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Productive Pedagogies: Is it an intelligible language for preservice teachers?

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ABSTRACT

Australian teacher educators and teachers have become increasingly familiar with the notion of ‘Productive Pedagogies’, itself the product of longitudinal research on school reform recently undertaken in Queensland, Australia (Lingard et al., 2001a, 2001b). One of its strengths has been its efficacy for in-service teachers to use as a language to talk about their pedagogical work and hence a way of reclaiming some of the ground on what constitutes good teaching. In part, this can be attributed to the numerous observations of teachers’ classroom practice that informed the construction of Productive Pedagogies (PPs). That is, many teachers understand these as naming what ‘good’ teachers have always done. In this paper the value of PPs as a metalanguage for developing pre-service teachers’ knowledge and understanding of teaching is examined; whether PPs is a language that is intelligible for pre-service teachers without access to this prior teacher knowledge or whether its elements and dimensions merely constitute an isolated vocabulary. A case study of four pre-service teachers provides the context for this exploration and its empirical data. Drawing on their fieldwork observations of teaching practice, voiced in the language of PPs, the paper argues that PPs language is indeed useful in the development of pre-service teachers’ understanding of teaching, particularly in assisting them to name evidence of teachers’ recognition of and engagement with difference.
INTRODUCTION

I thought, isn’t it cute the way they sit cross-legged on the floor and listen. Initially I thought the activity of sitting still, and paying attention was learning, upon reflection I understand it is learned and practiced behaviour, requiring little intellectual participation. Intellectual quality became apparent as the children became involved and engaged … as the teacher asked open-ended questions … (Ted, 2)

Productive Pedagogy is an approach to creating a place, space and vocabulary for us to get talking about classroom instruction again. It isn’t a magic formula (e.g., just teach this way and it will solve all the kids problems), but rather it’s a framework and vocabulary for staffroom, inservice, pre-service training, for us to describe the various things we can do in classrooms. (Luke, 2002, 2 emphasis added)

We need to have curriculum conversations, …We need to back these teachers, get them talking in staff meetings about how they adjust their pedagogies to get better results – showing and mentoring the rest of us about how it can be done. To do so we need to have a common vocabulary and framework for looking at and talking about pedagogy: productive pedagogies, authentic pedagogies, focused instruction, whatever. We need to get mentoring each other, swapping strategies, and having curriculum conversations about what we did differently. (Luke, 2002, 9-10 emphasis added)

Goodlad states: “Teachers must learn not only the subject matter of the human conversation but also the pedagogy for immersing the young productively in the conversation” (cited in Roth, 1999, 8)

All people, Antonio Gramsci said, are intellectuals; but only some have the function of intellectuals. Teachers are one such group (Hargreaves & Bascia, 2000, 8)

With the understanding and insights I gain each semester the prospect of teaching has become less daunting; with the use of Productive Pedagogies, there is hope for me to become a successful educator. (Ted, 6)

This paper describes a case study of four pre-service teachers drawing on their fieldwork observations of teaching practice, voiced in the language of Productive Pedagogies. We argue that Productive Pedagogies’ language is indeed useful in the development of pre-service teachers’ understanding of teaching, particularly in assisting them to name evidence of teachers’ recognition of and engagement with difference, intellectual quality, and connectedness.

This introductory semester unit gave importance to this notion of creating spaces (de Certeau, 1988) for discussion across groups. Workshop sessions were organised to allow participants to raise issues that they regarded as important. The participants in these were variously youthful graduates, mature age students returning to the workforce, many with children of their own and holding down part-time employment talking with one another, sometimes agreeing, sometimes not. Indeed, it provided a much richer representation of and dealing with issues than we have previously experienced. Rather, many felt the unit provided a more comprehensive and productive model for future interactions.

Productive Pedagogies, the central reform of Education Queensland’s New Basics curriculum is founded on the recently completed and released Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS); (Lingard et al., 2001a, 2001b) a three-year intensive observation of 24 representative state primary and secondary schools undertaken by some of Australia's pre-eminent educational thinkers. Almost 1000 separate lessons were carefully observed and analysed in conformity with international methodology across a variety of subjects and years levels. The final report is in two volumes. Together they represent the largest and most detailed school reform study, almost 500 pages of perhaps the most exhaustive and important education research undertaken in Australia.

The study, in line with the aims of educators everywhere, was concerned with how student learning, both academic and social, could be enhanced. The base assumption of the research was that this enhancement required quality classroom teaching and assessment practices. It rejects the emphasis on a credentialed society which defines quality student outcomes in terms of results from limited, standardised testing of basic skills. The New Basics instead defines quality student outcomes in terms of a sustained and disciplined inquiry focused on powerful, important ideas and concepts which are connected to students’ experiences and the world in which they live.

The QSRLS identified four major challenges confronting state school education today; the changing patterns of family poverty, the generation change in the teaching workforce, the apparently destabilising federal policy in relation to state and non state education and declining retention rates, loss of enrolment share and low teacher morale.
In response to these challenges the study's original contribution to the school reform debate is to specify which aspects of teaching require schools' urgent attention.

The key finding of the QSRLS should be no surprise to experienced educators. (Lingard et al., 2001a, x-xv) The higher the level of intellectual demand expected of students by teachers the greater the improved productive performance and, hence, improved student outcomes. The corollary of this is that improved outcomes have little to do with increased teacher and school resources.

In order for this to be achieved schools and the teachers in the classroom must shift teacher attention from the emphasis on so-called basic skills. The QSRLS concludes that emphasis on higher order thinking, relevance and connectedness and catering for differences within a socially supportive classroom- what the QSRLS report has termed *productive pedagogies* is crucial to improved student outcomes for all students, but in particular those ‘at-risk’. Quality learning experience is acknowledged as what our best teachers have always provided for their students – intellectually challenging material that is relevant and connected to the children’s lives, recognising that children learn in different ways and have different needs all done in a supportive class room environment. (Lingard et al., 2001b, 103-105)

This concept of productive pedagogies is a key plank of the New Basics Project being now developed in Queensland schools. It has also gained recognition nationally as a framework for teacher professional development which focuses on classroom practices whilst foregrounding persistent equity concerns in education.

The QSRLS research also found that it was that students most at-risk of failure, from socially, culturally and economically disadvantaged conditions who were the least likely to be exposed to the intellectually challenging and relevant material. The Queensland New Basics is not developing an instrumentalist model of teaching, which can be implemented through a mechanistic process. It is not an attempt to de-skill teachers. Indeed the converse is true. It accepts that there is no one true way of teaching and that appropriate teaching for particular contexts need to be determined by the teacher and students and school communities. This then is an integrated framework for delivering Bernstein's (1971) three message systems of curriculum (New Basics), pedagogy (Productive Pedagogies) and assessment (Rich Tasks). (Ailwood & Follers, 2002) where Bernstein (1973) conceptualises formal educational knowledge as being realised through these three message systems. He states that ‘curriculum defines what counts as valid knowledge, pedagogy defines what counts as a valid transmission of knowledge, and [assessment] defines what counts as a valid realisation of this knowledge on the part of the taught’ (p. 228).

Since the publication of the QSRLS in 2001 there have been limited but significant contributions to this discussion. Most notably Gore's paper Productive Pedagogy as a Framework for Teacher Education: Towards Better Teaching which reports results from a pilot study involving final year, teacher education students attempting to apply the principles of Productive Pedagogies during their internship. The study introduced Productive Pedagogies to a group of student teachers, and subsequently rated nominated lessons for Productive Pedagogies and conducted interviews with participants. (2001b)

In that paper Gore et al. conclude that:

Productive Pedagogy needs to come early in the teacher education program in order to be more fully integrated into students’ knowledge base for teaching. If it is just another framework, just another theory, just another list, then students are likely to draw on it as they might any other approach. Instead, if students are to treat Productive Pedagogies as foundational to all of their efforts in teaching, it needs to be: (1) clearly positioned in that way from the beginning of the teacher education program; (2) used as a device to guide all aspects of the teacher education curriculum; and (3) modeled in the pedagogy of teacher educators.(Lingard et al., 2001b, 8)

However the Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) in (Australian Council of Deans of Education, 1998, 2002) also foreshadowed the need for a new language for pre-service teachers, highlighting the work of the *Faculty of Education* (Woolongong University) which in 1997, after a series of discussions on the topic “Alternate Modes of Program Delivery for The Pre-Service Primary Course”, supported a proposal to design a research project which would “investigate, as a pilot, an alternative approach to initial teacher education through:

- implementation and evaluation of an inquiry and problem-solving approach such as that used in medicine and the health sciences;
- greater integration of the practical field-based component of the teacher education program with the theoretical. (Australian Council of Deans of Education, 2002, 15)

Their proposal for a "Knowledge Building Community" which is ‘a teaching model specifically designed to deal with the issue of contextualising the delivery of instruction' (Australian Council of Deans of Education, 2002, 15). The
ACDE state that such a community is founded on the 'creation of learning environments that support the continuous social construction of knowledge through the constant construction, de-construction, and reconstruction and sharing of meanings, so that the community’s knowledge needs are advanced and maintained (Australian Council of Deans of Education, 2002, 15). This is taken up further by (Ailwood & Follers, 2002) who suggest that developing teacher learning communities is founded on (among other issues) the requirement that 'teachers to talk to each other in a sustained way about the work of teaching and learning' (Ailwood & Follers, 2002, 6).

Sorin et al. (Reesa Sorin & Klein, 2002) suggest that an emphasis on the construction of robust intellectual knowledges and inquiring habits of mind in schools necessitates the implementation of innovative, inquiry-based teaching/learning relationships that have not been experienced by many pre-service teachers nor teacher educators. This they conclude is achieved through an inquiry based culture in a teacher education program. Through the Productive Pedagogy dimension of Connectedness the authors developed a framework for their pre-service course based on students experiencing new models of interaction in teacher education, where ideas and experiences were shared and problems solved cooperatively. By "modelling pedagogy " the authors hoped to induct pre-service teachers into 'new ways of being a teacher and a lifelong learner, as they build their own ways of learning and reflecting (Reesa Sorin & Klein, 2002). Luke describes Productive Pedagogies as:

an approach to creating a place, space and vocabulary for us to get talking about classroom instruction again. It isn't a magic formula (e.g., just teach this way and it will solve all the kids problems), but rather it's a framework and vocabulary for staffroom, inservice, pre-service training, for us to describe the various things we can do in classrooms - the various options in our teaching 'repertoires' that we have - and how we can adjust these, play with these (more narrative, less exposition; more dialogue, less lecture; more explicit statements of expectations, less) to get different outcomes. This isn't a "one approach fits all model of pedagogy". It has the possibility of providing a common grounds and dialogue between teachers, school administrators, teacher educators, student-teachers and others about these 'repertoires' and about which aspects of our teaching repertoires work best for improved intellectual and social outcomes for distinctive groups of kids. (Luke, 2002, 4 emphasis added)

Setting the scene

In 2002 the first year primary pre-service teaching foundation studies included for the first time a preliminary excursion into critical pedagogy through the introduction of the concepts of the newly developed Productive Pedagogies in Queensland. Eighty students, studying to become early childhood primary school teachers were exposed to this new conceptualisation of pedagogy, which suggests that there is no one "correct" pedagogy that will meet the needs of all students in all sites of education. Moreover, this new course of study stressed that in line with the aims of educators everywhere, Productive Pedagogy was concerned with how student learning, both academic and social, could be enhanced. The base assumption of the course was that this enhancement required quality classroom teaching and assessment practices. While emphasis on a credentialed society (Pearl & Knight, 1999) defines quality student outcomes in terms of results from limited, standardised testing of basic skills, the New Basics instead defines quality student outcomes in terms of a sustained and disciplined inquiry focused on powerful, important ideas and concepts that are connected to students’ experiences and the world in which they live.

Over the semester the students were introduced to the concepts of Productive Pedagogy while being given the opportunity to experience "first-hand" the pedagogies of in-service teachers during the fieldwork component of the course.

Zipin and Brennan (2001) raise the issue of a problem of ‘literacies’ among certain cohorts of pre-service teacher education students in particular with reference to with the problem of pre-service teacher literacy by framing it in a particular conceptual tradition, developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1977; 1992) which pays due attention to what is at stake in discussions of literacy ‘standards’: the issue of dominant cultural capital They point out that historically ‘primary education was almost entirely conducted through the CAE sector, and almost all the secondary pre-service education – certainly the three or four year courses and many of the Diploma of Education programs, while universities had largely dealt with the end-on dip eds, and not in such large numbers as the Colleges (page 2). Further with the increased enrolments in all tertiary studies came what Zipin describes as "massification" of education and teacher education has continued grow in particular with the positive advertising and career prospects.‘

In the words of an education writer on behalf of the NSW Education Department 'Productive Pedagogy draws teachers’ attention to what really matters in helping kids to learn. In the past we've put too much emphasis on things like the learning environment, specific skills, the syllabus and all of the details that add up to teaching. But we have tended to lose sight of the big picture - a focus on challenging, intellectually demanding learning for all students.
That's why Productive Pedagogy is different from other approaches. It's very comprehensive and doesn't focus on just one aspect of teaching. It requires attention to many essential aspects of classroom teaching.' (Khoo, 2002)

One of the aims of the New Basics project was to develop 'a strategic plan that outlined the support required to establish and maintain teacher professional learning communities' (Ailwood & Follers, 2002, 4) this "belief" was adopted in this course structure and became a key focus of its structure and design and action in its teaching approach for the pre-service students.

This preliminary research involves a case study of a four students (or four case studies) As teacher educators we wanted to know whether productive pedagogies is an intelligible language for pre-service teachers? This is asked in the context where productive pedagogies origins are in the observations of in-service teachers – people who are already teachers - experienced practitioners, and also drawing on literature from the field which similarly is drawing on experienced practitioners, and identifying their practices and giving them particular kinds of names – four dimensions, several elements within each dimension. Is it really possible for first year pre-service teachers, many coming directly form their final year of secondary school, to make any sense for people who have not been teachers, who don’t have the experiences to draw on like an experienced teacher has to make sense of the language that’s being used to talk about their practice. This is done in the context of a first year university subject in a teacher-education programme. The four students were in that cohort of students of 100 students – two males, two females.

Like the description of the students at the University of Canberra (Zipin & Brennan, 2001) pre service teachers at Peninsula Campus in the primary and the early childhood programs are increasingly a diverse groups of students, often ‘first generation’ students. Many are mature age, converting from other jobs or upgrading qualifications to degree status, many with children, and part time jobs needed to keep the family and/or themselves. Similar to many other campuses a significant proportion of our students may not have the "cultural capital" (Bourdieu 1977) brought from their backgrounds (both home and school) which enable them with the kinds of dominant literacy practices on which university study generally relies (Zipin & Brennan, 2001). Of the 100 or so students about two thirds are primary B.Ed while the rest are early childhood. All mainly are of Anglo background, with a small number of older "first wave" NESB students, as well as an increasing but even smaller number of full-fee paying international (Asian origin) students.

Critical Literacy argues that literacy needs to be seen as consisting of operational, cultural and critical dimensions, that bring together language, meaning and contexts. Many of our students may have at the operational level difficulties with functional levels of writing and reading of particular discourses and genres. But it is not merely the ‘skills’ of grammar but more seriously the difficulties these students have with critically having their own meaning-making purposes. As Zipin states

Culturally, they do not relate their literacy work to the contexts they know, nor are they able to frame our tasks in ways meaningful to them. They do not ‘read’ the institution and its genres well and so they remain largely a mystery. Most importantly, they do not understand the socially constructed nature of the discourse practices in which they are expected to engage, the scope for interpretation and the ways in which power operates in and through these discourses. ‘Critical Literacy’ among our students requires integration of these three dimensions of the operational, cultural and critical; these are needed to understand disciplines, representational genres, to develop and position themselves and to communicate with others. Somehow, in the current climate, students are able to ‘succeed’ in schools and TAFE and other fronts of living without exercising broad literacies. (Zipin & Brennan, 2001, 4)

Our task then was to introduce these students to a critical language of teaching when it can be said that in the past we ourselves as teacher educators have not been good at ‘teaching’ them in ways that encourage integration of these dimensions and thus the encouragement through experiencing success in working through the difficulties for those most in need of it. (Zipin & Brennan, 2001)

With more teaching positions becoming available, Zipin suggests that it is likely that these new teachers will be appointed, in the most educationally disadvantaged areas – with high unemployment, populations who are newcomers to the country, indigenous and rural schools, and/or areas of low socio-economic status. Thus, they conclude that ‘it is likely our exiting new teachers will unwittingly be placed in those areas where students do not come with strong literacy backgrounds and expectations of success in literacy terms, thereby continuing a vicious cycle of reproducing poor literacy among particular cohorts of pre-service teachers and in turn their students.’ We feel that therefore it was crucial that we gave our pre service teachers a critical language with which they might be equipped to “read” education, pedagogy and schooling over the next few years of their course work.

Zipin and Brennan’s (2001) research focuses on ‘conceptual abilities … which elite students win the academic contests of schooling.’ They found that their students lacked habits and capacities to "read the world" which is often
explored in terms of 'critical literacy'. Their analysis of the literacy of pre-service teachers is based on Bourdieu's concept of "cultural capital" such that 'people’s primary habitus or dispositions for being in the world are created through engagement in practices seen as a normal part of their societal location in family and early childhood.' Such students will come to their pre-service education with the assumption that students’ performance in school is related to their ability rather than by reproduction of what different groups bring to school and what capacities match what schools teach. Like most other tertiary students they will not have been exposed to ideas that challenge this dominant hegemony. Our task then through the introduction of a new language of Productive Pedagogy was to introduce a critical literacy which would create an awareness that systemically, without overt acknowledgment, schools reproduce social-positional inequality through all sorts of mechanisms that encode the privilege of dominant cultural capitals (Apple 2001).

We understand that the introduction of the language of Productive Pedagogy has 'the potential to interrupt schools’ automatic privileging of some cultural dispositions as high cultural capital, by broadening what counts as valuable and also providing access to those for whom different literacies are not automatically available' (Zipin & Brennan, 2001, 8). Our pre-service teachers come to education without the dominant and empowering "cultural capital" requiring a substantial intervention to equip them adequately to become critical reflexive teachers of disadvantaged and non dominant students.

'What is needed is not a single program but a serious intervention, requiring political-ethical agenda and consciousness-raising, to interrupt illiteracy as usual. Deep down, we believe, all of us who become implicated in the reproductive functions of schooling recognise these implications of what we do' (Zipin & Brennan, 2001, 8). Our aim was to provide through our students the key to the cracks and spaces for acting generatively and creating substantive change (de Certeau, 1988).

Our experience of most first year students is that they are ‘acritical’, and acquiescent ways in which students accept the curriculum, pedagogy and means of assessment as given in educational institutions. The obviousness of the power relationship between teacher educator and pre-service teacher cannot be underestimated. In an attempt to overcome and circumvent this reaction to both content and pedagogy in the unit we attempted to increase student engagement and active drawing from a focus on our own teaching practices and the Productive Pedagogies work. While our primary focus was on the issue of pedagogy as a pre-service teacher where the pre-service teachers considered and critically reflected on ‘repertoires of practice’ compatible with their personal understandings of high-quality pedagogic practice. We also were compelled to critically reflect on our own pedagogy at tertiary level as ‘modeled’ paradigm for practice.

One of the concerns of pre-service teachers (and in-service teachers) have with teacher education is its perceived theoretical distance from everyday teaching practice (R. Sorin, 2002). Attempts to link theory with practice (praxis) involve, for example, students spending part of their teacher education program within the primary or secondary school - the practicum or fieldwork component. To further embed this praxis we developed a case study approach. A case study is a 'real world' anecdote presented to students for the purpose of making a point, or more importantly opening up an area of inquiry. This process encourages universal perspectives as students conceptualise and reconceptualise traditional and modern ways of knowing. (Reesa Sorin & Klein, 2002)

Recent research in pre-service teacher education argues that as a framework Productive Pedagogies needs to be more extensively and consistently integrated into existing programs across all the years. Moreover this research reinforces our view that the ‘current priorities on generic teaching methods and strategies, together with an emphasis on class and student behaviour management and lesson planning is derived from a view of education as transmission of ‘relatively unproblematic and fixed content’ to our pre-service teachers. (Lingard et al., 2001b, 7)

**Three levels of pedagogy**
Many teachers tend to spend much of their time in the level of action and perhaps design. Our aim was to invert the triangle and set it on its base so that at the very beginning pre-service teachers would be exposed to critical theory that would challenge the common place. We set out to challenge the notion that learning to teach is a lock-step process, that you have to learn A before you can learn B before you can learn C and so forth. We were certainly challenged by this and what we found was that these students, even though they may not have a grasp on all of the tricks of the trade, the tools, the actions of teaching, they had a much broader grasp about the whole thing about teaching. They were able to look at it at a more global level in quite significant depth than had we have just taught them, say, the skills of questioning or explanation or crowd control or those things.

At the very least this was our attempt to address the ‘preconceptions and dominant discourses in teacher education’ (Lingard et al., 2001b, 7) and make belief central to all the teaching and learning that our students were engaged with.
Gore et al (2001) conclude that there is strong evidence that pre-service teachers highly value the concept of Productive Pedagogies as a framework to guide teaching and as the basis for their future work. In their study they quote their student teachers as saying:

‘I think it would help when you started off to use some of these ideas …’
‘I believe it [Productive Pedagogies] should be the basis for the whole four years …’
‘These dimensions are a good way of creating a base for these things to take place …’
‘I think it’s important that it is used [by] all beginning teachers …’

(Lingard et al., 2001b, 7)

By engaging the students in the substantive conversation, there is a case to be made for that kind of pedagogy in the classroom where they will eventually be teaching which is called productive pedagogies – that is to give them intellectually challenging and qualitative material right up front, not based on the assumption that they can’t learn this until they’ve learnt the most basic things. But also providing them the support so that those challenging things can be achievable, not just throwing them in the deep end and expecting them to swim and have nothing to be able to do it with.

Methodology - A Case Study

All students were required to go out into schools and observe in service teachers taking at least four lessons, and they were to use the dimensions from productive pedagogies as a way of describing and analyzing what they saw; so they selected four lessons and they focused on one dimension for each of those lessons of the four dimensions from productive pedagogies. They then had to write an observation of what happened in the lesson, and then back at the university write a critique of their observations detailing the extent to which those dimensions and elements were evident in the observed lessons. Our research focussed on the written product, the students’ assignments, in this case four students were selected and see how appropriately they were able to use the concepts of Productive Pedagogies to discuss their observations of teaching practice. We weren’t interested in whether they were accurate representations of the teachers’ practices because we don’t know actually what transpired in the classroom. We weren’t there to verify that. This research was to focus on the extent to which the pre-service teachers were able to use the language of Productive Pedagogy to identify what was going on in those lessons. All students handed in these assignments. Most of the students in the unit were able to complete the set tasks to a high level in terms of developing this critical new language.

What was taught? What was learned?

As part of their foundation studies, we introduced the students to the four dimensions of Productive Pedagogies and the elements within each of those. In presenting this material to the students, we became aware and some students, not necessarily the four in the case study (see below), but some students also became aware, that the connections between the dimensions and between the elements within these dimensions and across dimensions was not made
explicit – or didn’t seem to be made explicit by the productive pedagogies material, the various reports, the
Education Queensland website and other available material on productive pedagogies.

As a result of this inadequacy, part of our joint task was to explore together what those relationships might be. It
seemed that one of the shortcomings was, (if it is a shortcoming), was that although productive pedagogies provided
a vocabulary, a series of words in isolation, it did not necessarily provide the linguistic links (a grammar) which
connected those words together to create relationships between words, that actually resulted in a new language. As a
group we started to try to think through what the relationships were between the elements within the four
dimensions. These were developed and conceptualised by a series of diagrams of those relationships. These are
discussed in more detail on the Unit Website (http://www.education.monash.edu.au/units/edf1302)

The reflexive lens of Productive Pedagogies - through the camera shutter

This diagram was produced conceptualising the relationship between the four dimensions. This was a representation
of the four dimensions as overlapping circles, as in the shutter of the camera. The shutter of a camera actually
overlaps and opens and overlaps – and this gives a dynamic nature to them, as well as having the overlap between
them to try to represent that dynamic. The borders that we put around these elements which we call dimensions were
arbitrary to some extent because elements could belong to more than one dimension, but the productive pedagogies
had located them in only one dimension. So describing those four dimensions as like the working shutters of a
camera, both indicated the overlap and also the dynamic nature of those dimensions at work. And so each of these
dimensions are represented in a circular fashion with the elements within it and the relationships within each of
those.

The other thing about these dimensions is that the productive pedagogies doesn’t necessarily indicate any particular
order or prioritisation of the dimensions. This should not be problematic because the notion of the camera shutters is
that they’re all at work at the one time together to produce something very different from the individual component parts. To carry the camera metaphor further the various elements can be seen as the zoom and focus rings, lens aperture and shutter speed rings and exposure settings etc. Only when they are all perfectly aligned by a professional do we get those remarkable images that tell us much more about the subject under scrutiny AND the photographer.

Most of the time we use the camera set on automatic, just as most of the time in-service teachers perhaps function on automatic. The results are usually OK for the ordinary everyday family snap - but for that something very special (or very different) then a full working knowledge of all the knobs, dials and rings, the full potential of the camera or the pedagogy is revealed.

This also became an issue for us when students asked us ‘if I’m teaching a lesson, should all dimensions of productive pedagogies be evident in my lesson?’ And we decided as a group that this was probably unreasonable to expect of one lesson; however, that over a period of lessons you might expect to see each of those dimensions evident. In fact, the QSRLS researchers have said quite clearly and distinctly that productive pedagogies is not a formula TO follow and one would not expect these elements to be seen every time, all the time in every lesson, nor would they be used in the same way in different settings with different students. (Lingard et al., 2001b, 113-114)

While each of the 4 dimensions is readily defined on ideal grounds, there is no research basis for believing that school systems (anywhere) have been overly successful in consistently providing high levels of all four dimensions to large proportions students. There is substantial research basis for believing that not every dimension is equally required for success for all socio-cultural groups. In other words, while all four dimensions of productive pedagogies may be necessary and sufficient for all students, it is quite tenable that only one, two or three dimensions would be sufficient for some groups of students, but not all (Lingard et al., 2001b, 3). And furthermore they state categorically:

We deliberately use the term pedagogy to indicate that we are not developing an instrumentalist model of teaching, which can be implemented through a mechanistic process. This is not an attempt to de-skill teachers. Indeed the converse is true. Hence the pluralising of pedagogy to imply that there is no one true way of teaching and that appropriate pedagogies for particular contexts need to be determined. (Lingard et al., 2001b, 133)

And that:

We suggest that the presence of all four dimensions within a lesson will contribute to the practice of a productive pedagogy. However, we recognise that whilst a number of the elements within each dimension should be present in classrooms at all times, there are instances in certain contexts and stages within a sequence of lessons that some elements might be more appropriate than others. (Lingard et al., 2001b, 135)

If we were taking a formula approach to this you would be saying, ‘Yes, I’ve got to have each of those dimensions in every lesson’. Given that we’re not taking a formula approach, but that they’re more principles that should be evident across a series of lessons.

It needs to be said also that the literature and research shows that where teachers have applied it a formulae fashion, Productive Pedagogies has not been successful. So where they’ve taken this as a structure, applied it as a structure, a paradigm, it’s actually counter intuitive to what productive pedagogies is about.

The dimension of engaging with difference is a distinctive productive pedagogies addition or identification that was not present in the original research by Newmann and Associates, although It’s worthwhile stating that it was originally not engaging with difference but a strong recognition of difference. And that they’ve moved towards the term ‘engaging with difference’ to signal that it’s not enough just to recognize that students have differences or there are differences within the classroom, but there needs to be an engagement with those differences and the way in which you engage is important. The other thing, too, is the dimension called ‘connectedness’ was originally called relevance. They have used the word connectedness to better signal what they think needs to be done. Connectedness recognizes that productive pedagogies, in particular, is important for those most at risk, and those most at risk require connectedness over and above relevance. So both of those are indicative of the emphasis on taking some action, not just being deconstructive but being reconstructive, or generative (Lingard et al., 2001b, 71, 73).

The Four Dimensions

Although these four dimensions drew on Newmann the research team studies the literature more generally throughout the world on pedagogy and identified the elements of what constitutes good pedagogy. Then they went into schools and they observed the practices of teachers and observed the frequency and when these elements seemed to occur with other elements. They ran this through some statistical analysis and grouped these elements together in
bundles where they tended to occur at the same time. Then they gave each of those dimensions a name which, in some respects, look similar to Newman’s Authentic Pedagogies (Newmann, 1996).

- Intellectual quality
- Connectedness
- Supportive classroom environments
- Recognition of (engaging with) difference

If we could bring a name change it would be to calling the third supportive learning environments rather than classroom environments to signal that learning doesn’t just happen in classrooms to signal that not all classrooms are learning environments and that equally significant not all learning needs to take place in the classroom (Zyngier, 2003).

Our interpretation of Productive Pedagogies certainly doesn’t try to replace one hegemony with another hegemony; in other words to replace analytical abstracted versions of pedagogies with narrative pedagogies, our interpretation of productive pedagogies would be to argue for a counter-hegemony (Connell, 1973) which is cognisant of and will include the viewpoint of the most marginalized within the framework of learning. At the same time it’s additional to the need to have analytical and abstract pedagogies which all students must acquire if they are to have access to the dominant cultural capital of society (Apple & Beane, 1999; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Giroux, 1990; Shor, 1996; Teese & Polesel, 2003). When one looks at these dimensions and their related elements we can understand why our pre-service teachers have trouble understanding why one element is in this dimension and not in another; why active citizenship, for example, is not also included in the connectedness part of the dimension. In fact, that returns to the metaphor of the camera shutter because there is no barrier between them, even though we are talking about them as if they are discreet and separate. And in the learning environment in the classroom, they pop up and in and out in various places without being walled in or fenced in as a “dimension”. There really is a porous nature to the dimensions and their elements which overlap, so that elements sort of flow in from one to the other. This interconnectedness of Productive Pedagogies was stressed to the pre-service teachers during the 10 week course.

The Assignment Task

After 6 weeks the pre-service teachers were asked to go, as part of their normal practice of going to schools, as part of their fieldwork or practicum, to undertake four observations, one at a time, focusing on one lesson each. And in that lesson, they were to focus on one dimension. They were encouraged to review their notes that they might have taken at lectures and during tutorials. And the guiding questions that we gave them through the lectures. In the observations they were to choose one lesson and answer the question, ‘What’s the focus of the lesson? What is the sequence of events in the lesson?’ and then using the guiding questions relating to each of the dimensions to describe the pedagogy and to make notes as they go. Then that evening, to go home and to type up the observations including the lesson focus, the events in the lesson sequence, describing events that illustrate the dimension and elements that they were focused on. (See appendix for details of the Assignments)

The pre-service teachers were given series of questions, similar to the Productive Pedagogies analytical tools devised by the Productive Pedagogies researchers in the longitudinal study (Lingard et.al 2001b,) - one question for each element in each dimension and they were to focus on one dimension at a time. Under the element of higher order thinking, for example they were asked to what extent do students manipulate information and ideas.

But the observations of our students weren’t as detailed as the QSRLS team’s, they didn’t rate these on a scale of 1 to 5 - all they needed was to identify whether the element was there or it wasn’t and using those questions to try to guide the observations they made similar to the research of the QSRLS questions that guided their observation of classrooms too. When they came back to University, they were asked to use their observations and develop their assignment they by focusing on two dimensions through choosing the best two of the ones that they did and focus on these dimensions. These were to be the ones that they thought were the most rich for analysis. So they had to identify the elements of the dimensions within the observations of whether they were there and describe how they were employed and identify the situation in which these elements are good to teach in, whether any of those elements were absent, and to discuss what their analysis might mean for teachers in general and for their own future of teaching in particular.

What did the Preservice Teachers say about Productive Pedagogies?

We analysed four students’ work, looking at what students actually said about the observations and their own analysis of that using the productive pedagogies framework as a way of understanding what the teachers were doing. And one of the things we're interested in is what kind of things did they identify as either being present or absent. So
what was in their minds, what were the things that were paramount in their minds when they went looking and how might this compare to Gore et al. (2001) research with their fourth year pre-service teachers.

In their assignments, some of them did better than others to indicate that these were more significant issues from their perspective. And given our discussion earlier in the semester about relationships between the elements, and some of them seem to be more central than others, or more prominent than others.

How do pre-service teachers understand the relationships between dimensions and elements of productive pedagogies?

This preliminary analysis of the very rich material presented by the four pre-service teachers only looks at the language and vocabulary used. At this stage no attempt has been made to further deconstruct what they are saying about their understandings of Productive Pedagogies as a basis for pre-service teacher education. Clearly this remains to be done.

Clearly identifying the problematic, one of the pre-service teachers argues that, ‘being an observer in a classroom, it is difficult to gain totally an accurate and constructive data when factors such as yourself being there and everyone knowing it, affect the normal, daily functions of the classroom. This does not only affect the students but also the teachers’ (Bob, 3).1

Commenting on her observations on the dimension of Intellectual Quality, one commented about the lesson she observed that ‘students display deep knowledge regarding when they establish and form relatively complex connections between the central topic and tasks at hand … where students are required to … discover the relationship … to display their understanding and required students to manipulate information and ideas in ways that transform their meanings, … allow them to be able to construct explanations for their procedures and draw conclusions on what they have done and why.’ (Carol, 1) While Ted found that ‘encouraging students to make links … and divergent thinking to take place developed higher order thinking’ (Ted, 3). He also points to class discussions of ‘complex interactions, incorporating knowledge and understandings from previous topics, … from books they had read and television programs they watch, contributed substantial and valuable knowledge to the discussion’ as not just deep knowledge and deep understandings but connected to the lives of the children outside of the school. Noting the teacher use phrases like “what if?” and “how could this be done differently?” Ted writes that ‘the teacher supported the student’s learning with considerable teacher to child interaction, as she questioned children individually and collectively, promoting substantive conversations with the use of open ended questions … ‘ (Ted, 3)

Further, she commented that ‘substantive conversation occurred when the teacher and students interacted to develop a brainstormed list of relevant … words … and when the students discussed words with the neighboring person and finally when the students had to speak to the person correcting their work. Meta-language [was] evident when the teacher explores how language can be used in different circumstances … and for different purposes, … cover[ing] meaning structures … how sentences work, … [all] are solid indications of meta-language within the lesson’ (Carol, 2)

Alice although observing for intellectual quality noted that she ‘included the other three dimensions where I could see an outstanding inclusion or exclusion of … teaching.’ (Alice, 2). She observed that the lesson ‘progressed from being introductory to advanced, whole group and very lengthy.’ Commenting on the students’ ability to manipulate the information she writes that ‘higher order thinking had to have occurred because they were able to identify areas where they [students] believed improvements could be made … and explain their thinking to individuals Alice, 4)

Alice observed that substantive conversations were taking place as students were ‘looking for clarification, additional explanations and re-assurance, … talking with peers [which] may be a critical component fundamental to them developing an initial understanding.’ She continues that ‘for many children being able to share ideas and discuss their thinking and how they think with their peers is not as threatening as checking with the teacher’ as an example of metalinguage, noting that ‘how important interaction between peers is to the learning process’ (Alice, 4) She observed that the types of discussion that occurred encouraged and pretty much required that the children think below the surface level ..pushing to a deeper level, … deepening their knowledge and understanding. (Alice, 4)

Commenting on recognition and engagement with difference Alice notes that ‘the lessons were structured in such a way that the students were pretty much in control of their own learning development … exhibiting “student direction” because they had some control over what they were learning, … providing the examples (even if the teachers were fishing for them).’ This she suggests exemplifies academic engagement because the ‘children being attentive, they showed genuine enthusiasm … asked questions, contributed to the discussion, helped out their peers

1 The Pre-Service Teachers are fictitiously named Bob, Carol, Ted and Alice but their gender has been kept the same in order to differentiate between the 4 students’ work analysed.
… [and] to try and do things that they may not have had to consider before … - choice and thinking about how … was a very new concept … ’ (Alice, 5). She notes that the children were required to look for areas in need of improvement as an example of knowledge as problematic stating that ‘knowledge is constructed and that there can be multiple view points which can contrast and potentially conflict … [but] the fact that the children could directly connect the examples and improvements to their own work demonstrated that they understood the task, that there was a connection to the children’s world’ (Alice, 6).

Ted notes as an example of knowledge being problematic that ‘the teacher explained that there could be many ideas and points of view, each with merit and as a class we need to listen to everyone and understand that there is “no one view or right answer”’ (Ted, 3)

Reflecting on his own ideas Ted writes that ‘I recognize that a supportive classroom environment is more than a place where the walls are brightly coloured, and students’ work is prominently displayed. In a large portable I observed more than a supportive physical environment … a classroom where children’s learning was encouraged in a supportive non-threatening environment, … when students looked confused the teacher re-read a page to emphasise words or concepts and then ask open-ended questions … foster[ing] an atmosphere of mutual respect, trust and support between the teacher and the students.’ He noted that ‘children changed the direction and focus of the lesson for a time … and the teacher supported and developed these ideas … [while] giving detailed and specific instructions … reminding students again, repeating and rephrasing instructions a second time, explaining how, … prompting them to revisit, … encouraging them to use … ’ (Ted, 4) as examples of a supportive classroom environment.

What was missing?

Not only could the pre-service teachers identify and talk about elements of Productive Pedagogies that they observed they were also able to discuss missing elements. ‘Knowledge as problematic … was an element that was hard to detect. [It] involves an understanding that knowledge is something constructed and developed by learners and is fixed around a body of information. [Although] the actual lesson was based around a central body of information supporting knowledge as problematic, it wasn’t constructed or developed by the learners. The teacher was the source of the development … (Carol, 2).

Demonstrating a clear understanding Carol goes on to suggest how she might have used the same exercise but ‘let the children choose the words and the tasks they must perform with those words .. and depending on the words selected could also cover the knowledge being subjected to political, social and cultural implications … I would give the students the opportunity to construct their own learning and base [this] around their ideas ’(Carol, 3-4).

Ted also noted that although ‘the element of metalanguage was missing [in the lesson he observed] it could easily have been incorporated by the teacher … drawing attention to the words, ideas and actions … when they were using higher order thinking (Ted, 3). He then suggests how he might have modified the lesson to incorporate elements of metalanguage so that the ‘missing element could have enriched and empowered the children’s … understanding (Ted, 4)

Conclusion

‘It is easy to see that incorporating every element of each dimension requires a long, researched plan when constructing lessons. Much more than I previously imagined. [By] taking your time to think about the purpose and aim of your lesson, you can include each element even if it is only for a short time or minimal level. [But] by doing so you are providing the students in your class with the best opportunity to develop each of the elements… (Carol, 4).

I have realized why some or most children don’t like to or can’t handle mathematics … it doesn’t have any connection in their daily lives … unless the knowledge can be used in their world outside of [the world of] school. Bob, 4).

It is clear from the work analysed that the pre-service teachers were able to apply the vocabulary of Productive Pedagogies and successfully describe their observations in the discursive language of Productive Pedagogies, not just a valid language but a reflexive, productive, generative language in that it provided them ways to talk about what wasn’t there. That was very powerful, that they were able to identify what wasn’t there; as well as talking about what was there. So, in our view, these students were engaged themselves in a powerful, and empowering discursive conversation about pedagogy. And it also gave them ways to talk about – rather than saying it was good or it was fun or the kids learnt a lot – they were able to talk about specific aspects of the teaching and made it explicit.

Bob comments that his analysis positively affected himself ‘as a teacher … giv[ing me] a perspective on the qualitative practices in the classroom’ (8) Perspicuously he adds that ‘some teachers may not live by the ‘Productive
Pedagogies bible'. But their ways of teaching and enthusiasm towards teaching bring out the element of good teaching from the Productive Pedagogies set regardless.'

The task and the tools of productive pedagogies allowed, permitted our students to engage in substantive conversation. It provided them with deep knowledge, deep understanding and with a meta-language. The productive pedagogy itself was the meta-language. It allowed them to construct and deconstruct classroom learning situations. And promoted higher order thinking. If they didn’t have it, all that they could do was observe what was there without critically reflecting what was missing because they wouldn’t know what was missing. The task engaged was a productive pedagogy task.

Although adults learn perhaps in different ways to children, we are all learners and we react more positively to certain tasks than others and we produce better for certain modalities and productive pedagogies is one of those.

It did produce results that seemed to be quite outstanding compared to previous experiences of trying to introduce first year teachers to the notion of what is teaching. Now, just on this point, it’s interesting to note that there is a view amongst some teacher educators and some teachers that the way to introduce beginning teachers to the practice of teaching is to introduce them to some basic skills first and then build up from there; that the basic skills form the foundation of all subsequent learning and if one doesn’t have the basic skills, then by implication one cannot learn other kinds of knowledges about teaching. This is not the view that we took in this unit. We, in fact, went at the heavy end, if you like, of theoretical engagement and we began at the level of belief and design rather than the level of action and design in the three levels of pedagogy.

The four pre-service teachers studies here confirm the conclusions of the QSRLS team (Lingard et al, 2001) that Productive Pedagogies is not something new or groundbreaking, but the identification and expression using a vocabulary and language describing what good teachers have always been doing in their classes with their students; providing intellectually challenging material, in a supportive environment that engages with student difference and is relevantly connected to the world of the learner. This is surely not “rocket science!”

Their reaction to Productive Pedagogies as “the answer” or formula for good teaching (“just tell us how do we do this” approach so often heard by teacher-educators) is also mirrored in the misconception among practicing teachers and many teacher educators that Productive Pedagogies is merely another instrument of framework to be applied as writ. Moreover there the view (at least) among the pre-service teachers studied, that it is necessary and required to include all the dimensions and all of the elements of each dimension in every learning experience. Ted writes in conclusion that ‘all the elements of Productive Pedagogies … were not evident in this lesson, possibly because the teacher was unaware of Productive Pedagogies and the elements they contain … I believe with some planning and reflection it is possible to apply all the elements’ (Ted, 4). Alice comes to a similar view ‘when Productive Pedagogies are taken into consideration at the planning stage, the likelihood of a more effective learning experience for students is greatly increased … [and] that by structuring lessons in accordance with the Productive Pedagogies it enables teachers to be very much in tune with their students (Alice, 6). Ted concludes that ‘I see Productive Pedagogies as an important teaching aid that enriches student learning and makes teaching a more satisfying and fulfilling profession (Bob, 8 emphasis added)

At a time when teachers despair so many (wasted) school reform initiatives, where they have tried just about everything to improve student outcomes, it is timely that pre-service teachers are given the opportunity to embrace Productive Pedagogies that focus on what is achievable within any school system and structure, with any student cohort but in particular those deemed most at risk. Working on the work (Schlechty, 2002), on pedagogy, not the curriculum, not the assessment or school organization (Bernstein’s message systems) on what teachers do with learners, Productive Pedagogies recognizing ‘more than one way to teach’ so that teachers ‘can make the most significant difference’ (Carol, 1). Alice concludes that PP allows teachers ‘to be there for those pivotal moments of learning … providing a more more student regulated curricula, giving them more ownership over their learning, rather than presenting a more teacher oriented approach, that doesn’t include student input and the recognition of individual difference and needs to the same degree (Alice, 6).

Ted concludes that ‘I am still coming to terms with the theory of Productive Pedagogies – [although] it has taken me thirteen weeks to fully appreciate them, I find myself on unfamiliar ground. … The challenge is how to apply them … At present they are like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle and … I find it difficult to make the “big picture”. As a first year student teacher I acknowledge my limited understanding and knowledge of teaching, I am now beginning to understand that the elements of Productive Pedagogies just don’t magically appear in a lesson. … The responsibility lies squarely with the teacher to make a difference to student learning.’ (Ted, 6)

‘While we think and write in terms of talking the talk and walking the walk’ are we, like many of our students, aspiring to redundant notions of what it means to teach and learn in the twenty-first century?
Despite our efforts to present new models of collaborative inquiry, where we believe we are giving our students spaces to develop their own understanding, we wonder if we are really having an effect. Are students really telling us what they think, or what they think we want to hear? Are we talking the talk, but not yet able to walk the walk that leads them along uncharted paths as the educators of the future? (Reesa Sorin & Klein, 2002)
References


Sorin, R., & Klein, M. (2002). Walking the walk and talking the talk: adequate teacher preparation in these uncertain times? Paper presented at the AARE, Brisbane, Australia.

