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4. LEARNING FOR LIFE THROUGH PRACTICE-BASED EDUCATION CURRICULA

Live as if you were to die tomorrow.
Learn as if you were to live forever.
Mahatma Gandhi

While the focus of practice-based education (PBE) is on students becoming practising professionals, we contend that professionals inevitably and desirably bring their life experience to their practice, and so PBE curricula should also encompass learning for life. We want professionals to engage with the people and communities they work alongside, to be productive global citizens and to be enriched as people from their work as professionals.

Terminology

In this chapter we address the nature and place of *learning for life* through two dimensions: lifelong learning and lifewide learning.

The need to support *lifelong* learning has become firmly established in higher education over the past 30 years. Learning continues well beyond graduation, so professional education must support students in developing the insight and skills necessary to continually inquire into, enhance and learn from their practice. What they know and do as professionals will alter considerably in response to the many changes that occur through people's working lives. Although consensus has been reached about the value of facilitating lifelong learning, how such learning for an unknown and uncertain future can best be supported through PBE is the subject of considerable current research (e.g. Billett, 2010; Higgs, Fish, Goulter, Loftus, Reid, & Trede et al., 2010).

The notion of learning from life in a broader sense is not so widely established in higher education. Initially the term *lifewide* learning referred to informal and incidental learning in community and adult education settings. The concept has since been embraced within professional education to refer to the value of extra-curricular activities as well as the involvement in activities integrated into the curriculum that support students' individual interests, such as service-oriented or creative ventures (e.g. Butin, 2005; Barnett, 2011; Jackson, 2011). Student populations are increasingly diverse in terms of age, prior experience, cultural and socioeconomic factors. Many students work or juggle family needs.

Exemplary PBE curricula value the richness of such diversity, highlighting the learning that takes place in life beyond formally assessed activities. From awareness of the need for self-sustenance and time management to development of empathy and cultural awareness, such a breadth of learning experiences has a profound influence on who the professional becomes.

What Is the Purpose of Higher Education?

This question is a core focus for our discussion in this chapter. Proposed purposes range from education for an economically viable workforce to education that develops ethically engaged citizens (see e.g. Strain, Barnett, & Jarvis, 2009; Nussbaum, 2010; Enders, de Boer, & Westerheijden, 2011; Hodson, 2011; Marginson, 2011).

Almost a century ago, Dewey (1916/1966, p. 236), the educational philosopher whose theories underpin much of the current emphasis in higher education on reflective inquiry, action learning and communities of practice, asserted that education should aim beyond the development of knowledge and skills towards the development of "a life of rich significance." In *Democracy and Education* Dewey referred to an education that enhances both the life of a person and his or her ability to contribute to society. Life skills such as self-awareness, curiosity, creative thinking, critical reasoning and a reflective stance can enable a professional to flourish in life and to contribute as a professional and socially aware citizen towards the greater public good in addressing some of society's complex needs. Indeed, the attainment of academic excellence without a broader learning-for-life vision has been described as a hollow goal (Lewis, 2007). Education for a life of rich significance could be summarised as the transformation of students into professionals "with the learning and wisdom to take responsibility for their own lives and for civil society" (Lewis, 2007, p. xvi).

Even without explicit intent, education reaches across life. One useful way of considering professional education within the totality of a lived life is to draw on the social constructionist notion of the lifeworld (Berger & Luckmann, 1966/1981; Dall'Alba & Sandberg, 2010). From this perspective, the person and the social, structural and temporal context are considered to be inextricably intertwined as a whole, through lived experience within a shared and intersubjectively meaningful world. Within our lived experience, we shape and are shaped by interactions with others: in our family, university, workplace and other communities. Life presses in upon the professional realm and demands to be considered within an exemplary education program.

Becoming a Professional in Contemporary Society

What constitutes a professional life of rich significance? As society's reach becomes more global and more interconnected, and higher education participation becomes more equitable and diverse, strong arguments have been made for developing workplace-competent professionals whose analytical and critical

abilities are integrated within a wider sense of civic, ethical and moral purpose in contributing to the greater common good (Purtilo, Jensen, & Royeen, 2005; Walker, 2006; Sullivan & Rosin, 2008).

Arguments exist as to what constitutes the greater common good and how, within a public higher education, individual benefits for students might be balanced with wider social benefits (Marginson, 2011). Criticism has been directed towards such a broad pedagogical goal, as a form of social engineering or imaginative idealism, removed from either practical or economic reality (Walker, 2010). In the face of urgent global challenges, the past decade has seen a surge of interest in ways of educating professionals with both the specialist skills and the social consciences required to contribute to society. Professional work has been conceptualised as contributing to the common good when it is excellent, ethical and engaging: excellent in quality, ethically and socially responsible, and allowing meaningful engagement for its practitioners (Gardner & Shulman, 2005, p. 17).

Over the past decade there has been an ontological turn in higher education whereby the focus has stretched beyond the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes towards a concern with who the student is becoming (Dall'Alba & Barnacle, 2007). Barnett (2004) has argued that, in the face of the super-complexities and shifting uncertainties of emerging society, a pedagogy for human being is required. Moreover, he states that to flourish as a professional in contemporary society requires an ability to stand in the world and engage with it in a purposeful and authentic manner.

Professional Capabilities, Personal Wellbeing and Social Responsibility

One feasible approach to realising the broad goals of learning for a life of rich significance draws on the functional capability approach of social economist Sen (1999) and moral philosopher Nussbaum (2011). Functional capability refers to the freedom and opportunities for people to choose directions that, for them, make life worthwhile, as well as the ability to act towards those ends. It is a philosophical approach to human development with an outcomes-focused practical intent. The capability perspective has been adapted for higher education as a way of actualising broad pedagogical goals with an ontological or socially transformative intent (Walker, McLean, Dison, & Peppin-Vaughan, 2009).

Capability research has established links between agency and wellbeing through the pivotal notion of a person's freedom of choice in taking responsibility for the planning and evaluating of a worthwhile life. Within this framework, Nussbaum (2006) articulated three key educational capabilities that support the transformation of students' lives and, potentially, of society. The first capability is the ability to lead an *examined life* that is self-aware, critically conscious and open-minded. The second is an ability to think and act as a *global citizen* with an awareness of the shared commonality of human beings. The third is the development of a *narrative imagination* that enables students to link knowledge with empathy in seeking to understand the lives of others and to envisage new or undiscovered possibilities.

Within this notion of professional capability, is there a relationship between sustaining oneself and flourishing as a professional and doing excellent professional work? Learning skills of self-sustenance is essential in managing the stresses of contemporary professional life with its many, sometimes conflicting, demands. But is caring for oneself in opposition to concern for clients and contribution to society, or are they connected? Drawing on the work of moral philosopher MacIntyre (1985), Higgins (2003) maintained that support for professionals to flourish as human beings is central to the development and sustainability of their ethical practices. Higgins (2011) argued that professional work can contribute to a personal life of rich significance and that practices that support the personal wellbeing of professionals also support them to act in responsible, ethical ways towards the public.

Professional capability and human flourishing are social as well as personal constructs. They share an ontological basis of freedom, choice and agency with a social sense of engagement, responsibility, and meaningful contribution to the world. Within the notion of capability development, individual agency is interrelated with social circumstances in making the choice to live a worthwhile life, so that although freedoms may be individually attained they are socially constituted. Human flourishing develops through self-awareness, skilful mastery and meaningful work, and the world of professional work offers opportunities for all three in abundance. A capability framework offers possibilities for consideration in exemplary PBE programs.

Developing Professional Identity

To link professional capabilities and personal wellbeing in ways that support a skilful contribution to the world, consideration must be given to who students are becoming. Through reflection, experience and dialogue in education, students can develop an awareness of who they are and of their individual strengths and abilities, cares and concerns, sensitivities and fears. A professional identity, a particular way of being a professional, is never fixed; it changes through professional life in a dialectic interchange with lifeworld experience (Dall'Alba, 2009). Despite postmodern doubt, this fluid self is anchored by some core sense of "who I am": a self-sameness that infuses becoming with continuity over time to develop a narrative sense of one's self (Ricœur, 1984/1990). In a world of uncertainty such ontological security is constantly challenged and always shifting. In many senses, being a professional remains a continually evolving state of becoming.

The notion of authenticity in professional life is commonly understood in terms of integrity, that is, alignment of values and actions. In this chapter, however, we draw on an existential notion of authenticity (Guignon, 2004a, b). Our existential dilemma as human beings is that our lives are finite. Authenticity involves recognition that the shaping of our lives, through our choices, words and actions, is ultimately our own responsibility. From an existential perspective we, as human beings, have freedom of choice, not in determining our social circumstances and

biological blueprints, but in making choices about how we respond and act within our lifeworld. Essentially authenticity is about accepting responsibility for our lives.

Professional authenticity involves a reflexive choice in making decisions about our lives in the light of social responsibilities. Becoming authentic as a professional involves facing up to situations, weighing up possible choices, with a clear sense of what is truly worth pursuing (Webster-Wright, 2010). Such a stance contributes to a professional life of rich significance.

Learning and Thriving as a Professional at Work and Through Life

How can the commitment to a rich life, to clients, to a profession, to family and community be sustained? What skills and opportunities are required for professional and personal sustenance so that professionals can continue to learn and their practice can thrive through life? Of particular importance is the capacity to deal with uncertainty and change by critically inquiring into practices in ways that refresh skills and renew engagement with the world, and by developing habits, such as mindful inquiry, that nurture professional growth.

Once students become practising professionals they find that learning at work is profoundly different from learning while enrolled in PBE-based courses. The most obvious difference between undergraduate and continuing professional learning is in the assessment of predetermined learning outcomes. Exemplary PBE curricula stress the ability to self-monitor and self-evaluate one's learning. Such curricula also stress the uncertainty and complexity of practice through engagement with real and simulated work experiences. Nevertheless, most novice professionals find the uncertain and sometimes chaotic nature of working practice to be challenging.

Learning continues as professionals begin their lives at work, but it may not be immediately recognisable as such. Research confirms that professionals learn from, in and through engaging in practice with others at work, in many different ways (Eraut, 2004; Webster-Wright, 2009). Professionals learn from client feedback, from reflection on what has not worked, from interactions with colleagues, as well as from attending seminars and discussing research. Even if continuing learning goals are well planned, in practice learning beyond graduation is neither neat nor contained, is often messy and circuitous, may take unexpected twists and turns and have no clear beginning or end.

Graduating professionals understand that they have a responsibility to continue to learn and enhance their practice as research evidence and community expectations alter over time. They know that continuing registration will be tied to evidence of continuing professional development. Unfortunately, as attendance at courses and seminars is the most visible and simplest way of demonstrating compliance with mandatory professional development, such activities gain precedence over other valuable ways of learning through practice (Boud & Hager, 2011). Support for continuing learning can be offered through local workplaces and professional organisations. Research indicates that to be effective in sustaining changes in practice, learning support needs to involve collaboration to create

trusting relationships and cultures of inquiry, and encourage continuing cycles of engagement and reflection on experience with practice problems (Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007).

Learning to Make and Justify Professional Decisions

Being able to make informed choices and critically evaluate and justify these choices in different problem spaces is central to the development of independent professional judgement (Higgs & Jones, 2008). The development of professional judgement is a key focus of PBE curricula. Barnett (2010, p. 23) explored the complexities of competing and ambiguous priorities at work through the concept of "consideration." Practitioners need to *consider*, that is, to analytically evaluate and critically reflect on the many aspects of their practice, while being *considerate*, that is, caring for and being concerned about others involved in their practice, such as colleagues, clients and communities. Problems can arise in practice that defy purely logical decision making, particularly where ethical questions are involved, where there is a choice between competing needs, or where choices involve equally unpalatable options. Making professional judgements, in contexts of complexity where the constraints of a situation create serious doubt as to appropriate action, requires an ability to step back from practice, reflect critically on assumptions, and enter dialogue with a wider community, using professional capabilities discussed earlier.

Flexibility and openness are needed to deal with the changing complexities of everyday practice. Lives change, challenges arise and are resolved, interests and commitments alter over a lifetime. Despite attempts at envisaging the future, essentially it remains uncertain and unknown. When dealing with human beings in professional practices, "uncertainty" may not be the most useful term to use. Uncertainty implies that with more information a situation can become increasingly certain, and that is the case for many practice situations where further investigation, history or assessment is required. Often, however, *ambiguity* may a preferable term in describing work practices in PBE curricula. As an unknown and unknowable quality, ambiguity can be considered part of the very nature of being human and of practices dealing with human beings.

Mindful Inquiry in Living a Life of Rich Significance

Supporting students to become reflective practitioners has been an aim of professional education programs since Schön's (1983) breakthrough investigation of professional practice. Different interpretations of reflection have led to some confusion and a tendency for it to be referred to in a nebulous way, sometimes reduced to little more than a learning objective. Certainly reflection is considered integral to high-quality professional practice. That practice incorporates excellence in practice skills that continue to evolve, ethical and social considerations in making judgements, and meaningful engagement that sustains both professionals

and their practice. It is pivotal to the development of educational capabilities, to human flourishing and to living a richly authentic life.

Reflection is threaded throughout PBE curricula. Although reflection needs to be taught in explicit ways in the early stages of an education program, care must be taken that space is allowed in later years of education for the development of individual styles of reflective practice, rather than pre-ordained processes. All students need to develop a rigorous analytical process of examining and reflecting on clinical problems, as well as the ability to be aware of and critically evaluate their assumptions about practice in a metacognitive manner. Yet the shape of the reflective practices developed will vary among professionals, according to differing emphases placed on its critical, mindful, creative, engaged and socially situated qualities, so that reflection becomes aligned with diverse life orientations.

There is also a need for stillness and calmness in the midst of what has been described as a turbulent world of practice (Higgs, Loftus, & Trede, 2010). An ability to find stillness, from time to time, can provide some clarity about what it means to be a professional, living a life of rich significance. In a hectic life of competing priorities, can one engage in active, critical, social and interactive practice inquiry while maintaining the ability to sometimes sit with uncertainty and hold openness in inquiry through contemplative and mindful practices? Webster-Wright (2010, p. 151) used the term *mindful inquiry* in both active and receptive senses. It involves actively questioning assumptions, while listening with openness to replies. It involves both critical social dialogue and quiet thought. As a way of conceptualising professional reflection, the notion stresses the interrelationship between active questioning inquiry and receptive open mindfulness.

Professional practice calls for creativity and imagination; each client and situation is differently nuanced, their progress undetermined. The need for still, calm spaces may be just as important as collegial dialogue, although in contemporary workplaces it is sometimes difficult to establish either. In the generation of professionals emerging, advocacy for such professional self-sustenance may help support both clients and the community, as professionals are enabled to develop innovative solutions to current world problems.

CONCLUSION

We have argued in this chapter that learning for, about and through life during PBE can benefit both the individual and society; the transformation involved in becoming a professional can reverberate throughout the length and breadth of a life. Within this framework of learning for life we have discussed what might constitute a professional life of rich significance, how the development of professional capabilities might support such a life, how a stance of mindful inquiry can facilitate the continuing learning and growth of professionals through life, and the implications of such an approach for exemplary PBE curricula. In developing students' capabilities through a learning-for-life orientation in PBE, the goal is that these will be capabilities enacted and strengthened through professional life rather than swept away during immersion in the performative world of work.

A learning-for-life orientation to professional education does not seek to develop ideal human beings, but skilful and self-aware professionals, capable of stepping outside the turbulent rich lifeworld of everyday practice from time to time, to reflect on and redirect their efforts in authentic and mindful ways. Such exemplary education supports practitioners in using their skills and knowledge in practice, keeping the big picture of what matters in human lives in their minds and a sense of who they are and how they can contribute in their hearts.

> Becoming me – the professional *me*
> is about being me in practice
> and bringing me into practice
> but it is also becoming more of me
> more than I am now
> as I learn to be – in practice
> and learn to become – through practice.
> My life and self is *long and wide*
> both belong in my practice
> I am not *limited* by old practice words
> like objective, clinical, academic
> my practice is richer
> *by* me being me.

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