' professional experience placements (practicums), we have a further opportunity to impose *praxis* on pre-service teachers, not just in their learning but also in their teaching. Our freedom to impose a form of *praxis* impinges on their freedom to practice another form of *praxis*.

Our constraints are not the only ones that impinge on the freedom of our students in their learning and their practice teaching. We must also consider the intractable nature of university rules and regulations, the intractable nature of professional experience placement (practicum) requirements, and the intractable nature of state accreditation processes and compliance procedures. Are we seeking to serve the interests of the educational system, the politicians and the expectations derived from the hierarchical structure of schools and institutions? Are we encouraging our students to be submissive and passively accept the objectives of the school organisation? Are we 'training' students to be 'good' teachers in our model of good teaching? Are we encouraging them to act in their own best interests?

Neither we nor our students turn out to be entirely free; like them, we are constrained (and enabled) in our practice by rules, regulations and the best interests of others. *Praxis* always occurs within constraints; indeed, as we have suggested, *praxis* is called for precisely because we encounter constraints that require us to respond in conscience or in the best interests of others insofar as they are

compatible with the good for humankind. As Sartre was aware, freedom is not unconstrained and acting freely is always a matter of will and conscience. In the tension between our own freedom and that of our students, Newman's idea that we must teach our students defiance seems all the more appropriate – we must teach them to do what they believe is right, in their own interests, in the interests of the others they encounter, and in the interests of humankind. If we teach them that, and if they prove willing to learn it, we may have taught them (or they may have learned) *praxis*.

Enacting praxis and explaining our practices

In the last semester of the reflective process reported here, we became more conscious of making explicit to learners what teaching decisions are made and why. We recognise now, with much greater clarity, that our students are simultaneously learning to learn and learning to become teachers. They are both learning to Be and learning to Become. In these processes they are sometimes not very confident about what is happening to them. Modelling the sort of practice we want to encourage the students to do in their future practice as teachers is by itself a good enough reason to make our teaching decisions transparent. We believe we can enable this to happen by making teaching and learning more explicit for our students, including by drawing attention to our own teaching decisions. Schuck & Russell (2005) believe that we should make learning about teaching explicit by communicating our reasons for designing activities and tasks in particular ways, based on our specific intentions for learning, and in relation to our own educational philosophies.

On our blog, Peter wrote (on this dilemma refer also to Edwards-Groves & Gray, Chapter 5 in this volume):

> *A vexing issue I noted was the dilemma of a pedagogy that desires praxis for our students. The notion of praxis imbues deep, thoughtful, ethical and moral qualities, but it seems problematic when we 'demand' these things from our students. It would seem to me that a student is no longer enacting a form of praxis if they are doing it to meet my agenda. Can we, in a sense, be inadvertently promoting an artificial praxis by overtly promoting praxis?*

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

At the beginning of this chapter we said that we wanted to avoid any suggestion that we were presenting a recipe or model for *praxis* development. We said that, if we did, we would be in danger of changing the very nature of *praxis* into something more like *technē* or a product. That said, we do think that there are some characteristics or principles of *praxis* development that seem to be very important if not essential.

First, we believe that the development of *praxis* is a collegial venture. We believe our understandings and interpretations of *praxis* developed through our

conversations with each other, in our blog and in discussions with other contributors to this book. And these discussions, in turn, took place against backgrounds of our own experience and the experiences of others, some of whom have long preceded us in the educational traditions in which *praxis* has its origins and in which it evolves to meet the challenges of changing times and circumstances. Even as individual action, *praxis* turns out to be a collective enterprise – the enterprise of communities of practitioners jointly committed to the development of their own practice and the practice of their profession.

Second, *praxis* is by its very nature, a kind of action. It is what is done, beyond the dispositions, ideas or intentions which may guide or orient the action of *praxis*. In this chapter, we reflected on tensions and issues we encountered in our striving for *praxis* in two semesters of our teaching careers. Some of the examples we have given may hint at the moments when we became conscious, in the action or afterward, of our action as *praxis* – as something more than 'going through the motions' of teaching. As suggested in Chapter 2 of this volume, whether we did well or badly by our *praxis* will be a matter for history to judge – when the consequences of our actions might be more clearly known.

Finally, we understand *praxis* to be or to involve a reflective process that necessarily involves symbiotic consideration of theory/literature and action. Of course, these characteristics are also central to other educational processes such as Carr and Kemmis's (1986) action research and Schön's (1987) reflective practice, but, as has sometimes happened with these developmental practices, reflection can be captured and routinized, and become a form of *technē* that can be used as a bureaucratic form of control in educational situations.

In researching our *praxis* development, we found that we were, to some extent, caught in a hermeneutical bind: we were searching for 'aspects of *praxis*', but in a sense all we had access to were our acts or products – things that are more aligned with *technē*. We were trying to better understand something internal (*praxis*), by looking at something external (*poiēsis*). By recording what we might regard as evidence of our *praxis* – in our blog, for example – we risked treating it as external to ourselves, with the attendant danger that we might miss the thing most intrinsic to what we were doing – our commitment to doing the best we could under the circumstances; our actions and their consequences, not just our words about them.

Similarly, this chapter has now become a product – an object crafted according to a set of rules. Is it no more than the product of *poiēsis*, of 'making action'? Or is it the product of an act of conscience, an act of doing the best we could under the circumstances, willing that the consequences of our writing will be to enable *praxis* and to constrain the instrumentalization and bureaucratization of education? Of course, we hope it is, and that readers will understand it to be, the latter.

We conclude by asking, once again, that readers not see the activities described in this chapter as any sort of formula or recipe for the development of *praxis*. Equally, we hope we have not overly theorised our story. Our goal has been to lay bare some of our attempts to develop our disposition to act wisely and justly in our educational practice in our university teacher education program. At the very best, our efforts have refreshed our sense of what is at stake whenever we teach.

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