

Enabling Pedagogies

A participatory
conceptual mapping
of practices at
the University of
Newcastle, Australia

Anna Bennett
Sara C. Motta
Emma Hamilton
Cathy Burgess
Bronwyn Relf
Kim Gray
Sharlene Leroy-Dyer
Jim Albright



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This report has been written at a time when open access enabling programs are at risk of losing their federal government support (see Bennett, Fagan & Harvey, 2017; Chojenta, 2017; Harvey, 2017; Bennett, 2017). We hope that the open-entry fee-free programs like those offered by ELFSC since 1974 continue to be federally supported and that the pedagogies documented in this report continue to enable democratic forms of access to higher education into the future.

Executive Summary



Executive Summary

This report provides a summary and discussion of key findings about the ethos, values and practices that constitute enabling pedagogies within the English Language and Foundation Studies Centre (ELFSC) at the University of Newcastle (UON). ELFSC has the oldest and largest enabling programs in Australia. The report documents these pedagogies in relation to their history and development.

As an interdisciplinary study of the meta-conceptual approaches across the different disciplines and pedagogies in enabling programs, we explored the underlying pedagogic principles, ethical commitments and practices that have developed since the first enabling program was offered at UON in 1974. This is the first time this kind of research, which also contextualises the pedagogies within wider theory, has been undertaken.

While the study is primarily focused on enabling programs, the majority of the educators interviewed also discussed their extensive experience teaching in undergraduate programs, and student participants were interviewed at the end of the last semester in the first year of their degree program. Some of the staff participants had also taught in schools. The report thus contains important principles for developing inclusive transition pedagogies across different programs. It contributes important concepts for fostering enabling pedagogies in the widest sense, within and beyond access courses.

Methodology

The project involved thematic coding of data collected from:

- research team workshops held regularly and often throughout the project, from which the methodological approach was developed and recurring themes were identified;
- a literature review (including of the wider and international fields) to inform and develop the approach and thematic analysis of data;
- document analysis, taking into account grey literature and unpublished studies, including program reviews; and
- individual interviews with teaching staff¹ representative of discipline areas across all enabling modes and programs (n=30), and with past ELFSC students enrolled in a degree program (n=21).

The reflexive approach to enabling pedagogies was identified as important early on, first through our exploration of the literature and documentary analysis and accounts provided by the six ELFSC researchers on the team, and then later by staff participants in

interviews. The research data also emphasised the importance of approaching teaching as learning. Reflecting this, we sought to follow the enabling ethos of co-learning and reflexive development through the research process itself (Motta, 2011).

This epistemological underpinning foregrounds the team's shared belief that research itself be pedagogical, in that it can both represent pedagogical practices/philosophies *and* develop them through critical reflexivity (see Burke et al., 2017). Reflexivity involves the ongoing practice of critical exploration and examination of one's own, others' and wider socio-political assumptions and actions because they all shift and change over time. It moves beyond mere personal reflection in that it is a continuous exercise of considering the self and others as implicated in wider socio-political contexts.

This project shares the commitment to the pedagogical practices studied which work to democratise access to knowledge creation. The approach explicitly contests a simplistic opposition between the 'knower' (researchers and teachers) and 'objectified subjects to know and teach' (students and research participants). We are all learners; however, we are all also always implicated in socio-institutional relations of power. Research and teaching spaces are relationally dynamic and are often fraught and 'messy' (Nussbaum, 2006), and it is precisely this complexity and the challenges thrown up by those spaces of relationality that the pedagogies we discuss reflexively act within.

Our participatory, prefigurative methodology aims to continue to contribute to, reflect and engage with enabling educators and their commitments and goals. We have provided a glossary defining this approach and other key terms at the end of this report as a way of contributing to the further development of concepts important for understanding and theorising enabling education.

We do not offer this report as a simple 'how-to-teach' guide because, as we found, it is through *ongoing reflexive* pedagogical approaches that engagement in learning is achieved. Our dialogical approach to both research and practice is ongoing, with more workshops scheduled to share learning, broaden discussion and more closely link tacit knowledge with conceptual knowledge. Indeed, student and staff participants explained that an enabling approach is not about course 'delivery', but is about teachers engaging in ongoing reflexive practice as learners because pedagogical spaces are *relationally dynamic*. Staff require ongoing opportunities for this. Hence, in the implications section provided in this executive summary we highlight the importance of a structural commitment to providing research-informed continuing professional development (CPD).

¹We refer to teaching staff participants interchangeably as teachers/teaching staff/academics/educators throughout the report to reflect the different ways that the participants referred to themselves and their colleagues.

Summary of Key Themes

- Enabling pedagogies provide dialogical spaces where students' existing knowledges are valued. This is counter to a monological² 'banking' approach to education (Freire, 1970) that research participants described as disengaging.
- Recognition, articulation and affirmation of student capability for developing new knowledge enables important development of student 'narratives of self' as capable learners.
- Enabling pedagogies are strengths-based, an approach that project participants described as important for distinguishing the pedagogies from limiting deficit framings (often associated with alternative pathways).
- Pedagogies of care, which emphasise optimism and empathy, are fundamental.
- Emotional, semantic, conceptual and pedagogical content 'scaffolding' are utilised interchangeably to engage students in learning.
- Teachers embrace the complex relational dynamics involved in teaching. Moments of discomfort and resistance are expected and considered important pedagogically. They are not considered impediments to teaching.
- Enabling pedagogies follow an iterative reflexive approach (a process depicted in the basic conceptual figure below).
- Enabling pedagogies work to provide democratic access to powerful forms of knowledge. They aim to enable students to develop the academic and intellectual resources (to provide epistemic access) to start utilising, developing and/or challenging them. Learning about 'powerful' privileged knowledges (Bernstein, 1971) through disciplines³ is considered important to performing successfully in undergraduate programs. Utilising students' valuable and rich knowledges enables epistemic access to new forms of powerful knowledge (Bernstein, 1971; Young, 2013).
- Tensions were evident regarding some approaches and conditions within the broader higher education context, which were described by project participants as providing various challenges to enabling pedagogical care.
- The educators and students interviewed considered decontextualised metrics of learning 'success', such as program completion, problematic. Many students defined success in more complex and holistic terms than the definition supplied by the institution. Staff were concerned to broaden definitions of success to encompass the reality of students' experiences, circumstances and goals. For example, students may take more complex pathways to completion with multiple entries and exits, but later go on to achieve good academic standing in degrees, or pursue other forms of education and employment and achieve personal satisfaction. All of these outcomes were considered by the staff and students interviewed as comprising diverse and important forms of 'success'.

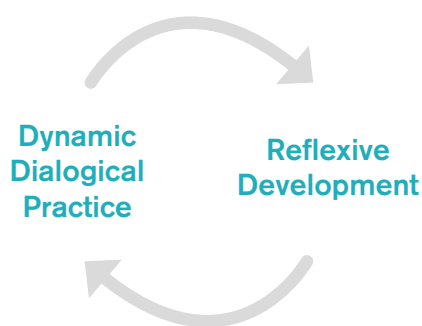


Figure 1: A Reflexive Dialogical Approach

- Educators aim to provide access to powerful knowledges through dialogical learning of university discipline concepts. Understanding of disciplinary concepts and theories is more important than recounting individual facts or formulas.

²See Motta (2013a) for discussion of the monological epistemologies, subjectivities and pedagogies underpinning hegemonic renditions of education and teaching and learning.

³Although it should be noted that the three different enabling programs at UON differ in organisation and disciplinary offerings as a result of context, program histories and participant demographics.

Implications

- This research could be useful for informing and developing other studies and approaches to research about pedagogies in different contexts (across access and other types of programs).
- Further work is required to develop enabling pedagogies across all areas in higher education through continuing professional development (CPD). A commitment to a sector-wide sharing of approaches through CPD would enable closer connections between the enabling, Indigenous and under/graduate pedagogies within and across institutions. This would help to facilitate a more inclusive environment that values the diverse experiences, knowledges and needs of contemporary student cohorts.
- Important contextual differences between disciplines and areas can be recognised and valued as part of a nuanced inclusive pedagogical framework.
- Broader programmatic models of success are required for enabling programs because they have different and distinct functions to other university programs.

Introduction and Context



1. Introduction and Context

This report outlines our study into the ethos, values and practices that constitute enabling pedagogies within the English Language and Foundation Studies Centre (ELFSC) at the University of Newcastle (UON), Australia. Through the thematic analysis of data collected from this study, this report traces the *meta-conceptual framework* that emerged as important to enabling learning. On theorising (or developing a conceptual framework about) enabling pedagogies, we do not intend to produce a simplistic 'how-to' guide for teaching. This is because enabling pedagogies are described by participants as relationally dynamic, which is a critical aspect we discuss in this report. As one study participant who had governed enabling programs for many years explained, teaching is often over-simplified as being about delivery of content, with discourse about 'inclusion' often remaining rhetorical, not *relationally* realised:

you might get responses [from teachers in interviews] that show you that someone understands these concepts that you have and they'd say, you know, 'My teaching practice is inclusive'. What do they mean by that? Um, there may be some big gaps in here in what we both mean by inclusive. Student centred, student focused, well, once again you can say it but it can be a range of interpretations for student focus.

This research participant explained that it is in the approach to the relational dynamics, the ongoing reflection/action dynamic of the teacher and student relating to one another to make the learning meaningful, rather than purely delivering content or presenting it in a monological way, which makes teaching 'enabling'. Each teacher and student interacts and expresses their experience, and valuing, of the pedagogical relationship in different ways, precisely because it is about relationality.

We were able to learn about the overarching philosophy and commitments that have shaped enabling at UON over time. The report is structured according to the major themes arising from the study, with student comments incorporated into section headings.

Enabling programs

Pathways programs in Australia are often referred to as 'enabling' programs. The term 'enabling' has been used in the Higher Education literature in Australia since 1990 under the *Fair Chance for All* policy directive (DEET, 1990). Outlines of these developments over time and of their impact appear in Pitman et al. (2016), Habel et al. (2016), Bennett et al. (2015), May and Bunn (2015) and Hodges et al. (2013). Enabling programs provide:

... a course of instruction provided to a person for the purpose of enabling the person to undertake a course leading to a higher education award, but does not include:

- (a) a course leading to a higher education award; or
- (b) any course that the Minister determines is not an enabling course for the purposes of this Act. (Department of the Attorney General, 2003, p. 384)

For programs that meet the definition of 'enabling', the government provides Commonwealth Supported Places (CSP) funding as well as an enabling loading. As a result, enabling programs are free for students.

These types of programs are often called 'Access' programs in the UK. Drawing on her doctoral research about UK access programs, Burke (2001; 2002) explains that a student-centred approach to teaching and learning, the negotiation with students in relation to curricula and pedagogy and the encouragement of students to follow their own interests, were fundamental to early access courses in the UK.

A brief history of UON enabling

UON has three enabling programs: Newstep (for students aged 18–20 years); Open Foundation (for students 20 years+); and Yapug (for Indigenous students). These programs have some differences in structural design, but are united by an overarching governance model that includes continuing pedagogical development sessions and activities along with a strong centre ‘politics’ of inclusion and engagement that has carried through since the Open Foundation program was established in the early 1970s. Across all three programs, the aim is to offer learning activities based on students’ interests and experiences, and to embed academic literacies and critical analysis into discipline-based courses, which include Literature and Film, Sociology, Australian History, Law, Linguistics, Physics, Chemistry, Science for Nursing and Midwifery, Mathematics, Business, Visual Art, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Earth Science and Education. Every year, approximately 3000 students enrol in the programs, and over 55,000 students have participated in them over the decades. Newstep was introduced in 1990 and Yapug in 1999.

UON’s Open Foundation program was first offered as a pilot program in 1974 with 70 students (Stockdale, 2006; Kavanagh & Stockdale, 2007) and, in many ways, closely resembles early UK access projects, which were focused on social justice, empowerment and community, and were generally practitioner led (Burke, 2001). One participant who had taught in enabling programs at UON for over a decade, and who has also held a senior executive position governing them, explained the similarity to UK access programs:

I was aware, definitely aware, that the program had been set up based on [some of] the principles of the Open University in the UK, and [the founder and first Director of Open Foundation, Brian Smith] had brought those concepts with him when he developed this here ... Because the director had this personal experience himself, he would talk about that and he would talk about his story to the new students who came and so that helped to build a bridge and so the students were always individuals. They were always people, not just, you know, this bunch of anonymous people who happened to be in the same lot. Um, and so I felt very strongly that part of what they had to do was maintain a sense of them as individual people all with different needs ...

Founding director Brian Smith’s (1987) account of the development of the programs explains that what is now known as the English Language and Foundation Studies Centre was originally established as the Department of Community Programmes. The idea of a mature entry scheme, as Professor Smith (1987) describes, “had come from Western Australia where there was a long tradition, dating back at least to the mid-thirties, of mature-age admission by special examination. In Perth quite significant numbers of people entered the university that way” (p. 3). He also reports having spent his study leave examining and teaching in the “British Open University, which was just getting established” (p. 4). Smith describes how his experiences in Perth and the UK had ‘convinced’ him of the following:

that a very high proportion of those people who, for whatever reason, did not matriculate at school-leaving age and carry on to further study regret this and are, in fact, quite competent to undertake degree studies;

that, granted only physical activity and a reasonable level of literacy, [a student’s] age and extent of formal schooling are largely irrelevant to competence to undertake tertiary studies ...;

that a spread of two subjects is quite adequate for testing the ability of people to cope with degree studies;

that instruction in tertiary subjects by tertiary methods is more acceptable to mature people than instruction on secondary-school-oriented subjects by secondary school methods and also provides a much better indication of their potential for university work;

that, notwithstanding technological advances, traditional university teaching methods — basic lecture, discussions and marked assignment — are most effective with and acceptable to mature people; and

that many more (suitable) people will come forward for a course which is open to everybody and leaves to ‘experts’ the decision about whether they should pursue degree studies than will seek ‘grace’ and ‘favour’ admission as special cases. (p. 7)

Smith (1987) writes that “for several years the most important publicity has been word-of-mouth from former students [which] suggests a fair level of student satisfaction” (p. 8). Today, word-of-mouth is also consistently reported to staff as the most common referral method for enrolling in the programs. Smith also comments on the fact that in the community past students who had not completed, and even those who had failed their courses, were regarded by subsequent students as being program ‘ambassadors’ (as he called them) through encouraging others to enrol.

Smith (1987) also describes how:

people do not take mature-age matriculation courses unless they feel that, in some way, their own education level is inadequate ... the vast majority are unsure whether the fault is in their circumstances or in themselves. It is vitally important, therefore, that the students do not feel themselves to be on trial by anybody but themselves. (p. 8)

Smith discusses the requirement for educators to have “a patent commitment to and enthusiasm for the subject-matter”, along with expertise in their area: “Teachers should use whatever teaching styles and methods seem to them most appropriate for their own subjects and the purpose of the course” (p. 17). Academic expertise and pedagogical creativity, he argues, is “the most important of the differences which make [the program] more acceptable to students and more effective as a predictor of future performance than say HSC studies” (p. 17). Smith sees the differences in the enabling approach with first year undergraduate courses as a matter of ‘quantity’, not ‘quality’. Much more concentration on the most important topics and a “smaller spread of subject-content” are essential, he believed, as enabling courses are “an orientation to university generally and a test of capability” (p. 19).

Today, teaching staff who are employed in ELFSC are appointed based on evidence of effective inclusive teaching expertise. The majority of academics employed to teach in the mature-age Open Foundation program also hold higher degrees and PhDs. In the first half of their program, recent school leavers enrolled in Newstep are taught by teachers with experience in the schooling system and thereafter they are mostly taught by academic staff from the Intensive Open Foundation program.

Enabling pedagogies have consistently achieved the best results across UON degree programs, according to institutional student feedback data. However, the pedagogical approaches of these programs has often been overlooked. Because of the long history of enabling teaching staff being employed casually (the first significant round of appointments of ongoing and contingent teaching staff in enabling programs at UON was not until 2010), the majority have been employed as teaching-only. As such, across the wider national enabling sector most of the research about enabling programs has been produced as professional development descriptions of teaching methods and program structures, rather than being focused on wider research-informed meta-analytical theoretical approaches. A number of studies address enabling pedagogies, but only a few Australian studies explicitly link enabling pedagogies within a theoretical framework (see McDougall, Holden & Danaher, 2012; Stokes, 2014; Stokes & Ulpen, 2015; Dinmore & Stokes, 2017). A variety of sub-themes in the literature about enabling pedagogies (see Stokes, 2014; Dinmore & Stokes, 2015), include ‘critical pedagogy’, ‘transition pedagogy’, ‘inclusive practice’ and ‘Universal Learning Design’ (ULD). Here, enabling pedagogies are described as providing “guidance for curriculum structure and content” for enabling courses at UniSA College and “a useful framework for enabling programs” (Dinmore & Stokes, 2015 p. 60 & p. 59). This report seeks to contribute to the field a deeper analysis situating UON enabling programs in an international theoretical context. For this reason, its content spans all the enabling courses, disciplines and programs at UON, and the pedagogical practices through which the teaching philosophy is actualised.

Methodological and Conceptual Framework



2. Methodological and Conceptual Framework

This project focused on the overarching pedagogical perspectives, commitments and practices underpinning enabling pedagogies at UON and, by implication, the transitional approaches, practices and structures that support or impede the transitions of enabling students as they begin undergraduate programs.

Our decision to develop a participatory methodological approach to the project builds on the previous work of Sara Motta, which conceptualises prefigurative epistemologies of research (2011; 2013; 2017), an approach that seeks to be true to the approaches, practices and ethics of the context studied. This underpinning foregrounds the importance that research itself be pedagogical (Burke et al., 2017) in that it can both represent pedagogical practices and philosophies as well as co-create critical reflexivity in relation to this praxis.

Specifically, the methodology embeds a politics of knowledge that seeks to contribute to both access to powerful forms of knowledge and democratisation of the process of learning/creating such knowledges. This aim is premised on recognition of the intellectual practices of teachers, refusing a conceptualisation of the teacher as a mere transmitter of knowledge understood as a noun and a consumable thing. We instead embrace a framing in which teaching and knowledge is a verb, relational to its core, and co-created by all participants who are equally doers and knowers.

Key to this kind of methodological orientation and politics of knowledge, then, is contestation of the traditional split between knower and object/subject to be known, and the resultant hierarchical divisions of labour internal to research teams, and between researchers and researched. Thus, our epistemological commitment was operationalised in a participatory pedagogical practice to foster the co-creation of the conceptual and analytic framework, data collection, analysis, evaluation and writing. It also dialogues with recent work that situates and embeds research as pedagogy and the experiential and pedagogical knowledge of the research team to offer a praxis based methodology (see Burke et al., 2017).

This approach foregrounds our strong commitment to the research reflecting enabling pedagogy. As the data show, this is about engaging in continuous reflexive learning in a way that features practices of working to redistribute socio-culturally valuable epistemic resources (powerful forms of knowledge), to create possibilities for knowledge-creation and new agency.

The project group was composed of academic staff from a variety of humanities and science disciplines, with six of the eight researchers being permanent staff in enabling programs. The ethics that marked our collaborative and reflexive engagement included discussion of the pedagogies of discomfort resulting out of the embrace of 'other' and previously 'unknown' habits and practices of research (for further details of pedagogies of discomfort see Zembylas, 2015; Pereira, 2012). This work involved an active commitment to creating the time and space to enable the sharing of our stories in relation to the project, our role in the project, the participatory process itself, and the transformations of self/other that were facilitated (see also Motta, 2017, for further reflection on the affectivities and ethics of such pedagogical-prefigurative participatory research). The fostering of the critical reflexivity of researchers and participants mirrors the practice of co-creating the conditions of possibility for the emergence of Freirean 'Cultural Circles' (Souto-Manning, 2010). This approach values, recognises and nurtures the philosophical capacities and wisdoms of educators, contesting the reduction of education to standardised methods and of educators to transmitters of such standardisation. Its commitments are thus to re-foster a return to recognition of enabling educators and enabling education, for the key role that it has, and will continue to play, in democratising access to powerful knowledge and, concurrently, democratising higher education. The methodology attempted to do this in a way that also fosters critical reflexivity on the tensions, contradictions and ambiguities of this project, subject and practice in ever increasing marketised and precarious times for inclusive education.

We set out to understand the *conceptual* approach of enabling pedagogies within the context of the politics of knowledge – the what, how, when and why knowledge is developed. As Maton (2013) and Howard and Maton (2011) argue, the structuring of educational knowledge remains largely unconsidered and a false dichotomy between studying either knowing or knowers creates 'knowledge-blindness' about why, how and what is being valued and determines what is taught. They argue that there is a preoccupation with either 'knowing', considered in terms of individual psychology (and focused only on what students think, feel and how they approach knowledge), which does not bring attention to how knowledge is structured, or, alternatively, there is a singular concentration on 'knowers' – those who know as simply producing knowledge to secure their own interests. Maton (2013) and Howard and Maton (2011) argue that these singular preoccupations with knowing or knowers do not take

into account 'knowledge': its disparate foundations, historical developments and value. However, in this study of the meta-conceptual approaches across the different disciplines in the enabling programs, we have explored the underlying pedagogic principles and approaches to knowing, knowers and knowledge, all of which have developed over time in the enabling programs.

The project involved: a series of seven research team workshops which identified recurring themes from discussions and collectively and dialogically developed the underlying ethical and pedagogical commitments of the research team, and the division of labour; a literature review (including of the wider and international fields) to inform and develop the conceptual and thematic analysis of data which explored three areas, including enabling-related research, critical pedagogies research, and Indigenous pedagogies research; document analysis, taking into account grey literature and unpublished studies, including program reviews; individual interviews with teaching staff representative of discipline areas across all enabling modes and programs (n=30), and with past and current students (n=21).

Following this report there will be two participatory workshops with enabling educators to broaden dialogue between tacit and experiential knowledges and inform the emergent conceptual mapping derived from the literature review, document analysis, research team workshops and interviews. These workshops will have a number of aims, including developing and complexifying our understandings and conceptualisation of enabling pedagogies, and nurturing the ongoing critical reflexivity and research skills of all participants, most especially the research team who are committed to a praxis based methodology (the reflection – action dynamic cycle with each of us embodying researcher/ learner/teacher).

From the research team dialogue facilitated prior to the commencement of interviews, we co-created the underlying conceptual framework used to analyse the pedagogical practices. The facilitators were mindful of co-creating explicitly the conditions for dialogue and voice within the team (Motta, 2013; 2017), and we spoke extensively in our first few meetings about how to do this. As such, an Aboriginal member of our research group agreed to co-facilitate the team meetings using Yarning methodology and a Yarning stick. Explicit attentiveness and commitment to recognition and valuing of diversity in the team, was key to co-creating participation in study design and analysis.

We began by reading works about enabling programs across Australia and reflecting on our practices. We then moved to discussions of the nature and application of critical pedagogy (CP) approaches and philosophies, and work related to Indigenous and Indigenising pedagogies in the Australian context thereby deepening the sharing of our stories as teachers and scholars. Each team workshop involved facilitating reflection on key readings related to these areas, and then a mapping out of key themes emerging from our discussion, in relation to our own pedagogical practices.

Early on, questions of care, and its feminised and invisibilised nature emerged out of our discussions, followed by reflections in relation to the kinds of spaces – times necessary to create caring pedagogies, and then the kinds of epistemological/knowledge practices within which such careful practices are currently embedded. This led us to dialogue creatively and reflexively with the CP tradition and its focus on creating horizontal and inclusive times – spaces for learning, and the need to democratise the relationship between student and educator. These questions and themes from CP spoke clearly to the experiences of enabling scholars in the team, and were put into deeper dialogue with comparative reflection between enabling and undergraduate teaching.

We were mindful to avoid binary thinking and be open to the complexities of teaching in both enabling and undergraduate contexts, a process which was supported by the participation of a critical scholar working with CP in the undergraduate space. We reflected on the barriers and possibilities in developing an ethics and practice of care, and horizontal dialogue in our teaching praxis. We also engaged with the question of the emotional and affective dynamics of this kind of teaching practice, particularly the relationship between creating safe and inclusive spaces, and the role of discomfort within this.

Out of these discussions emerged the themes that structured the interview questions. For students, these included questions about: 'student motivations', 'teacher – student relationships', 'space and place', 'learning experiences', 'transformation', 'inclusivity, care and belonging', 'transitioning', and 'equity, social justice and power'. For staff interviews, questions were about: 'entering enabling', 'approaches to teaching', 'space and place', 'transitioning', and 'care and belonging'.

However, as the methodology itself works with research as pedagogical (the development of knowledge), as a relational and developing practice, so too, new themes and concepts emerged in light of our mapping of interview data. This process was informed by the articles we had read and discussed, our conceptual/thematic mapping, and our own individual experience and practice. An example of this was the inclusion of metaphor and narrative as themes. One of our team members worked with metaphor and another with storytelling from Indigenous traditions, both of which brought attention to the role of narrative in pedagogical relationships, transformations and practices emerging from the interview data. In particular, we were able to identify two new areas that merited inclusion: the metaphors that become dominant or are transformed in the enabling experience for students and staff, and also the extent to which enabling approaches challenge the deficit narrative applied to students by dominant discourses of education.

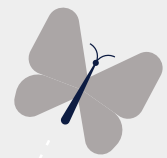
Interviewers explained to staff participants that the questions were based on the major themes that emerged from the research team workshops. Through the interviews we aimed to continue the collaborative approach and so study participants were not regarded as merely interviewees but instead as research colleagues important in the co-creation of the project. In order to gain deeper, more reflective, discussions about the connections between their experiences and the wider development of enabling pedagogies over time, an excerpt from Burke and Crozier's (2013) *Teaching Inclusively* was used as a starting point for both the research team workshops and interviews with teaching staff. Its purpose was to nurture the critical reflexivity and research capabilities of the team and study participants, through providing an intellectual stimulus:

A key insight of Freirean pedagogy is the importance placed on the pedagogical relationship, which positions teachers and students as partners ... This relationship places emphasis on the 'creative power of students' [through dialogue] to draw on their experience in order to generate understanding. (pp. 15–16)

Both student and staff participants were diverse in terms of their ages, background and area of study. Of those students interviewed, all had completed their enabling program and gone on to further study in a degree program.

This report is an attempt to 'map' enabling approaches across ELFSC at UON. Importantly, whilst two of us took responsibility for the final edit and bringing together of separate chapters which were written by individual members of the team, we attempted not to erase the multiplicity of writing styles, mapping of epistemological structures or analytic orientations. This was an ethical decision, made in line with the approach committed to honouring diversity, whilst creating something in common that can be a resource for scholars in enabling and beyond. We hope that our work offers an important launch pad from which to develop broader fields of research practice for pedagogies that are enabling.

Entering Enabling Education: Motivations and Perceptions



3. Entering Enabling Education: Motivations and Perceptions

- Students enrolled for many reasons, including the perceived longer-term positive impacts on their children, significant others and the broader community.
- Students organised their commitment to study around caring commitments and other important responsibilities.
- Substantial changes in self-understanding and 'narratives of self' occur for students as a result of enabling pedagogies.
- The increasing neoliberalisation of society (which places costs and responsibilities on individuals) intensifies challenges for focusing on study, both in terms of broader political and economic conditions (such as the precarity of employment and labour conditions and the removal and restructuring of social services) and in relation to changes within higher education, and enabling programs more specifically.
- Success needs to be contextually situated, as how it is measured by the individual and the institution can differ.

Students interviewed for this study reported an array of motivations for enrolling in an enabling education program, including career-oriented, educational and diverse personal reasons. Staff echoed these reasons and demonstrated familiarity with the variety of circumstances that motivate students to enter their classrooms. Importantly, staff perspectives were nuanced in their appreciation of not only students' diverse motivations in entering enabling education, but also in recognising that motivations can vary depending upon the cohort and type of enabling program.

Student comments did reflect a motivation for enrolment that was pragmatic—that is, related to employment opportunities and up-skilling in a changing economy. Some students expressed dissatisfaction with their current employment and its trajectory; for example, “it was [enabling] or retail forever”, “I went into the workforce, and it just got to a point where it wasn't challenging at all for me ... so I thought I'd give it a shot and try and get into a career”, “I saw other people training and, you know, moving on and earning more money, and I just didn't want to stay where I was to be honest”, and “I just found every year I'd change job or try and find something else, and I just felt like I was gradually slipping down the workforce, as it were, and getting more and more untrained”. Staff recognised the nuanced motivations within this category. As one staff member pointed out, students are not necessarily motivated to enrol because they want higher paying or high status jobs, but because they often want different

kinds of employment than their current occupation. Such a perspective, along with the argument that educators should not automatically assume that students enrol looking for any particular outcome or entrance into undergraduate study, respects the current lived experiences of students, rather than suggesting that students should 'aspire' to higher education, particular occupations, or adopt cultures associated with higher education. In practice, enabling educators are well aware of the problematic use of the term 'aspiration', which has been deconstructed extensively by contemporary educational theorists (see, for example, Bok, 2010; Burke, 2012; Whitty & Clement, 2015; Gale & Parker, 2015).

Changing career goals play an important part in enrolling in an enabling program, but it is interesting that in many examples provided, students interspersed descriptions of their career-oriented motivations with motivations of personal identity, relationships with others and their belonging to multiple communities. The three students quoted above who talked about motivations for enrolment based on their employment also stated that the encouragement of friends imparted a sense that “I could do it”, that it was an opportunity to “better myself and step out of my comfort zone a little bit” (this student was also influenced by the support of a relative who successfully completed an enabling program), and “I haven't studied since school and it just seemed really attractive, and of course, it was free ... My wife and I both made the decision, basically, to, you know, start again”. Of the sample of students who participated in this study, expressions of motivations that could be regarded as employment-oriented contain further, implicit, motivations that relate to their understandings of themselves and their experiences more broadly that are connected to notions of their place in their families, peer groups and communities.

Staff members emphasised recognition of these more implicit motivations. Many used the term “self-identity” to describe student motivations for enrolment and attributed it as the primary motivation. Indeed, one participant who has undertaken extensive research into enabling cohorts using self-selecting samples asserted that the category of “identity” was dominant in her research subjects’ attribution of reasons for entering enabling programs. Two staff members (including the aforementioned) grounded their assertions explicitly in educational research, specifically Jack Mezirow’s discussion of the “disorienting dilemma” (explored in a number of his works, see, for example, Mezirow, 1981, pp. 7–8). One explained that “a significant number” of students identified a catalytic experience that could be classed as a “disorienting dilemma”, such as a death in the family or a relationship breakdown, as part of their journey to enabling education. Another stated that:

Mezirow talks about the disorienting dilemma that pitches people into the transformative path ... there are a myriad of disorienting dilemmas in the world, and all of them at one stage or another pass through the Open Foundation ... [students] have chosen something very positive ... They’re to be applauded ... they have this need in their lives for change. And that is what we’re dealing with.

The above discussion highlights the ways in which student motivations are rarely singular or only individualistic and individualising, but are rather multiple and reinforcing, and embedded in the complexities of their everyday lives.

Some students explicitly framed their motivation around family and a desire for inclusion. One student explained a sense of familial exclusion by not attending university: “I dropped out of school. I was the black sheep”. For others, the impetus arose from the desire to help their children develop their academic skills and to model academic success. For example, one stated: “My daughter’s, well, both my kids, have got degrees and my daughter’s got several ... She’s doing a thesis here and she runs ideas by me and I can help a little bit. I can at least be a sounding board”. Another explained that after some initial resistance from family members, her daughter “liked being able to read her essays to me, and I got it ... so this became a sort of point of connection”. Staff supported the idea that “often people just don’t do [enabling] for themselves” but as part of a broader familial shift such as supporting children through academic study. A number of students asserted that they entered enabling as a result of word-of-mouth, because a family member or friend had engaged with the program. Such feedback is important in providing evidence that enabling education has impacts well beyond the individual.

Indeed, this suggests that students themselves see their participation in enabling education as significant beyond the impacts it will have on them as individuals.

Many students discussed the motivation for enrolling in an enabling program as connected to their previous educational experiences, particularly experiences at high school that had limited their connection to learning, a desired career or higher education pathways: “as a kid, I didn’t even know what a uni was and I was never expected to go past Year 10. My older brother and sister stopped at Year 9. It was never going to happen, just the environment” and “my schooling was a disaster ... which is why I’m here now ... with the issues I had, there was no real care or support so, um, I was doomed to fail”. Many staff also reflected that some students were motivated to enrol in enabling education because their previous educational experiences had left them feeling unprepared for university, or even to expect that university was a viable pathway. For these students, “for whom university wasn’t really on the radar”, enabling education offers a low stakes opportunity to explore different capabilities and knowledges (Pitman et al., 2016).

Some students reported that they had either been accepted into or started an undergraduate degree but enrolled in an enabling program instead because they felt that they needed more grounding in academic skills and the culture of university to be successful. For example, “I didn’t want to bite off more than I could chew and I thought that this would be a good sort of stepping stone to get me back into the frame of mind of studying”, “I really wanted to have a go at Open Foundation, just to give me the grounding that I thought I’d probably need”, and “I actually came to university straight out of school and did a semester of primary teaching and early education. But I didn’t enjoy it; I hated it, and I didn’t get very good marks ... so I thought enabling would be better”. Such personal experiences go towards supporting broader academic literature that points out that student pathways are not necessarily ‘linear’ and uncomplicated (Harris et al., 2006; Harvey, 2017).

Students reflected that their initial motivations for enabling study did not necessarily align over the course of their program, and could be significantly constrained by other factors. Some reported that initial motivations to join an enabling course changed when they began to experience the classroom teaching and learning environment. For example, one student who elected to study enabling for career options, stated:

The way we sort of delved into the material and dissected it and analysed [it], it was brilliant. You know, it was an absolute fantastic learning experience, and I'm so grateful that I had the opportunity to do that. I'm glad I made the decision to do Open Foundation.

Another stated that "I also learnt about myself. And I developed a sense of confidence and self-esteem ... I really got in touch with who I was, which I wasn't expecting". Overwhelmingly, interview participants identified that regardless of the initial motivation for enrolment, their involvement in an enabling program facilitated a growth in self-confidence and exposed them to alternative viewpoints that broadened their existing knowledges, in turn providing continued motivation during their enrolment. In the words of one student participant, such intellectual exercise was "addictive".

Constraints to student motivation were also reported and included such things as financial hardship, peer pressure and institutional barriers; as one student noted, these are the "real life factors". This student accounted for a number of these factors in terms of the broader societal shift towards neoliberalism, "user-pays" and a lack of status around being a student:

... more people now need to earn a living. And they're not, and they're also looking at, they're facing down the barrel of, you know, cost, more costly HECS [student loan], and all that uncertainty around that. And they know what's happening in Centrelink in terms of just processing (payments) ... Students have now become a category of you know, the deplorables.

In such a context, this student explained, it is difficult to maintain motivation and difficult to understand how current hardship – financial, relational and intellectual – can equate to better long-term outcomes. Some students reported that their motivation to study was constrained by the lack of government supports and incentives. For example, one past enabling student who reported having three part-time jobs, four children and a current PhD enrolment explained:

I've had huge struggles ever since I started. Even last week my money got cut off Centrelink again ... They should be providing incentives for women like me to learn and supporting them instead of, um, threatening them constantly and taking their money off them.

Other students reported experiencing institutional constraints within higher education settings, for example, around attempting to access disability support services, which left one student feeling very "disempowered". Students also explained that initial motivations could be disrupted by the level of familial and peer support they received. Indeed, one described their enabling experience as "about change ... and disruption". Another asserted that they had experienced:

... a lot of pressure to keep up the lifestyle that I did have beforehand which I knew that I couldn't do ... there was a lot of pressure from the outside as well. And the same with friends ... I'm like 'Oh no. I can't come out this weekend. I've got an assessment to do'.

Staff repeatedly acknowledged what they perceived to be the institutional factors that can negatively impact on both the motivation of students and their capacity to complete their enabling program, along with the "real life factors" that impede their participation. As one staff member suggested, "their study life is just one aspirational arm of their lives. And sometimes aspirations have to go overboard for reality", because financial pressures, family needs, and illness sometimes intervene. Thus, for many staff 'hard' data regarding retention, attrition and student performance does not simply correlate to the level of a students' motivation, nor to 'success', as it is institutionally defined. Rather, staff emphasised that student progress is often non-linear and success is better judged using 'soft' qualitative data, which is contextualised to the enabling programs and therefore able to explain the whole experience and attainment of personal, relational and contextualised, rather than institutional, goals.

Pedagogical Relationships:

“I realised that being the ‘sage on the stage’ is not that useful to students”



4. Pedagogical Relationships:

“I realised that being the ‘sage on the stage’ is not useful to students”

- Dialogical spaces are provided that enable students to learn and contribute on their own terms, counter to the monological educational mainstream.
- Students’ knowledge and cultural situatedness are valued, recognised and affirmed.
- Student–teacher relationships are deepened through sharing of both negative and positive experiences.
- Affective pedagogies of care, empathy and optimism are emphasised and embedded.
- Teachers embrace the complex relational dynamics involved in teaching.
- Emotional, semantic, conceptual and content types of ‘scaffolding’ are utilised interchangeably to engage students in learning.
- Enabling pedagogies work to democratise access to, and creation of, powerful knowledges.
- Teachers are also learners; that is, learner/teachers.

There was overall acknowledgment by staff that embracing students’ experiences and *‘learning alongside’* them is critical. As participants described, this creates a respectful, empathetic relationship, a move towards a flattening of the plane of hierarchy common to banking-education classrooms and towards more horizontal relationalities commonly found in traditions of critical pedagogy (Motta, 2013b).

Many students described their experience in enabling courses as placing “more emphasis on you as a person student as opposed to you as one of a group of students. You were sort of encouraged to talk about yourself.” Staff contrasted this approach to those often found in schools and in many undergraduate courses, where traditional banking-style education positions the teacher as expert and the student as empty vessel, lacking knowledge and unable to meaningfully contribute to the development of curriculum, content or the process of learning itself (Freire, 1970; Darder, 2014). These more monological pedagogical traditions, which have been strengthened in the neoliberal audit culture period (Motta & Cole, 2014; Hall & Winn, 2017) are implicitly and, at times, explicitly challenged and transgressed in the enabling space.

Both staff and students who were interviewed argued that authenticity is important for teaching. One teacher explained that “you’ve got to be yourself”. Another said that “you are not trying to make the students something that they are not ... I’m nothing special”. Staff referred to “the importance of being human”, making themselves accessible to students and developing an authentic relationship that builds

‘mutual trust’. Students described the importance of teachers “being down to earth”, “real” and, as one explained: “it was probably just the personalities of the lecturers that we had—we just bonded really well with them because they were so approachable”. Another reflected: “I will always remember that year very fondly. The two lecturers just made it a very personal experience—friendly”.

Staff also described how optimism and affirmation are key components in their pedagogical ‘toolkit’. One explained that:

from day one, students need to be able to see that it is possible to get to the standard where they will have an understanding of the knowledge and the commitment they need in order to be successful in a course and that we are both confident that there is a way forward.

Therefore, conversations with students which ‘presuppose their success’ are important and firmly ground the student in a new world of education where it is assumed they will be moving on to further study in a university. Many enabling teachers said that they feel they have an opportunity to “change someone’s life”. A student describes her perception of this, “there is a sense of purpose in enabling ... that’s what came across that, you know, it’ll change your life”.

Several of the participants articulated how they change their teaching approach when shifting from undergraduate to enabling courses because of the different conventions, expectations and cultures in each context. However, many also talked about how they apply enabling pedagogy to undergraduate cohorts because the approach is more effective for engaging students in learning than the more instrumentalised approaches to teaching and learning often found in the faculties, where they see teaching as being increasingly reduced to a disconnected and, therefore, unengaging delivery. One staff member described changes to their teaching over time and in relation to pedagogical cultures, expectations and contexts: “there have been changes in my confidence, facilitated by the support offered by students themselves ... the students were a lot more engaged [in the enabling course] ... more so than in undergraduate. I am far more likely now to try something different”. Another stated that “changing my practice over time has involved a recognition that content is less significant than skills and care”—not generic skills—but skills the participant described as being about approaches and literacies within the context of the course and assessment.

One of the more effective enabling pedagogical methods shared by the participants was that of 'scaffolding' learning according to the needs of students. Participants explained that when teachers imaginatively position themselves as students, they can better understand how to scaffold pace and content. By employing such an empathic approach, teachers described how they are able to provide a "context for learning rather than too much content". For instance, one staff member explained that an empathetic approach to teaching involves that you "know your students, academically, try to gauge reactions and track them so as to pitch the content correctly and tailor an approach that works for that student". Another teacher explained that they approach teaching thinking: "if I was this student what would worry me the most?"

Indeed, as Rosiek and Beghetto (2009) argue: "teaching is a highly emotive experience and, as such, teachers need to be able to recognize and respond to the often idiosyncratic, context dependent, and swiftly changing currents of student emotion" (p. 183). Rosiek (2003) refers to emotional scaffolding as employing the affective domain and is used here as one dimension of the original scaffolding metaphor. Emotional scaffolding is defined as a teacher's use of specific techniques such as metaphors, visual representations, and narratives of subject matter concept to foster particular emotional responses to the content and therefore more fully engage the learner (Rosiek, 2003). It is considered important for students to make meaning of their learning (Rosiek, 2003) through the use of a narrative to explore concepts. For example, one science enabling teacher commented: "I try to develop the lecture so that it has a narrative ... One question leads to another and another and OK then let's work it out together". Semantic or conceptual scaffolding is also reflected in the comments from a mathematics teacher regarding the importance of providing a conceptual understanding and background context to a mathematical formula: "I am more worried about the idea, the concept behind the maths, get that and then everything else can follow, get them to see the idea, not just a formula".

Staff also highlighted the use of 'scaffolding' in designing and pacing pedagogical content in enabling courses. For example, one stated:

I use low stakes assessment early in the course as a form of an early warning system, so that I can identify students who haven't understood a topic sentence. I also then know what they fear most usually referencing or the classic essay structure. I then use a template so that they can't go wrong ... so much guidance. The essays have improved out of sight and I get more essay submissions.

Students described the benefits of this scaffolding of academic literacies. One stated: "they were taught to us in lessons and then we had the opportunity to get our work corrected and discuss where we went wrong". Speaking about a particular lecturer, another student explained: "she guided us through and gave us lots of tips and helpful things and when you get into, say, first year, they just expect you to be able to write essays". Enabling educators described their multi-faceted role in "helping students to navigate content, systems, communications with staff and the administration". Describing this supportive pedagogical approach, a student commented that in enabling she "learnt how to do uni".

Providing a range of different methods and materials was regarded by teaching staff as important, as one said: "anything you can do to make the concept more real and applicable to them". Setting aside time during class breaks (and just before and after class) to help students further their understanding and expression of concepts, even within very large groups, was considered valuable. Students reported that they appreciated this informal and timely consultation: "... and if you didn't understand something or you got something wrong he would go over it with you until you got it. That was very helpful."

The enabling educators interviewed saw their role as working to 'demystify' academic culture and discourse (see also McKay & Devlin, 2014, p. 949). A student described this goal in regard to supporting understanding of concepts and theories through:

... real world examples, to sort of back up the content that we were learning so you could sort of conceptualise ... and some demos and things like that ... That's been a big thing for me because it's all very well and good to describe on paper how things interact with each other, but until I see it for myself it doesn't really make sense.

Adaptation of and flexibility around course content and schedules were described as being important in providing an engaging learning experience for students. One staff member said that "my course has different levels, so you can succeed at different levels. I concentrate on engaging those who are more advanced while still enabling and equipping those who are less advanced". The importance of conceptual and topic scheduling flexibility and reflexivity was also discussed:

Sometimes you cannot stick to the script because you innately feel that the students are lost ... you need to back track, reiterate, reiterate, reiterate. In fact, sometimes you may end up moving in a different direction to what you first planned for the lesson and consequently you need to be able to quickly adjust your material and approach while still focusing on the important concepts.

All teachers interviewed talked about the way that many students had previously felt marginalised and excluded from education. As a result, staff viewed their role in facilitating peer connections and strategies for (self)recognition and confidence, so that students can turn to one another for support: “you encourage groups, make friends so that people can help you out if you’ve been away for a week and missed some work they may also have some strategies for coping when things become difficult”. Students said they found this important: “I suppose coming from Open Foundation I’d already met friends and I was starting uni with people. If I didn’t know anyone it would be hugely overwhelming”. Another explained: “I’m still studying now with people I did Open Foundation with ... and we’re quite close friends now. They had that experience as well. I think that’s such a personal thing, though, the ability to absorb information, process it and understand it”.

The interviews with enabling staff and past students conveyed a united sense that enabling pedagogies focus on establishing an affirming relational dynamic, where the student is enabled to become both a learner and a knower – teacher of others in that pedagogical space. As one staff participant explained: “yeah, enabling teaching is teaching *with* as opposed to teaching *to*”. As such, enabling pedagogies and ethics move against and beyond more monological banking pedagogies and embrace a democratisation of the practise and process of learning in ways that contribute to transformation in the broad sense of the term (May, 2005).

However, as staff explained, in the contemporary climate where discourses about teaching are increasingly reduced to a didactic rhetoric of content delivery and transferral of generic skills, the multidimensional, caring, and participatory approaches to supporting students in gaining epistemic access to powerful knowledges is increasingly challenging (see Motta 2013b for discussion of the need for a multidimensional conceptualisation of pedagogical transformation in neoliberal times).

In summary, the enabling educator employs a pedagogical approach that establishes positive student–teacher relationships. These practices and commitments include:

1. providing affirmation and validity to the learner
2. recognising the importance of scaffolding
3. producing a range of different methods and materials to supplement learning
4. employing a flexible approach to timing of assessment tasks
5. facilitating peer connections
6. developing strategies for learning
7. setting achievable goals for both parties

Enabling pedagogies include a complex interaction of intuitive, emotional, social and cognitive sensibilities (McDougall & Davis, 2011) to foster meaningful and transformative learning and reflexivity. As one student explained: “thinking about it now in terms of constructing knowledge it was more of a constructive approach to building knowledge. It was the academic expertise, and the theory, but you applied that to your own life, which I guess is the thing.”

Space, Place and Time



5. Space, Place and Time

- Care-full approaches are foregrounded in enabling pedagogies, including the emotional labour of care and connection.
- Boundaries and ground rules are set, not in the sense of conventional authoritarian patterns of teaching and learning, but according to the conditions of dialogical learning.
- Discomfort and resistance are recognised as important in the creation of pedagogical moments of possibility, not as impediments to teaching.
- Creating democratising learning spaces necessitates a deep commitment from staff.

As has been discussed in relation to student–staff relationships, and student motivations, study data show that enabling pedagogies attempt to break down overly ‘vertical’ didactic pedagogies which homogenise students and staff, and foster a deficit understanding of students as merely recipients of expert knowledge, information and skills. Instead, enabling pedagogies offer an inclusive space for learning that democratises and contextualises access to powerful forms of knowledge. Our research has identified that additional ways through which to achieve this aim include attentiveness, creativity and criticality towards the conventional dynamics of pedagogical practice.

A number of the educators interviewed mentioned their use of humour and self-deprecation to create inclusive teaching spaces, describing how they used these techniques to challenge students’ notions of expected classroom behaviour, making them feel comfortable and included in the university environment. Indeed, humour has been demonstrated to be an important pedagogical resource in the overcoming of discomfort, fear and nervousness, particularly for students from non-traditional backgrounds entering a formal education space (Bermudez & Urquijo, 2011). For instance, one educator described using humour to remind “people that ... we can relax and have fun in this, and if we don’t have to, you know, um, be sort of, turgidly and tensely intent on being academic”. However, it is important to note that although most students and staff felt that the use of humour created inclusive spaces, one student described how this strategy discouraged them from engaging with classroom discussions, “he did sometimes make a few jokes to the students if they asked questions and that made me step back and not ask questions”.

Many students interviewed said that especially during the first years of study they found the university environment ‘strange’. They described feeling ‘scared’—“petrified the first time I went”. Describing this fear, one staff member said that this is because many students are “stepping into the unknown”.

Some students explained that they could see that enabling teachers wanted them to feel comfortable. One student described how the teachers spent time on making “us feel comfortable in the environment and [to] make us feel like that we did belong there no matter what”. As research shows students often experience learning activities as too fast-paced and disconnected from their experiences (see, for example, Bennett & Burke, 2017; Burke et al., 2016). Conversely, enabling educators are aware of the importance of taking time in order to create the conditions where students feel welcomed, safe and able to contribute. Students do not possess empty heads to be filled with discipline knowledge, but are feeling-knowing subjects who need to be recognised as important partners in pedagogical practice.

Such care-full attention to time involves reflexive labour outside of the classroom space; labour which is often both invisibilised and feminised as secondary to the important and essential labour of teaching (Burke, 2012; Moreau & Kerner, 2015). This attentiveness expresses itself in the awareness of the kinds of rhythms, practices and languages that are conducive to co-creating inclusive and participatory learning spaces and relationships. Both staff and students described the importance of using ‘non-judgemental’ language and tone, encouraging students to participate in classroom discussion and ask questions. One staff member explained that “we make no judgements on why they’re here”. Another stated that “people, if they participate and gets things wrong you never belittle them, or anything that like, you know?” Another explained that “it was always put out there that there was no question that was stupid”. Adding to comments about using care in face-to-face forms of communication, one teacher noted that for online resources and courses “the tone of your emailing or writing [is important]”. Many student participants in the study also noted the importance of attempts to make them feel included and respected: “questions were always accepted and encouraged ... there were no times where I felt uncomfortable at all, during any of the lectures we had”. Of course, all this requires attention to the kinds of spaces we create as well as time to enable students to speak, even if that speaking does not fit into hegemonic renditions of the speaking-knowing-subject (Motta, 2013a; 2013b).

Disguised power dynamics in space and place can be implicitly communicated through the physical positioning of staff in relation to students during both formal and informal teaching situations. Some educators described how the physical spaces they taught in were not conducive to establishing an inclusive teaching space, with one staff member commenting:

I guess one of the kind[s] of teaching spaces I'm looking for would be a large tutorial room ... A lecture in a university just has a wall of faces. How do you forge an individual connection within that way, in a non-threatening way?

However, educators also described how they were able to modify or transform spaces. For instance, one described dismantling the teacher–student spatial divide by adopting an approach of being ‘pedagogically alongside’ students: “I think that’s really important and, um, really, just sitting with, rather than opposite – not a didactic approach, but a coming with you approach”. Another enabling educator described how they disrupt power relationships within the LBOTE (Language Background Other Than English) classroom by allowing students “to move, get up, write on the board, take control of the classroom. I sit back and say ‘Let’s work together to get something on the board. Let’s write short answer responses, pretend we’re writing an answer in an exam.”

However, in addition to the ‘horizontal’ required for effective learning, staff also described how ‘vertical’ approaches, for example, setting clear ‘rules’ and ‘boundaries’, were also important. Such rule and boundary setting, were not representative of overarching authoritarian practices but rather were part of an important practice of authority, as identified by Freire, and used to create the conditions of possibility for participation and inclusion of students (Freire, 1970; Darder, 2014). Rules were identified by staff as being important for establishing a code of conduct binding both teachers and students. One staff member described how in “the first week, I tell them, you know, it’s a respectful space and I’m here to help and no homophobic, transphobic, ageist, sexist language at all”.

These spatial practices of enabling pedagogies shift hierarchical embodiments of space in a lecture theatre and in the traditional pedagogical understandings of the relationships and relationality between teacher and student. They show that different and unconventional ways of occupying space create the possibilities for disrupting ‘dominant’ modes of learning and teaching, empowering students to feel that this is their space, not another space in which they feel scared, intimidated and silenced (see Motta, 2013b). This creative use of

spatial and temporal dynamics helps to support the conditions of shared authorship of the learning-space.

Tensions that arise from creating teaching spaces

Enabling students bring a wide diversity of life knowledge and prior educational experiences with them. Teachers described how they view positively the potential issues arising from the diversity of students’ backgrounds, taking the opportunity to use their different experiences as a teaching and learning tool.

Staff recognised how the students’ prior experiences contributed to creating respectful teaching spaces: “the cool thing about enabling is that generally because they do have a lot more past, or a history [as mature age], they’re generally a lot more respectful to everyone else”. When personal tensions that may impact on the inclusivity of the teaching space did arise, for example, when discussions turn ‘heated’, educators described how providing direction “in a way that’s calm and non-combative” diffuses the situation and allows students to go back to the material being studied. Another staff member stated that whilst we want ‘safety’ we also want students to be “intellectually adventurous ... And questioning, and because that is the new knowledge that, that is the catalyst for different thinking.” This approach resembles the work undertaken in relation to pedagogies of discomfort that theorise how student tensions and resistances can be transformed into pedagogical moments (Pereira, 2012; Zembylas, 2015).

Staff acknowledged the need to respect resistance, and be open to the complex and multidimensional causes and contexts of such resistances by students:

So, I guess that I would vary the approach on the basis of what I think their personality is, or what their level of confidence with the stuff would be. I’m not ... I don’t like putting people on the spot if I don’t think they would like that themselves, just because I wouldn’t like it myself. But, I will ... Quite happy to talk to them after class, so in a more private setting, if I think that would put them more at ease.

Both staff and students acknowledged that class size impacted on the sense of inclusive teaching spaces. Student participants described how they felt that the more relaxed feeling of the Ourimbah campus and smaller class sizes helped establish a close relationship with teachers.

Staff, more so than students, discussed the impact of lack of time on their ability to engage in good teaching practice, one commenting that “there’s never time for what you want to do”. Concern was expressed by enabling educators particularly in relation to provision of time by the institution for reflection on teaching practices. One educator noted that “when I first started here and just looking at curriculum and pedagogy and time and space to reflect, um, I was gobsmacked that there wasn’t dedicated time and space to reflect on curriculum”. Here again, this confirms other research into changing spatio-temporal conditions within the marketised university, in which time and space for critical reflexivity is undermined and devalued (Hall & Winn, 2017; Amsler & Bolsmann, 2012).

Student participants appreciated that online spaces provided them with the ability to study in places, and at a time, which suited them: “so much [sic] resources available online that I could sit back and I could – I’d be at home – it could be 1 o’clock in the morning and I can still access all these different books”. However, as recent research also reveals (see Bennett & Burke, 2017; Burke et al., 2015), overwhelmingly, participants said it is in the establishment of the relationships between staff and students that effective enabling pedagogies are located. Participants explained that without the care-full pedagogies (Burke, 2012; Motta, 2013b; Moreau & Kerner, 2015) that pay close attention to the importance of building intimacy in pedagogical s/paces (both face-to-face and online), the kinds of reflexive learning required to re-engage access to higher education would not be as effective.

Pedagogies of Hope



6. Pedagogies of Hope

- The collaborative nature of enabling pedagogies is strengths-based.
- Enabling pedagogies prefigure the possibility for development of all students' capability, counter to many other educational approaches and experiences. They demonstrate recognition of the epistemological resources and knowing-subjectivity of all students.
- Pedagogical attention to the 'whole' person enables students to overcome a common sense/memory of 'failing' in other forms of education.
- These pedagogies are not only about hopefulness in the creativity, capability and knowing of students, but they also involve maintaining hopeful possibilities for the pedagogical practices of teachers, who are themselves engaged in ongoing learning.

The discourses that emerged about the pedagogical practices of equity and enabling highlighted 'hope' in at least two key ways: (i) hopefulness in relationship to developing knowledge from the contributions of students from non-traditional backgrounds; and (ii) commitment to pedagogical relationships and processes that foster hope and the possibility of developing satisfying and productive transformations for both individuals and their wider communities.

Through our mapping of research on enabling pedagogies, our participatory workshops and findings from interviews, we identified both hopefulness and doubt in relation to student capability, wisdom and openness to critical thought and practice. When doubt was expressed by staff about the capability of students, it was often related to the temporal— structural limitations on the time it might take to enable a student to learn if they experience substantial social-structural or health related challenges, rather than it being a sense of a lack of innate capabilities or talent (see Burke et al., 2016, about views of student capability in higher education). According to participants in this study, the default position for teachers is being inclusive, not exclusive, and there is a strong commitment to challenging elitism in higher education.

Belief in the creative power emerging from the rich experiential knowledges of enabling students is illustrated in the following reflection:

I love the idea of the creative power of students ... so part of what I would want to do is to sort of clear the way so that the creative power of students and the mutual energy of the teaching staff and the students can create something that is new ... and with teaching staff not being afraid to go with an idea that comes up from the students and work with them to develop that in an interesting way. So, I see it as always being a collaboration.

Here, 'hopefulness' expresses epistemological hope, in a belief that creative energies, desires and experiences of students provide a place of knowing-possibility. Such a place of possibility manifests in pedagogical encounters and collaborations in which the direction and process of learning moves towards a dialogical horizon and relationship as opposed to a uni-directional and monological direction found in banking education (Motta, 2013b). The affectivities of the educator are ones of hopefulness but also courage; a courage to trust in the more 'hidden' capabilities of enabling students (see Freire, 2014 for more discussion of pedagogies of hope).

Pedagogies of hope are also embedded in a strengths-based orientation to enabling students and are, at times, articulated through a clear ethico-politics of knowledge, mirroring that found in traditions of critical pedagogy. As one study participant commented:

Enabling philosophy has multiple levels and different approaches but it sees the problem in teaching is not the student but is institutional. It is not top down, more bottom up, not going to their level but understanding where they come from and valuing their amazing life experience and trying to use this to teach ... and connect it to everyday life ... and demystifying education because the elite have mystified education for a purpose so they can maintain their power and elite status and, when we demystify it, we shift power.

Such a politics of knowledge contests hegemonic renditions of student success with its focus on individualised motivations and outcomes. Instead, the above comment recognises that student performance (both success and failure) in mainstream education is classed, raced and gendered (for further discussion of the hidden classed, raced and gendered exclusionary elements of dominant education see, for example, hooks, 1989; 1994).

In the case of enabling, some study participants explained that what distinguishes enabling pedagogy is that a pedagogy/epistemology of hope is programmatically embedded, and is thus always already hopeful in relation to its students and their potential. As one participant observed:

I think ELFSC is a bit of a beacon, a bit of a lighthouse because enabling education cares about the whole person ... I have come to the view that the essence of enabling pedagogy is the giving of hope: hope that dreams can and do come true, hope that education can produce a fairer, more just and humane society. It is the quotient of optimism and hope for our students among enabling education that is outstanding.

Clear from staff reflections is the layered and cyclical nature of creating hope through scaffolding hopeful epistemological commitments with students. This involves careful attention to creating the time, embodying the patience and developing practices, which unravel the common experience of enabling students of failure and failing in formal education. As one participant described, this is a “responsive pedagogy, enabling students, with their particular set of desires and needs, to inspire this form of pedagogy”. This, in turn, creates the conditions for students to be able to recognise their own capability and success.

However, there were also expressions of doubt about how far the development of student capability is able to reach. This doubt was manifested in at least two ways. Firstly, in questions related to the lack of an inter-cultural plurality in program development, emerging historically as they have from a predominantly mono-cultural, Celtic and white working class experience (except for the Yapug program, which focuses on enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to access higher education). One staff reflection about this was made in relation to students for whom English is not a first language: “I think, [the] curriculum doesn’t recognise difference”. Secondly, doubt was expressed in relation to a perceived growing complexity in student expectations regarding demands emanating from an increasing marketisation of education and a focus on work-ready students. Along with the increasing economic precariousities of students’ lives, it was noted that there were both structural and attitudinal limitations to the possibilities for creating a transformative pedagogy embedded in critical thought and practice. According to one staff member:

[Students] are getting less and less stimulation in their school studies. They are more interested purely and simply in a job, which is a rational response to

a much more difficult world ... over the last five years or so, taking chances is a dangerous proposition. If you don’t have a meal ticket then you’re going to find yourself in a different situation. It’s a lot harder to get back into the system ... All of these things I think are actually having an affect ... the result of dumbing down ... and they’re just not particularly interested in intellectual thought.

Immersed in the complexities of institutional change and resultant complexities in student subjectivities, other participants expressed a commitment to reflexivity as key to navigating these often tension-ridden conditions that can mitigate against critical thinking and insight-oriented pedagogies. As one staff member observed about students teaching teachers:

I think we always need to check our assumptions and check our privilege as teachers in enabling, or anywhere, and so even though I probably entered the role thinking that I was pretty good at not assuming anything about students, I would sometimes find myself making assumptions and then go ‘Hang on a minute. You can’t do that because students are always going to teach you things’.

Such reflexivity re-connects back to the collaborative nature of creating pedagogies of hope embedded in strengths-based understandings of student knowledges and capability. It also reveals that such pedagogies are not merely about the creativity, capability and knowing of students, but they involve keeping alive the reflexive pedagogical practices of teachers, who are themselves engaged in ongoing learning.

Re-narrativising: Practices and Stories of Transformation



7. Re-narrativising: Practices and Stories of Transformation

- Transformation involves the re-narrativisation of the self as a capable learner.
- Enabling pedagogies nurture critical reflection and the development of 'voice'.
- Staff views vary across programs and disciplines in relation to an open-ended framing of student intellectual development and a more uni-directional approach to what should be known and counted as successful participation in an enabling program.
- The processes of transformation and re-narrativising of self were reported by students as empowering and pleasurable as well as disruptive and uncomfortable. Their accounts were also gendered.

The conditions of possibility for transformative pedagogy, in terms of both student/teacher learnings, has a rich history in the tradition of critical teaching and pedagogy studies. Much of this tradition has emerged in relation to the formation of social and community movements: contesting the hegemonic 'hidden curriculum'; advocating for curricula and pedagogy reflective of student experiences and knowledges; and enabling of collective social and political transformation (Freire, 1970; 2014; Darder, 2014; hooks, 1989; 1994). There is a growing literature that frames transformation within the conditions of the political economy of neoliberalism, and the disarticulation (at least within the most developed nations) of collective forms of popular mobilisation and organisation (Motta, 2013a; 2013b; Hall & Winn, 2017; Amsler & Bolsmann, 2012). It is within this latter historical and political context and conceptualisation of transformation that enabling education at Newcastle can be fruitfully situated. The kinds of transformations we were able to map across the enabling programs involved processes of individual (and sometimes collective/community) transformations in terms of: (i) contestation and questioning of deficit discourses; (ii) opening up of new conditions and horizons of 'choice'; and (iii) re-narrativisation processes in which the individual becomes situated in their social, political, economic and culture contexts in ways that question the individualisation of social problems (for a more detailed discussion see Motta, 2013b).

From the interview data, it became clear that hegemonic framings of students as individual and individualised cost-benefit seeking subjects whose motivation is successful inclusion in the job market, misses the desires of these students, their familial and community relationships and the(ir) relationships with their teachers. The transformations for students are relational, and impact upon their community, their family and, significantly, their children. As one participant described: "We often think students

are doing it for themselves, often it is not; it might be to be an exemplar to their children ... or might be for their parents or families. Often people just don't do it for themselves."

Transformation is non-linear and non-unitary, with staff noting that transitioning into undergraduate study is not necessarily the desired pathway of all enabling students and that sometimes not attempting undergraduate study is a "mature decision" based on other factors in a student's life. This view indicates the need to be mindful that the process of transition can include changing one's mind about an undergraduate destination, or indeed the desirability of undergraduate study altogether.

Key terms and thematics under the umbrella of transformation revolve around a process of re-narrativising individual and community self-understanding, and contesting the internalisation of deficit discourses in which students enter programs disbelieving their ability to know, their capacity to study and their rights to voice and agency. As one staff participant explained:

I did some research on the impact of enabling education on people, I call it the ripple effect and how if you influence one you influence the others. One of the interesting thing[s] that one person said was it gave them voice, ah, and that often they felt they didn't have a voice ... and that feeling of being affirmed — there are others who felt that they are imposters, they shouldn't be there, so it's trying to make them aware that they deserve to be there, they have every right to be there as anybody else. And — and our role as a guide and a mentor rather than an instructor, and I think most — I can't say, I've never been in all the classes to see that happen but the feedback from the students, ah, is amazing and they say things like what I'm saying and, umm — and that they have been taught for the first time. Because prior to that their previous education experience — many of the reasons that they've come to an Open Foundation type of program, not all but some, is because they've had a — that school had failed them rather than they failed school ...

Such re-narrativising reveals the possibilities for situating individual 'ills' within the social, education and cultural conditions that (re)produce these students as failures and raising questions about the very institutions and structures of education itself. Transformation in this way opens up choices otherwise considered out of reach and unattainable. The content of these choices is therefore heavily influenced by the curriculum and the pedagogical orientations of teachers, as illustrated by this study participant:

So, my vision of any educational process is to develop awareness of where I am, what I'm doing and that there are alternatives to any of those pieces. Then develop the capacity ultimately to take a step towards some of those alternatives, one of those alternatives. And ultimately, to develop the capacity for critical reflection upon your own situation, as an element in a much more complex system. So, you're not forgetting the system. You're not forgetting yourself but you are merging, creatively interacting the two in a place where you can start to take control of your own life.

However, there is also variability across the more opened-ended pedagogical commitments to providing alternatives for students to develop, think and act critically as situated within their communities, enabled through an understanding of how their individual experiences sit within broader socio-structural processes, and a pedagogical/student desiring of more complete identity transformations into 'new', middle-class values and subjectivities. This latter conceptualisation of transformation involves, as one staff participant suggested, a potential loss of working class culture, tradition and knowledges and a 'leaving behind' of others on the road to transformation:

I've often tossed and turned about that ... am I trying to make them middle class, and therefore then could become worse than – than the long established middle class ... So, I do think that this is a worry. I mean my perfect world would be that education wouldn't be a thing for the elite, that education would be borderless ... to me the current university system was designed for an elite 40 years ago.

Indeed, the relationship between past identity, processes of transformation and re-narrativisation of self, are necessarily disruptive as previous roles, understandings, relationships and responsibilities are often challenged during the learning journey. These tensions and the pedagogies of discomfort that are at their creative heart, can of course be productive in the widening and opening up of previously unimaginable possibilities of self, family and community. However,

without the necessary reflective tools and collective understandings, some transformations can create tensions for students. In addition, as one teacher pointed out, there are stories of transformation and there are also stories of people being left confused:

I remember an American writer recalled that sometimes students who go through an enabling type program and into university – that they're often in limbo, the old Catholic thing of you're neither in heaven or hell, you don't belong to one class or the other.

Many stories of transformation are significant and life changing. As one teacher commented: "some people sitting in an enabling classroom are travelling at the speed of light from a position where they did not believe that they could do university". Another staff participant who researched enabling student experiences stated:

... people whose lives have been enriched by the program but who have also in turn enriched the community ... 90% of respondents and I checked that by postcode on their survey forms had remained in the region. So, you know it is a resource, not only for the University but also for the Hunter and Central Coast areas.

Student transformation is also deeply gendered. Two participants explained how a number of female students withdrew due to domestic violence beginning or worsening as they began to change and question established gendered familial and community roles (also see Habel et al., 2016). The disruptions of re-narrativisation and the opening up of previously unimaginable possibilities of self and other can thus be disruptive and sometimes violent, although the transformative potential and experience emerging out of a difficult journey can be significant. As this account illustrates:

I've had at least 10 examples of this, domestic violence against women. One actual classic case that stands out for me is [that of a] woman who was doing brilliantly. She started off, had no idea absolutely uncertain of what she was doing. By the end of her semester, she was flying, loved it. [She was] one of my best students [and] came to see me at the last minute of the last lecture of the first semester and said, 'Look, I won't be coming back next semester'. 'Why not?' Um, because her husband was beating her up. Husband said, 'You've got to be home for the kids and for me and food on the table, kids to school, all that stuff'. Um, and she was not in a position at that stage to resist. But she said, 'This won't last forever'. Basically, I think she's waiting for the kids to get to a certain age. And she said, 'I'll come back'. And I, when I was a coordinator some — or quite a few years later, it would have been at least 10 years later ... I looked up when I was at the graduation ceremony, recognition of attainment ceremony, I looked up and saw this woman standing there beaming at me about to walk across to get her attainment certificate. That was just fantastic, but that was very common.

It would be amiss not to register reflections on teacher transformation, particularly the affectivities of supporting the transformation of their students, and the internal transformations in self and understanding experienced. Joy and pride were important affective registers that accompanied staff experience of student transformation and study participants reflected on their own processes of learning about students' experiences, and being mindful to question stereotypical assumptions.

“We’re here for the students”: Pedagogies of Care and Belonging in Enabling Education



8. “We’re here for the students”: Pedagogies of Care and Belonging in Enabling Education

- Pedagogies of care and careful practices are at the centre of enabling pedagogies.
- Attentiveness to students’ experiences, histories and needs are of foremost importance. A commitment to connecting and listening to students, and to other staff, are key components of putting into practice such attentiveness.
- Misrecognitions, misunderstandings and differences in pedagogical approaches in some wider institutional spaces towards enabling programs and their students undermines smooth student transitions and relationships in some areas across the institution.
- Tensions within a broader institutional space that emphasises competition over care result in care-full pedagogies being discounted from dominant wider narratives of excellence and success.

In its analysis of teacher – student relationships, this report has posited the centrality of fostering a sense of care and belonging in students as fundamental to the enactment of an enabling pedagogy. Here we tease out the factors of what constitutes a ‘pedagogy of care’ in enabling spaces and how students understand that pedagogy. We examine the ways in which ideas of care transcend the relationship between student and teacher to also become integral to how enabling educators see themselves in relation to their colleagues, the Centre and the university environment. We argue that while ‘care’ is essential to discussions of meaningful teaching and learning, and workplace environments, care also carries tensions and contradictions. Care also needs to work in a duality, with caring applied by both staff and students.

Such a focus is significant, as Walker and Gleaves (2016) assert, owing to the scarcity of literature that seeks not only to critically analyse pedagogies of care in higher education but to situate those pedagogies within the “broader contextual dimensions of being a caring teacher in relation to the diverse institutional settings in which teaching and academic work occurs” (p. 67). In particular, tensions arise within an audit culture orientation to education, in which practices of carelessness that erode ethics and the value of subjects are normalised and consolidated (Lynch, 2010; Amsler & Motta, 2017). These broader institutional dynamics have been demonstrated to be deeply gendered (Amsler, 2014). Pedagogies of care, caring subjects and careful practice sit within a mostly supportive localised, but sometimes conflictual and tension-ridden, wider terrain.

Overwhelmingly, the staff interviewed for this project identified themselves as “caring” and reported various ways in which this is enacted in the classroom. For example, staff variously discussed the significance

of holistic approaches that consider the student as a “whole person” in the broader context of their lived experience, of demonstrating authenticity, empathy and respectfulness, of making one’s self seem “human”, approachable and relatable, and of a general willingness to “go the extra mile” for students. Staff also described various motivations for student care. Staff members saw care as intrinsic to their sense of identity as a teacher and one academic related this to their family values, because other family members are teachers by occupation (for discussions of care and teacher identity see O’Connor, 2008).

Several staff pointed out that pedagogies of care are especially significant, even pragmatic, in teaching environments wherein the cohorts are diverse, largely from non-traditional backgrounds, and may have previously negative educational experiences. For example, one educator stated that “you don’t just leave your life out the door when you come to study. It will impact on what you’re doing ... stressed people can’t take in information and it’s a barrier”; care then is essential in deconstructing the barriers to student success (see, for example, Muller 2001). Other staff also noted that care was a method of subverting traditional hierarchies of power and knowledge in the classroom. For example, one staff member reported the significance of inviting a range of support staff and professional staff into the lecture space for informal discussions centred around care for self and others because it “breaks down that kind of authoritarian relationship that sometimes a teacher might think that they have to have”. Ultimately, one could argue that these strategies to personalise the self as an educator and position oneself as a classroom participant as well as an educator not only facilitate care but reconceptualise care as an act that is potentially subversive to traditional concepts of teacher authority and that let students into the “backstage” elements of teacher performance (see Walker & Gleaves, 2016, pp. 71–72).

In interviews, students largely supported teachers' accounts of how care is enacted and articulated, and the significance of pedagogies of care to their own educational experience. Many students stated that feeling "nervous", "petrified" and "a little bit fragile" when commencing enabling education was swiftly translated into feeling, as one suggested, "just totally comfortable", via enactments of care. Students favourably discussed care in terms of "an accessibility to support", "empathy", being "given personal examples from them [lecturers]" to create a sense of "working together", and a sense of being "a valuable member of that course, and you can have an opinion, and you can voice it". Students also discussed the role of humour, embedded support services, and respect for their previous life experiences. Some reported that care could be subversive to the extent that it had a "levelling" effect, or as another student stated, there was "no hierarchy" in the classroom. Participants noted that pedagogies of care were significant in their experiences of enabling education in a variety of ways. Caring, for some students, facilitated confidence building, empowerment, and a sense that "we did belong [in education] no matter what", which helped students reposition themselves in relation to previously negative educational experiences that had become part of their self-identity.

Staff and students also noted the significance of fostering relationships between students as an aspect of care, although the student body could be diverse in age, experience and goals. Students reflected on the long-lasting nature of these relationships, which transcended the enabling experience. Both groups reported that pedagogies of care continued beyond enrolment in enabling classrooms. One staff member reported the "absolute delight" of receiving updates from students on their educational and employment progress, sometimes years after their completion of an enabling program, noting that these ongoing relationships are validation that "we bothered to care about them in the first place, to encourage them to think that they could". Others acknowledged that students returned to enabling facilities and visited staff precisely because they were approachable and because they perceive a lack of available support services in undergraduate study. One staff member stated, for example, "I've got students who still come to me ... [because] the supports aren't there and [the wider University is] a big scary place". Some staff saw this continued connection as desirable, as former students can – and, according to the students themselves, do – act as mentors and ambassadors to newer students; whereas, other staff acknowledged that some never want to "come back" because they "thrive" in undergraduate studies. The number

of students who discussed going on to act as ambassadors, mentors, or otherwise and continue to feel connected to the enabling programs suggests that pedagogies of care create cyclical caring relationships, with some students acting to reassure others that "I was exactly the same as you ... this will really help you".

Staff and students noted that sometimes tensions arose as a result of pedagogies of care, and that these tensions should not be overlooked. Tensions described by students typically related to perceptions that support was over-emphasised and had unintended connotations: one student felt that the focus was too much on "soft skills" and "you couldn't just not go", and another believed that the focus on "keeping it positive" stifled more extensive "constructive" feedback and downplayed students' need to "proactively lift themselves". Staff noted that students could be resistant to enactments of care but suggested that the major tensions tended to arise from what was variously described as the "balancing act", "tricky territory", and the "blurry" line of student – teacher relationships of care.

Such interactions, and pedagogies of care in general, within the broader demands of the institution and sector, are time consuming, in a space where staff are increasingly expected to be "always on call and infinitely flexible" (Motta, 2012). The demanding and invisibilised nature of pedagogies of care and careful pedagogical practice is especially accentuated for casual academic staff. One casual staff member noted the bind of being a sessional academic where future employability is dependent upon enacting 'good pedagogies', including care, which are performed because of a feeling of professional responsibility despite the lack of additional remuneration and the recognition that "being a casual you're on a fine line. Okay, you could be gone in no time."

While recognising the significance of these caring relationships, many were ambivalent regarding their enactment in practice. Some staff noted that they felt a level of disconnection with the University, that their care labour was not valued. One staff member identified caring as feminised and as “invisible [labour] ... if I go to a performance review, I don’t get ticked off how caring I was, you know?” Another said that “there is no recognition of the other kinds of things that you do, there’s no ... legitimate support structure around those [practices]”. Many expressed a sense that research cultures and outputs were more highly privileged than positive pedagogies, which could have adverse impacts on career prospects (see Amsler & Bolsmann, 2012, for further discussion of the exclusionary logic of audit-culture). Funding cuts, such as those to enabling programs, and institutional restructuring of professional staff were also identified as factors that illustrated a perceived lack of concern for caring pedagogies and institutional care. As one participant asserted, “you can’t automate help”. Coupled with this view was the notion that the University and (correspondingly) the Centre shifted with neoliberal goals in ways that could be antithetical to pedagogies of care, including a focus on ‘hard’ outcomes and narrow definitions of success and standardisation, which can limit creativity and autonomy, and larger class sizes with its associated impacts on catering to individual needs (see also Zepke & Leach, 2010; Hall & Winn, 2017).

These perspectives recognise that there are institutional barriers to care, primarily centred around perceptions of the value of teaching, and in particular inclusive and democratising pedagogies that take time, and include attentiveness to the multidimensional nature of the student, the learning space, and the teacher, and broader contextual and ideological shifts. Some staff pointed out that there was a corresponding impact on feeling cared for themselves. Descriptors such as “isolating”, “competition”, “I see myself as an island”, “easy to live in your little cocoon” demonstrate this, as does a criticism of institutional managerialism as being “so disengaged [from] the classroom, so meaningless to what actually matters”. In the words of one participant, there are “many, many people in the University who haven’t got a clue what we do and don’t really care”. Another expressed the “wish” that “the wider university was more understanding of enabling ... I think we need to be valued more”.

For one study participant this feeling led to an assertive, or “fierce”, “face outward” towards the University as whole, one that was “ready to go to war [because] we’ve been for too long hiding this beautiful golden thing, you know? Under a bushel and the university’s been taking it for granted.” Such a view connects with

broader arguments that pedagogies of care should be seen as significant and important given that university participation is now “massified” (Bunn & Westrenius, 2017) and therefore, by necessity, enabling pedagogies are “now [supposed to be] part of first year undergraduate pedagogy ... or should be if they’re not”. Yet, it was argued by some staff that corresponding shifts in institutional culture and the instruments to measure both staff and student performance seem to work in an opposite direction, and continue to devalue such labour and the staff that enact care.

This is not to say that all staff interviewed did not find care and value within broader institutional structures. Many educators pointed out that they had worked within faculties catering to undergraduate cohorts either before or concurrently with their enabling teaching and had developed and maintained meaningful relationships as a result: one noted feeling “very engaged” with a previous department, “I very much appreciate the way they reach out to us and arrange things, all inclusive”. Another suggested that a regular social gathering with their previous faculty “does keep me connected to the department” and another stated “I’ve either worked with them or taught them [current faculty employees], so yes, in my case I feel very connected”. One participant noted that international and national conference attendance and growing recognition of her research work on enabling programs helped her to feel connected to a broad community of practitioners committed to a global movement towards open access enabling programs.

In terms of peer-to-peer connections amongst staff in enabling programs, many did speak effusively of the value of these relationships (“like a family”), and where ambiguity did exist participants overwhelmingly acknowledged that pedagogies of care expressed between staff were significant for the health of staff. As one suggested, “when you have a bad incident happen I think [the staff room] is very good because you can’t go home unless you can download it onto somebody. And people are very, very good and will listen to each other.” Peer relationships, staff acknowledged, could recreate a continuity of care and approach even when staffing varied, allowing new educators to get “a feeling of our students in general and specifically.”

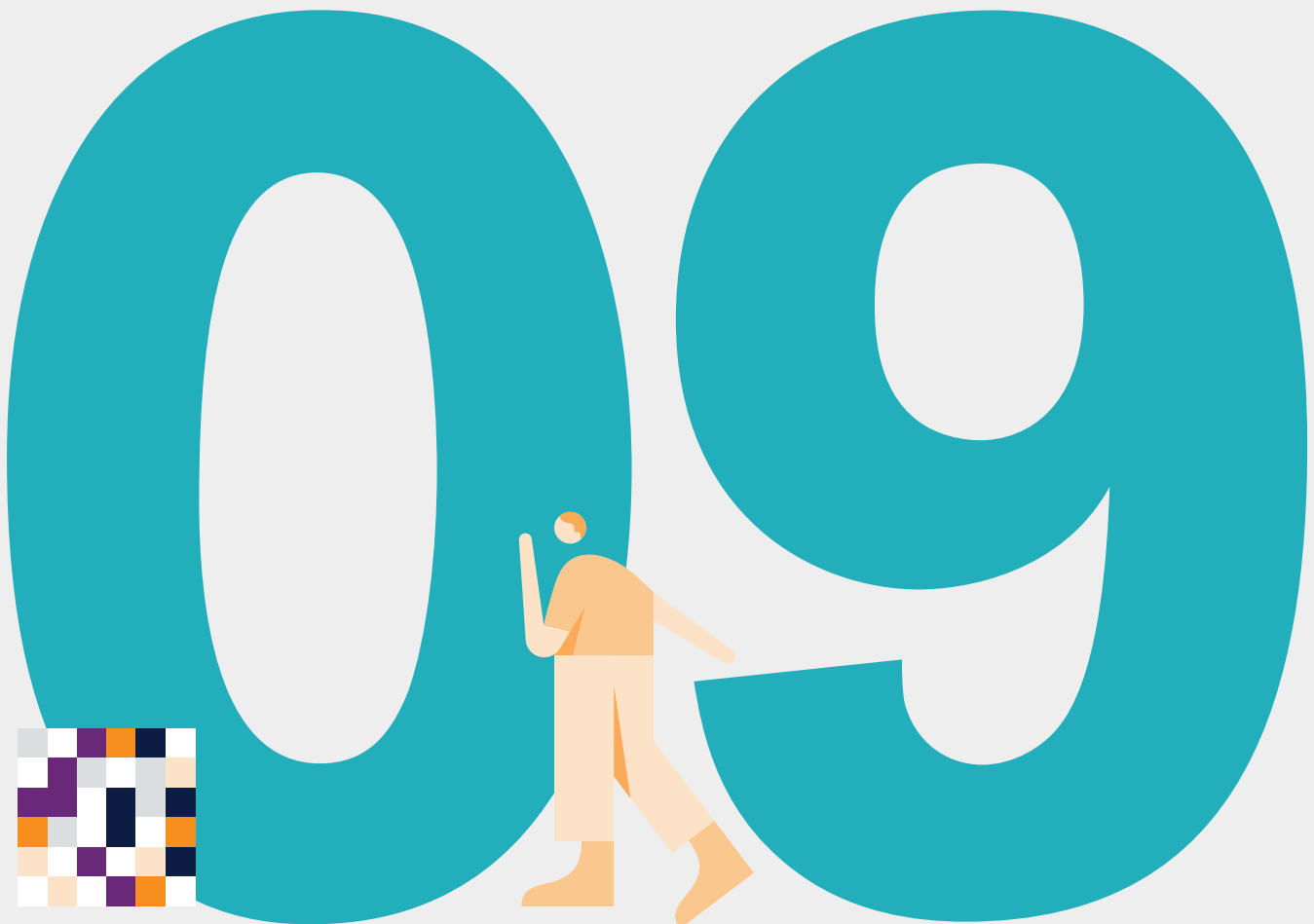
The capacity to refer students to embedded support services relieved some of the tension associated with assisting students with personal issues that are impacting upon their learning, which academic staff lack training and expertise to cope with effectively. As one participant noted, the bonds between enabling educators are founded in a shared value—the importance of caring—and this perspective overrides other points of difference:

When you get enabling educators in a room there's a lot of nodding ... because we all agree ... we're here for the students. We will do and change anything that needs to be done or changed if it's going to help them achieve their goals.

However, as this comment shows, while 'care' is essential to discussions of meaningful teaching and learning, it also carries tensions and contradictions — clearly there are limitations to teaching staff fulfilling “anything that needs to be done or changed”. Access to higher education is located within the relational limitations of politico-structural s/paces, where both staff members' and students' broader contextual dimensions impact on pedagogy and learning possibilities.

The key point of this chapter is to demonstrate that in enabling the relational and responsive nature of pedagogy is important. Teachers and students learn together. With institutional support and recognition, conditions may be developed for more careful pedagogies and for relationships of care to be fostered and valued.

“A bit of a step up”: Student Transitions



9. “A bit of a step up”: Student Transitions

- As experienced in undergraduate programs, increased pressure on staff for research outputs, along with an increase in student numbers, creates tensions in the ability to be care-full.
- Both students and staff expressed how increasing workloads for academic and teaching staff, increasing casualisation, and prevalence of banking-style understandings of pedagogy (as content delivery) across higher education, makes teaching and learning more difficult.
- There is a need to embed institutional commitments to fostering the conditions, both material and pedagogical, for inclusive and caring frameworks to aid student transitions so that all staff have the necessary space and time to develop these attributes.

Study participants devoted substantial time to discussing “transitions”, for students particularly in terms of their experiences of moving from enabling into undergraduate studies and, in the case of staff, assisting new students to undertake the transition into enabling education (especially in relation to their previous educational experiences). While we acknowledge the difficulties associated with using the term “transition”, as transition is always occurring and never completed, we also recognise that for most students their entry into and exit from enabling programs marked a significant milestone – they themselves defining this as a transition. Staff too saw these periods as significant, as pressure points where students may require assistance and affirmation.

The process and impacts of transitioning into different educational environments was not uniform. For some, entering new educational environments, both enabling and undergraduate, was associated with feelings of “anxiety” and some used words such as “petrified”, “daunting”, and “overwhelmed” to describe the emotional impact of such transitions. For others, there was an expectation of change but it was associated with less fraught terminology: “there’s a big jump coming in ... but there’s an even bigger jump going from Open Foundation to undergraduate” and

I think I was well prepared, because I was ready to study and because I knew people that had done the program previously and had transitioned across. So, I was expecting a bit of a step up, and I was prepared for that to happen ... I know there [were] a few people that did really struggle ... with the transition.

A student’s familiarity with higher educational environments, support systems (especially family members and friends who had experienced similar transitions), and take up of support services, for example, seemed to have corresponding impacts on how they viewed the transition.

Staff also discussed student transitions into enabling education as a variable experience, contingent upon a variety of contextual factors. In particular, many noted the significance of students’ prior educational experiences. They related this not just to the importance of such prior experiences giving students important grounding in academic content and skills, which may ease the transition for some students, but as also holding significance in students’ own narratives about themselves as a learner and their corresponding skills and capabilities. Many staff raised the detrimental impact of previous negative experiences on students, which they noted were not a reflection of students’ actual capabilities, but rather reflected the institutional constraints of, especially, the high school system. This point was explicitly expressed by one academic staff member who suggested that “some people would say they failed high school and I would say high school failed them”.

Some staff explicitly acknowledged the importance of distinguishing their own classrooms from high school classrooms as a strategy to aid transitions for those students who carry, what one staff member called, the “baggage” of previous negative experiences, as well as creating “ambience” and personal connections with students that respect their existing skills and capabilities. Staff generally reflected that they felt there were positive approaches taking place at the Centre level to assist students to transition into a new learning environment. Overwhelmingly, staff identified that the central tenets of an enabling philosophy, such as fostering a sense of care and belonging, empathy, and personalising learning experiences, are of assistance in aiding students’ transition into university environments.

At the same time, staff also noted constraints and tensions in assisting students in transitioning into enabling education. For example, some observed that as enrolment in enabling programs has increased, the size of the student cohort has, in exchange for growing standardisation, limited some of the informal opportunities for socialisation, creativity and personalisation involved in the transition process. Some pointed out that university cultures and traditional ways of doing things (for example, standardised formats for lectures and tutorials) were not necessarily conducive to assisting students with transitions. Some staff added that “our actual infrastructure is of another age” which does not help to facilitate informal discussion, develop relationality and welcome students into higher education.

Staff noted that similar cultural and institutional constraints exist for educators in undergraduate classrooms. In particular, they pointed out the lack of infrastructure conducive to making students feel welcome, the impact of class sizes on personalised care, and what they perceive as a university research culture that is valued more highly than teaching outcomes. Therefore, they argued, there is little incentive to adapt teaching practices to assist students transitioning into higher education. As one staff member pointed out, some long-term staff are “cynical and they’re over the organisation, but they are really, they do like what they do. And I guess, so much value is placed on research and not a lot on teaching. Which is the thing that needs to change.” This lack of value on teaching, as this staff member argues, has a flow-on effect to produce high workloads, staff dissatisfaction and reliance on an increasing number of casuals, who are not necessarily fully remunerated for enacting ‘good pedagogies’, which can assist students in transitioning effectively in higher education.

Referring to the increasing work demands that have ‘crept in’ for academic staff through both digital and new forms of quality assurance bureaucratisation, research ‘outputs’ and the morale of staff who had been employed long before them, another teacher interviewed commented:

they’re cynical [some long-term staff] and they’re over the organisation, but they are really, they do like what they do. Future employment, especially for casual teaching staff, relies on good pedagogical practices that cannot be reasonably undertaken in the time allocated.

Staff pointed out that there are other constraints for undergraduate teachers that may limit their capacity to aid students transitioning into higher education. For example, they believed that there is more emphasis in undergraduate courses on content but less emphasis on development of the required academic skills, which are an embedded part of the enabling curriculum. This can lead to detrimental impacts on student transitions into and retention within undergraduate courses.

Staff also pointed to funding constraints, particularly as they relate to student support services, which are embedded within the Centre, but are not offered within faculty programs. They also discussed greater rigidity in undergraduate courses, for example, adverse circumstance requirements and late penalties that make transitions especially difficult for students from non-traditional backgrounds. Another point raised was a lack of embedded flexibility in the lack of night classes and limited capacity to engage in online study for some degrees, both of which are typical in the enabling programs in recognition of their importance for equity outcomes.

Some staff participants recognised that because of the culture and institutional incentives for academics working in undergraduate programs, there might be more inclination towards research and less interest in pedagogical development. One staff member suggested that because academics working in undergraduate programs have a history of educational success themselves, they might be less likely to identify with students who have challenges and those from equity groups. This was thought to create something of a cognitive or empathetic dissonance between teachers and the realities experienced by first year students especially, without previous experiences of higher education environments.

Staff made a number of recommendations for transition practices that they considered beneficial to students. At an institutional level, they emphasised the importance of: spaces that are comfortable, welcoming and convey a sense of breaking down barriers; trained and resourced educators who understand their student cohort and who perceive that their teaching is valued and core business; providing embedded student support services; and providing information that is clear and makes obvious the pathways by which students can achieve their goals at both a course and a program level. They recommended classrooms that focus on demystifying and making transparent hidden curricula and knowledges, and embedding this within course design, along with working to develop discipline specific skills and knowledges.

Staff emphasised the importance of transparent information regarding approaches and challenges and viewing each student as a “whole person”, with valuable skills and abilities to contribute to the transition. Staff also conveyed a conceptual shift away from seeing transitions as linear and towards recognising student pathways as more complex. For this reason, several noted the significance of students feeling that they can return to visit enabling staff, even after they have exited the program. They highlighted the positive impact this can have for students transitioning through undergraduate and postgraduate programs. Staff also emphasised shifts away from measuring transitional success via retention and/or subsequent undergraduate enrolment, emphasising instead that undergraduate enrolment is not a desired destination for all students, as many change their mind about their desired pathway and, furthermore, retention statistics ignore “positive attrition” (Hodges et al., 2013), where students may exit to pursue employment or other opportunities, or to focus on other responsibilities.

Most significantly, it was argued by all staff and student participants that it is in the interests of the University to create the conditions, including through professional development opportunities, to support undergraduate teachers in facilitating caring and inclusive pedagogical spaces. Recognition that education is not about delivery, but relationality and, therefore, that transitions into and through higher education require considered and careful pedagogies, was key to all discussions.

“This is bloody tough ... but you know you can do this kind of thing”: Collaboration, Reflexivity and Power in Enabling



10. “This is bloody tough ... but you know you can do this kind of thing”: Collaboration, Reflexivity and Power in Enabling

- Collaborative and dialogical orientations enable the conceptual connections for providing democratic access to powerful disciplinary knowledges and to higher education.
- Disruption of traditional pedagogical power hierarchies through horizontal forms of teaching and learning are important.
- Critical reflexivity by the teacher is a requirement for maintaining the capacity to understand, engage with and enable students.
- Reflexive dialogical approaches attempt to dislodge static and exclusionary discipline approaches to teaching; however, this process is relational and is therefore complex.

So far, we have seen that staff and students describe enabling pedagogies as relationally co-constructed between students and teachers. This pedagogy is dynamically co-constructed. Although articulated differently across the various discipline areas and programs, all staff interviewed expressed the belief that good pedagogy is achieved through a reflexive, iterative approach. As Freire (1970) explained, co-productive pedagogies are dialogical and reflexive. To be reflexive is to reflect on the following: the actions and behaviours of others; how one relates to others; and one’s assumptions and actions in relation to others. It is a continuous process of reflecting and learning about oneself, how one makes assumptions and judgements and relates to others. As one participant explained:

people who are less adapted and do less well as an enabling educator, are thinking inwardly ... to be, um, successful I think in the enabling space you [laughs] really need to be looking outwards and always thinking about, you know, what you can do better and how you can help people.

Another said:

I think we always need to check our assumptions and check our privilege as teachers in enabling, or anywhere, ... and, so, even though I probably entered the role thinking that I was pretty good at not assuming anything about the students, I would always – sometimes – find myself making assumptions and then go, “Hang on a minute, you can’t do that because students are always going to teach you things”.

Therefore, as a relational dynamic, both perceptions and approaches to the exercise of power are pivotal in defining pedagogical relationships (Burke et al., 2016; Burke, 2012). Understanding power as a complex inter/intra-personal dynamic (Bennett, 2012), which is contextual, relational and productive, as well as repressive and constraining, is important for thinking through the complexities of pedagogy. One long-time member of staff, who both taught and moved into leadership roles, said about the primacy of working on good pedagogical relationships:

One of the first things I’d want [university teachers] to do is to say to themselves, “What are my assumptions? What am I assuming about this group of students that I’m about to take?” “What do I assume about them as people?” and often there’s no assumption that they are people ... “What do I assume about the knowledge they may already have um that relates to this particular area of learning?” “Well, if I think they have no knowledge of that, what do I think they might have knowledge of? ... do I think that they have any knowledge that I can build on or uh what is my role? ... This is what we have to be able to do. Um, if you can’t do it now, then you’ve got to find a way of doing it” or do I have other strategies um of uh working towards that knowledge?

Learning collaborations

Through thematic analysis of the insights contributed by interview participants and research team members, we have been able to gain an understanding of the types of pedagogical relationships that pay attention to the productive complexity of mutually empowering approaches and actively resist didactic pedagogic methodologies in the enabling programs. One teacher explained that it is important to resist overly didactic models of pedagogy constructed at school and, instead, to engage students in an enabling pedagogical approach in interesting ways:

We've seen what things excite them and that energy of the new, of understanding, of opening themselves to new ways of thinking and new ideas is, you know, very empowering for the teaching staff as for the students. So being part of this is just fantastic. It's, yeah, wonderful not privileging the teacher is, you know, and that's difficult. It's tricky because many of the students want the teacher to be the guru, "I want the teacher to have all the knowledge and just pour it into me. Just tell me what I need to know. Tell me what I need to write. Hold my hand and tell me what to write" and there's certainly an aspect of that in many students who are fearful ... the more we don't promote anxiety, the more we don't promote guilt because they haven't succeeded or they've let us down or whatever, the more opportunity we have for the blossoming of those creative energies.

One long-term staff member described this as being 'collaborative':

I love the idea of the creative power of students, you know, I think that they're so, so very important ... we are always in danger of underestimating our students ... It's an awareness of what gets in the way ... and so part of what I would want to do is to sort of clear the way, so that the creative power of students and the mutual energy of the teaching staff and the students can create something that is new and with the teaching staff not being afraid to go with an idea that comes up from the students and work with them to develop that in an interesting way. So, I see it as always being a collaboration.

Students interviewed also described the collaborative approach in class as being about learning from one another, including the teacher from students. As one explained, "it's more like you're all working together rather than the 'us and them' kind of thing". Another student commented that she found enabling courses to be:

... very inclusive in welcoming people's opinions and welcoming discussion and—you know, showing that respect when someone had something to say, whether it was relevant or not—actually listening, giving people a chance to talk ... but I definitely think (it was) inclusive in that you've got a whole age range of people from 20 through to ... I think the oldest in our group was about 60 or 70, even ... and valuing everybody equally, and everybody's opinion and everybody's experiences.

The details of this dialogical approach were explained by one student as follows:

If you spoke you know like the teacher would listen to you and, you know, and then it wasn't kind of like a free for all where everyone would just talk over the top of each other. It was each person had their chance to say—it was like a nice flow like that. It wasn't just sort of everyone talking over the top of each other. Your idea was actually, you know, taken and thought about, you know, in the whole classroom.

This student continued: "I definitely think in like the Open Foundation there was, I think there was a more, there was more of a relationship between the teacher and the student than in undergraduate". Another student commented that "it's attitudes" to teaching that they thought were not entirely unique to enabling, but "they're just more focused I guess, there's more, they're more relational I think. More emphasis on you as a person student as opposed to you know, you as one of a group of students". One student discussed their enjoyment of learning, curiosity and feeling encouraged to think beyond assessments and curricula in enabling, as compared to the learning environment in their undergraduate courses. The student summarised this by stating that in enabling "no one was scared, I guess".

One teacher explained that collaboration is not just for teachers and students, but works across staff and student groups 'horizontally', through peer learning and collaborative pedagogical approaches:

I think one of the most important things for enabling teachers and academics is to see it as a team ... Part of a team ... I think it's important for them to see too that learning support staff, and library staff, and counsellors, to see us on the same level, that I'm not more important than them, whereas academics generally do see themselves, not everyone, I know that's not true, but in enabling it's just, it is a team thing.

The inter-connection of academic skills, discipline knowledge and student support: 'embedding'

In enabling programs, specific types of learning such as how to search for literature, how to reference, how to further develop writing and maths knowledge, are all embedded into the programs and courses where it is relevant and structurally possible within the timetable.

Different staff with different forms of expertise, such as counsellors, are also involved, especially leading up to exam periods when many students feel 'stressed', so that working on strategies to deal with competing and stressful demands and the development of different types of foundational knowledges (for example, essay techniques) are normalised rather than considered 'remedial'. Courses are designed with the 'skills' (specific writing, scientific or mathematical knowledges) 'embedded' and applied to the discipline as part of the curricula.

Enabling pedagogies work to democratise university access and, along with this, student expectations, hopes and approaches when transitioning into it. A student discussed the importance of the 'non-hierarchical' feel of enabling pedagogies:

I think by the time I had the first break, it was just totally comfortable. Totally. We were treated, it felt to me treated no differently to an honours student, you know, we were taken seriously and not dismissed by the lecturers. Um, so there was no hierarchy—if you thought there was going to be one, there wasn't.

However, collaboration in most forms is not a static, simple process given that all relations are negotiated and punctuated by dynamics of difference and disjuncture over time. As Burke (2002) points out in her discussion of her project drawing on collaborative methodology developed with students:

As a complex process, collaboration was always on the edge of destabilising conventional power relations between researcher and researched, teacher and student (Hey 2000, p. 163), creating moments of the temporary reconfiguration of power relations through a collaborative methodology. (p. 133)

Another study participant pointed out that being equitable in classes is only meaningful 'in action'—it is "lived": "Equity is, for example, you know, it's not just something on paper that you laminate, it's something that you live, it's something that you know". Describing enabling's equitable, dialogical approaches, a student reflected on a class in her enabling program:

... we did do a lot of talking and discussion around experiences and how we felt about things, I guess at the beginning of the course and then at the end of the course, how we feel now that we've actually learned stuff in between—so I found that really beneficial. And I think our experiences in regards to that were really valued and listened to by everyone in the class.

Epistemic access: powerful knowledge

As Bernstein (1990; 1996) explains, learning about ‘powerful’, ‘culturally privileged’ or ‘abstract’ knowledge in the form of the disciplines is necessary for students to perform successfully in the mainstream. Using ‘experiential knowledge’ to connect learners to becoming proficient in decoding/encoding discipline knowledge is at the heart of enabling pedagogies. A research participant interviewed said:

... knowledge is political, and uh, people, some people have the misapprehension that knowledge isn’t political. They think a fact is a fact is a fact. Part of enculturation in the academic way of thinking is to understand that facts are at the service of interpretation. And that um, uh, although the fact stands, it, it is always enclosed in some kind of political interpretive framework.

Providing ‘epistemic access’ (in short, the necessary conceptual understandings of a knowledge base) for enabling students to become proficient and participate in powerful forms of knowledge (Bernstein, 1971; Morrow, 2009; Young, 2013) in disciplinary contexts is an important commitment of enabling pedagogies. However, as Moore (2013) emphasises, access to ‘powerful knowledge’ does not mean mere conformity to the ‘knowledge of the powerful’, although knowledge is inevitably entwined within inequality and relations of power:

The powerful are so *not* because they can arbitrarily impose *their* knowledge/culture as ‘powerful knowledge/culture’, but because they enjoy privileged access to the knowledge/culture that *is* powerful in its own right. Basil Bernstein expressed the key issue in terms of ‘enhancement’: ‘Enhancement is not simply the right to be *more* personally, *more* intellectually, *more* socially, *more* materially, it is the right to the means of critical understandings and to new possibilities’ (Bernstein, 2000). This is why *knowledge* is important. It is at this point that epistemological issues merge into social issues, educational issues and justice issues. The precondition for this ‘enhancement’ is a recognition that there actually is powerful knowledge as opposed to simply the knowledge of the powerful. (original italics, p. 350)

Similarly, Watkins (2017) asserts the importance of understanding power and empowerment (the nexus of power-knowledge), which the staff interviewed for our study also discussed as central to pedagogy in enabling. Watkins explains that this kind of pedagogic methodology is not about ‘imposition’, with the demand of one-way transformation of students to a static knowledge system, but of the ‘capacitation’ of the entire field (mutual development of students and higher education):

Skills of analysis and abstract thinking, forms of academic or higher order literacy and certain disciplinary knowledge across the humanities and sciences are not just utilised within academe and the professions, they provide the means for effective social participation: powerful knowledge ... Such a position is not about romanticising the teacher’s role, nor is it neglectful of structural relations of power. (p. 12)

Indeed, staff talked about the tensions and limits of accessing and participating in such knowledge, at points in time, and especially according to context:

... occasionally you would get someone who was a, a true ‘original’ in their thinking. And who resisted uh, you know, any party line, and would find a way to think their way through, quite brilliantly, a problem, and then present it in an unconventional way ... I’d give them great marks because I love the thinking, right? Thinking is fabulous. It’s original. It’s startling. Um, and this happened a, a couple of times during my career, and I said, “If you do that in your first year [undergraduate programs], you’ll be marked down. You will be marked down. You have ... not used the academic tools ...” To present this very original ... but for God’s sakes stick to your guns because you’ve got something to say, and it’s worthwhile that we hear it.” ... That did happen, and I do worry that occasionally with our very thorough grounding in academic capital, we might squash an otherwise unconventional talent ... our resistant capital comes fully formed and ready to shape the halls ... And you have to say to them, “Just be aware”. ... “But keep punching”. ... Because [otherwise] we will never change that organising knowledge, that is how knowledge changes.

One participant talked about the importance of reflexive practice:

... in terms of reflecting about the pedagogical interactions and plans—this is what we need to reach. That’s the end of the semester. How do we come back from that, step back to that, to where we are now? So, we need to know how we’re going to get there. Is there a path? Do I know the path?

The sense of a “path” and that these programs are “pathways” means that there are limitations to how radical redistributive approaches to other ways of doing and knowing can be, because the programs are structurally limited in scope and reach and are largely considered preparatory.

Webs of power

Both federal funding schemes and home institutions support enabling programs. As power is relationally dynamic, enabling programs and institutions are implicated in complex webs of broader sectoral and political forces. At UON, enabling programs have been recognised as valuable on a number of institutional and community levels. Enabling staff view their context as important to UON, although consideration of enabling as an important *part of* UON has developed over time. Recognition of the importance of enabling, and of equity in higher education more generally, has become central to UON's strategic planning, as documented in its 2011 and subsequent strategic plans.

In this study, we captured the tensions and challenges relating to institutional and wider socio-political structures. In research team meetings and in interviews with Centre staff, enabling teachers discussed how they consider their approaches as entangled within inter/national policy and institutional dynamics. According to staff, the power of neoliberalism (or economic rationalism, as it is sometimes known in Australia) is now felt as a significant force in the contemporary structural design and performative, globally competitive nature of higher education. Gaining increasing momentum since the 1980s (Connell, 2012) and intersecting with other historical forces including neoconservatism (Apple, 2006), Australian universities have seen reductions in government funding for higher education and increases in fees for students.

Teaching, learning and research have become increasingly measured, sold and consumed as competitive outputs, and activities have become structured so that staff and students are also increasingly obligated to think, enquire and know within the neoliberal framework (Bennett et al., 2013). Interview participants discussed the difficulties of such wider sectoral pressures in terms of the impact on both teaching and learning. For example, one staff participant described the tensions between short-term focused institutional (economic) demands and the historical commitments that UON's enabling programs have had in the community for over 40 years, including developing the learning of individuals and communities in ways that are valuable and have broader forms of application, such as employment, opportunities for promotion and social mobility, community wellbeing, social justice and the pursuit of higher education for individuals in the longer-term. They commented:

We have to also stop seeing enabling as just getting people into university, it is giving people a sense of voice, to improve their work situation, we often get hit on the head as they don't flow through

to university but for me the purpose is to open opportunity and possibility.

One student participant expressed frustration with the way they felt universities misunderstand students' lives and their 'real life' challenges, which they contrasted with their view of traditional students of the past who did not have to work and struggle. The student saw this as an institutional/sectoral issue, rather than being primarily about teaching:

Students have now become a category of you know, the deplorables ... now you just treated with, everybody is treated with contempt ... They're real life factors ... where's it going to take me? What's the point of even doing this second assessment ... but I think that's more than teaching style.

Although this is not the experience of all students interviewed, this participant points to what Gale and Parker (2017) argue is a deficit discourse about the non-traditional student in higher education, which is reproduced through policy and through powerful national media outlets like *The Australian* and other forms of media. Often this reproducing is done subconsciously through simply repeating concerns about the problem of attrition and concerns about 'quality' outcomes. For example, Gale and Parker (2017) argue that there is a:

continued problematisation of the retention of low SES students in the Australian higher education system, despite the evidence that shows that attrition is not a problem particular to these students. Instead, 'the problem' would appear to be their access to the dominant cultural capital, which undermines the advantages of higher education for traditionally advantaged groups (cf. Brown, 2003; Marginson, 2008). (p. 91)

Along with Burke et al. (2016) and Bennett and Burke (2017), Gale and Parker (2017) assert that a persistent habitualised rhetoric dominates Australian higher education, in which "particular groups are increasingly seen [read: 'represented'] as 'not fit' for advanced education, as being limited in their abilities, as requiring less of an education than the supposedly more gifted and talented (Dorling, 2010: 33)" (p. 91). Indeed, dominant discourses that position widening participation as a problem are also 'felt' as exclusionary by many students (cf. Burke et al., 2016).

Reflexive practice: insights gained

As a result of relatively rapid changes in higher education in recent times, some of the enabling staff interviewed have come to consider research as antithetical to good teaching, because it takes time away from, even hinders, it. This view is concerning because this type of dichotomous thinking (i.e. teaching versus research) puts in jeopardy the very pedagogies of care identified as at the 'heart' of enabling pedagogies by the wide variety of staff participating in this study. The 'caring' or affective pedagogy described as critical by staff, means acting in ways that necessarily involve being reflexive and informed about one's learning participants and their contexts. Without research into the ways that socio-political change impacts and influences education, teachers rely simply on their own judgements and assumptions, without wider consideration and information. This puts at risk the collaborative and empowering praxis-based pedagogies described by staff as critical to enabling pedagogies throughout this report, where reflexive practice as an historical commitment to the community, through socially just and informed teaching, is key.

Indeed, this report, and the long history of enabling pedagogies at UON, is testament to the importance of being informed through both historical and contemporary forms of research into enabling and related contexts, especially higher education for inclusive teaching practice. One student participant described the significance of one of her enabling teacher's reflexive pedagogy:

Her personality and her maturity and her life experience connected her to everyone in the room and she was able to give of herself and teach passionately what she thought and— and correct and self-correct and say that's not good enough as well which is what makes a good teacher in a respectful relationship.

Students reinforced the importance of being informed beyond one's own context, something described by both staff and students as key. One student expressed this powerfully:

We immediately set about talking about the world and things I thought I knew about; I just didn't. An example would be stolen children. I thought I knew but I didn't know the extent. I've learned things like that. I learned and took it on board because that was one of the reasons I was going to uni, to, you know, dial some of the redneck out of me, I guess, you know, just to learn a more worldly view.

The reflexivity (contextually informed action) described by both teachers and students, moves beyond the 'micro' relations to understanding the wider, 'macro' politico-historical commitments and contextual challenges as they have developed over time. As one student shared, "there is a sense of purpose in enabling, it was to enable you to, that's what came across that, you know, this is bloody tough, and it's, it'll change your life, but you know you can do this kind of thing".

Enabling students are only ever passing through, and, if they continue to study, they will encounter diverse pedagogies and different approaches to knowledge in later pedagogical spaces. Enabling pedagogies are contextually powerful and enable democratic epistemic access to powerful knowledges. They foster complex forms of transformation. However, because they are pathways and preparatory programs, not stand-alone, they are relationally situated and, therefore, carry with them all the opportunities, possibilities, complexities and limitations of an increasingly neoliberalised (marketised) higher education system focused on changing and intensified outputs and measures.

“Bridges” and “Pathways”: The Metaphors We Teach and Learn By



11. “Bridges” and “Pathways”: The Metaphors We Teach and Learn By

- Metaphors are significant in the discourses (expressions, understandings and changing narratives of the self) of students and staff.
- Significant metaphors in the enabling space are: travel and movement, direction and boundary, games and safe spaces.
- Travel and movement capture elements of the journey of enabling students (and staff), reflecting the non-linearity of their journeys.
- The metaphoric ‘register’ reveals staff attentiveness to the inner landscape, narratives and transformations of students.
- Metaphors capture the democratising and collaborative commitments of enabling pedagogies and foster understanding about what demystifying education and knowledge actually means to both students and staff.
- Safe space metaphors express careful attention to students and their lives, as well as the need for boundaries to enable participatory and democratising pedagogies to emerge.

Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) seminal work on the nature and function of metaphor sought to reposition the metaphor away from simply being a form of poetic expression to, instead, being integral to ordinary thought processes, which are reflected in speech. Today, metaphorical language is seen as an important way through which people communicate their understandings of everyday life and, significantly, as a way for them to cognitively structure their perceptions of life’s complexities and themselves as part of the possibilities of change and stability in meaning and experience. Metaphors, then, have real-world implications in that they structure realities. They have the power to both illuminate concepts and experiences by conflating them with other ideas, images or experiences, and they are also limiting in that they may confine one’s capacity to think about and convey certain issues.

Scholars of education have examined research on metaphors to understand how they may be used effectively as a tool of teaching and learning (see, for example, Mouraz et al., 2013) and to conceive of how students and teachers understand and make sense of processes of learning and teaching by deploying metaphorical techniques (see, for example, Martinez et al., 2001). To date, however, no significant research exists that examines the uses of metaphor within the specific context of enabling education, despite its usefulness in illuminating the ways in which staff and students explain their processes and regardless of the fact, as illustrated by this study, that enabling educators

and students use metaphorical language extensively in their pedagogical and learning reflections.

Here we refer to metaphors of travel and movement, direction and boundary, games and safe spaces as examples of the significance of metaphors in speaking about, conceiving of, and understanding, enabling education. These metaphors have significant overlap regardless of the research participant’s role as either student or teacher. This study reinforces the point that metaphors are not simply rhetorical flourishes but, rather, are fundamental to how enabling educators and students think and communicate about their work. These are the metaphors they teach and learn by.

Enabling educators rely heavily on metaphors of travel and movement (May, 2005) to explain the ways that students transition into enabling programs and, upon successful completion, often subsequently enrol in undergraduate programs (noting that ‘transition’, ‘in’, and ‘out’ are themselves common metaphorical explanations of the same process). The “pathway” metaphor, which envisions students on an educational journey, with its association of “barriers” and “obstacles” to success, is well noted in the field and is reflected in this study (Raffe, 2003).

For some enabling educators there is an explicit acknowledgement that their students’ enrolment in enabling studies is part of “their personal journey”. Various staff explained that they tell students: “we’re all on the same journey”, “we’re all in the same boat”, and “you don’t know what pathways will open to you, what doors will come open”. Sometimes, as staff expressed in interviews, this “journey” is not easy but “when you see that light go on and the turnaround, it is very rewarding” for educators. These metaphors are significant, as May (2001, p. 19) asserts, in moving away from “literature on transition [that] reflects concerns about the economic outcomes of education for the student ... [but] ignore the psychosocial experience of education”. Thus, by emphasising transition as travel and movement, educators reflect that education is not procedural (related to enrolment status), nor related simply to the occupation of physical space, but instead relates to shifts within the inner life of the student, be they intellectual, emotional or other. For this reason, travel and movement metaphors are used to indicate transitions between enabling and undergraduate study, for example, but also transitions within a student’s inner life during their enrolment in an enabling program. Hence, one educator asserted that students “sitting in an enabling classroom are travelling at the speed of light from a position where they did not believe that they could do university”. The positioning of enabling programs as part of a “journey” means

that correspondingly they can be seen, for example, as a “bridge” and “a beacon, a bit of a lighthouse”, and educators within them refer to themselves as “the conduits” and “the cloak over the puddle” for students moving from one non-literal ‘space’ to another.

The enabling education as travel and movement metaphors raise questions of power and identity. Who owns this “pathway”? What is the role of educators in getting students from a perceived Point A to Point B? In emphasising journeys, does the metaphor implicitly suggest that students should be transformed to become more like someone else and less of who they currently are? Many study participants seemed conscious of this power-dynamic: one stated explicitly that the “journey” of students is “not really my journey”, another that it was important to “check our privilege” as enabling educators. One staff member took care to emphasise the importance of a “coming with you’ approach ... [of being] pedagogically alongside”, having a sense of being with the students, rather than a hierarchical or didactic relationship with them. One can note the easy way in which study participants slip into the collective personal pronoun “we” in the previous journey examples. One educator saw lateral movement ceasing in the sense that an enabling pedagogy is “squarely centred on the student ... that’s the gold you can mine at any time” because regardless of disagreements on means or methods all staff are in agreement on the priorities of a “squarely centred” (and therefore ‘still’) pedagogy focused on students.

It is important to note that students also rely on the same category of metaphor, in addition to directional metaphors, to explain their motivations for entry and ‘journey through’ the programs. For example, one student explained that they had witnessed work peers “moving on” but felt that their own employment status was “gradually slipping down”. Another was “at a crossroad”, one reflected that life “took me on a different path” before returning to education and another described being set “on a road of discovery”. Many prior students who participated in the study conceptualised enabling education as a “good stepping stone”. This does not mean that students themselves conceptualise their movement into and through higher education as necessarily linear. One student who had previously participated in an undergraduate teaching degree had come to that program “straight out of school” but found they lacked the necessary skills to fully enjoy and engage with their chosen program. Instead, they pointed out that there needed to “be a little bit more in the middle” between school and undergraduate study. In a separate interview, another student used almost the same terminology

to describe the same phenomenon of students “that have gone straight from high school” experiencing a difficult adjustment, while emphasising that in enabling classrooms “everyone is in the same boat”.

Such assertions support a growing body of enabling research that highlights the (middle-class and neoliberal) illusion that the ‘pathways’ of students are typically linear and uncomplicated. They also support literature regarding enabling spaces as part of a rite of passage, which itself involves disorientation (May, 2001). Staff, for example, used emotive terminology such as “anxiety”, “fearful”, and “uncertain” to describe the entrance into this “little pool [from which students later transition] into the big ocean”, which was followed by transformative metaphors to describe students who “survive” or “thrive” in their environment. Some transformative metaphors were also used by the educators to discuss their experience in enabling, as distinct from other forms of education: “I think I died and went to heaven, because to teach here is just a dream”.

Students used ‘disorienting’ terminology to describe what one called a “step into the unknown” into enabling. Another described it as a “step out of my comfort zone”. Multiple students used the term “petrified” to describe their transition into enabling; others used corporeal terms such as “brain turning”, an “absolute eye opener”, and feeling “stretched ... pushed”. Students thus use metaphors of travel, direction, and transformation in analytical rather than simplistic ways that reflect the diversity and depth of their experiences (see also Bunn, 2013; May, 2005).

Game metaphors also had a role in explaining the process of sitting “alongside” and negotiating power relationships. This was explicit in the discussions of one participant who noted that “talking about university as a game was often a way of sort of loosening the tension ... but very quickly they got to understand that the games were pretty serious too”. Such an acknowledgement does much to illuminate the role of enabling education for enculturating students, not only to appropriate discipline-specific content and skills, but to acquire the necessary navigational capacities (Appadurai, 2004) to “play that game” by the established “rules”. One student also reflected consciously on the nature of the “field” in enabling as distinct: the lecturer “wasn’t ... above us ... we’re all on an equal playing field”. The game metaphor was less explicit though more prevalent in staff assertions about the “pitching” of their material. Staff and students both spoke about the importance of “ground rules”; that is, the need to make explicit those facets of education that are often ‘hidden’ or implicit, such as conduct and methods of classroom participation. This metaphor

was less explicit though more prevalent in staff assertions about the “pitching” of their material. Staff and students both spoke about the importance of “ground rules”; that is, the need to make explicit those facets of education that are often ‘hidden’ or implicit, such as conduct and methods of classroom participation. This metaphor reflects many educators’ relative cognisance of the Bourdieusian pedagogical position by recognising that many enabling students may be navigating a ‘field’ without correspondingly having knowledge of the ‘rules of the game’ (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002).

Related to this, many of the educators articulated pedagogies of care via safe space metaphors. Participants engaged openly with dialogue founded in the notion of classroom space as ‘safe’. Examples of this reference to safety include comments like “inclusivity is about safety: feeling safe in the classroom”, and another staff member noted that the nature of the content delivered “inevitability creates a safe space for them [students], because we talk about discrimination”. Study participants also discussed issues of “tension”, “anxiety” and, particularly, “care” as factors that must be considered in creating “safe spaces”. As Robert Boost Rom (1998) asserts, the ‘safe space’ metaphor is often complex—in that it conflates literal classrooms and literal dangers with metaphorical spaces that relate to students’ sense of emotional and psychological wellbeing, sense of connectedness and feelings of comfort while tackling potentially discomfoting material—yet is largely overlooked as a metaphorical device. He asserts that because this metaphor is often overlooked, it is rare for educators to engage critically with it, and to ask: to what extent should students feel safe, and is safety antithetical to intellectual challenge?

Many students used the word “comfortable” to describe the nature of an enabling environment, but as the prior examples of rite of passage suggest, this “comfort” exists alongside the severe ‘discomfort’ of (re-)entering education. It is important to acknowledge that this metaphor of safety was also explicitly deconstructed by at least one staff participant who noted the importance of being ‘unsafe’: while “enabling pedagogy would require us I think, to err on the side of safety”, students also need to be “intellectually adventurous ... and questioning because that is the new knowledge that is the catalyst for different thinking”. This educator also viewed the significance of “safety” from a political perspective, pointing out that “we know the students that are listening for unsafety”, who come into enabling education bearing resistant approaches, which must be simultaneously respected and recalibrated in order for them to fit (enough) within

dominant structures “for their protection, for their safety in the system”. Drawing on boundary metaphors, many of the educators described how the notion of “safety” and “care” is complex. They explained a need to maintain professionalism with students, whilst also attempting to make the classroom “safe” via positioning themselves as active participants. For example, one of the participants stated that:

there is [laughs] a line in the sand ... there’s a boundary ... there is a line obviously between student and teacher ... this is very tricky territory that we’re on ... it is easy for that line to get a little bit blurry.

For both staff and students then, understandings of ‘safety’ do not necessarily and always relate to conditions of certainty and comfort. Rather, ‘safety’ exists in conjunction with considerable and, sometimes, desirable forms of discomfort.

Conclusions:

“It was more of a constructive approach to building knowledge. It was the academic expertise, and the theory, but you applied that to your own life, which I guess is the thing.”



12. Conclusions: “It was more of a constructive approach to building knowledge. It was the academic expertise, and the theory, but you applied that to your own life, which I guess is the thing.”

Thematic analysis of data from the research team workshops, interviews with educators and students, the literature review and document analysis of program reviews and staff training documentation, all reveal that the overarching focus of enabling pedagogies is on connecting students’ knowledges to powerful forms of discipline knowledge. Enabling pedagogies are concerned with: developing epistemic access through connecting new with existing knowledge; how these new discipline based knowledges are performed and assessed; and making explicit the underlying approaches and principles involved (often left within the hidden curriculum in the educational mainstream). As one student explained about enabling pedagogies:

thinking about it now in terms of constructing knowledge, it was more of a constructive approach to building knowledge. It was the academic expertise, and the theory, but you applied that to your own life, which I guess is the thing.

Enabling pedagogies seek to make visible the approaches, values and assumptions about specific discipline knowledges, and what is counted as ‘legitimate’/‘illegitimate’ and ‘valid’/‘invalid’. Students are taught how expressions and performances of this are recognised and valued in the higher education context. Enabling pedagogies work to make explicit the ‘rules of the game’ (Bourdieu, 1997) and to facilitate the co-development of ‘navigational capacities’ (Appadurai, 2004).

Enabling pedagogies highlight the underlying, often ‘hidden’, aspects of what is counted as valid learning in the university context, so that students are able to develop understandings of the cultural norms and pedagogical demands taken-for-granted by people with family/social contacts who are more familiar with university systems. Enabling pedagogies focus on the ‘hot knowledge’ developed as new forms of ‘cultural capital’ important for access/success (Ball & Vincent, 1998; Ball et al., 2002; Bourdieu, 2000). Enabling pedagogies emphasise the importance of engaging and encouraging learners by connecting learning with existing knowledge(s) and making new forms of knowledge interesting and relevant. This approach is student-knowledges focused, which is distinct from didactic approaches that conceptualise teaching in terms of filling ‘empty vessels’ (Freire, 1970).

Drawing on the literature about ‘transition pedagogies’ (typically focused on first year students, but which have also been applied to enabling), the enabling approach may also be likened to what Gale and Parker (2014) call the ‘transition as becoming’ approach, different

to conventional notions of ‘transition’ that demand conformity to historically-static discipline knowledge. Instead, like the type of engaged pedagogy that these authors describe, enabling pedagogies highlight the importance of *enabling* students to “contribute from who they are and what they know” (Gale & Parker, 2014, p. 746).

Conventional pedagogy places emphasis on teachers and teaching activities (delivery of content and how teachers relate to students who must conform to pre-defined foci, activities and requirements), whereas enabling pedagogies focus on teachers and students *in relation* and the importance of co-teaching and co-learning, so that the context of learning, relevant skills and knowledge are developed dialogically. ‘Academic skills’ are taught in terms of being a *key part* of discipline specific methodologies, not as universally consistent entities.

Enabling pedagogies develop connection and engagement through collaborative learning and acknowledge the importance of being explicit about expectations within disciplines and courses as forms of knowledge that have specific histories and utility. This epistemic concentration on what ‘stands behind’ university disciplines and associated academic skills enriches learning through the development of analytical learning in pragmatic ways.

Enabling pedagogies are not politically homogenous or static, nor prescriptive about what kinds of outcomes are ‘best’ for students. Enabling pedagogies follow the Freirean emphasis on dialogics and valuing diversity/plurality in learning and, importantly, knowing. However, because of their structure and relatively short duration as university preparation programs, enabling pedagogies do not fit exactly with all aspects of the critical pedagogical approach that Freire envisioned, although they share important commitments to refusal of the banking model that dominates Western education. This approach has failed—and continues to fail—many students who enrol in these programs.

Enabling programs are relatively short and do not stand-alone; they seek to distribute power to more people to access the higher education system, rather than being able to dismantle or redefine the structures that students move into following their engagement in them. Nevertheless, in terms of staff and individual students, and the communities to which they belong, the transformations in 'choice', voice and re-narrativisations of self are significant. These transformations emerge from a context of pedagogies of hope and care, and foster the grounds of possibility for an educational practice that is hopeful both in relation to student possibility and educational contribution to democratisation in access to, and the practice of, higher education. In this report and our research, we aim to recognise and value the commitments, care and knowledge of enabling educators and students. In this endeavour, we are inspired by "the beacon of light" offered by ELFSC at UON, and enabling as a sector on the whole, for co-creating an inclusive and socially just academe and society.

Implications

- This research could be useful for informing and developing other studies and approaches to research about pedagogies in different contexts (across access and other types of programs).
- Further work is required to develop enabling pedagogies across all areas in higher education through continuing professional development (CPD). A commitment to a sector-wide sharing of approaches through CPD would enable closer connections between the enabling, Indigenous and under/graduate pedagogies within and across institutions. This would help to facilitate a more inclusive environment that values the diverse experiences, knowledges and needs of contemporary student cohorts.
- Important contextual differences between disciplines and areas can be recognised and valued as part of a nuanced inclusive pedagogical framework.
- Broader programmatic models of success are required for enabling programs because they have different and distinct functions to other university programs.

Glossary of Key Terms



Glossary of Key Terms

For further exploration, please see:

Getting Started on Research. The Academic's Support Kit. Rebecca Bowden, Jane Kenway and Debbie Epstein, London: Sage. 2005;

Public Sociology: An Introduction to Australian Society (3rd Edition). Edited by John Germov and Marilyn Poole, Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin. 2016; and

Teaching to Transgress: Education as a Practise of Freedom. bell hooks, New York: Routledge. 1994

Some of the concepts included below have been adapted from these texts.

cultural capital

A term to indicate cultural competencies, such as taste preferences and lifestyle, that differentiate one social class from another and are transmitted culturally through the generations and via the education system.

deconstruction

An analytical technique that aims to expose the meaning contained within a text, approach or social structure.

discourse

An utterance, inference, belief, idea, attitude, course of action, or practice, which defines or conveys a position or meaning about individual/s, groups, contexts or environments.

epistemology

The underlying assumptive framework that drives an approach or belief to knowledge and what can be known. It is also about what is valued and therefore counts as knowledge, who are assumed as the subjects that know, and what processes are considered the legitimate ones to create knowledge.

habitus

Refers to socially learnt dispositions or taken-for-granted sets of orientations, skills, values and ways of acting that shape behaviour. People are the products and creators of their habitus. Also related is the concept of institutional **habitus**.

hegemony

The operation of power of one group over others, not achieved by physical force or persuasion, but rather through particular worldviews and perspectives becoming common-sense and therefore normalised so that subaltern or popular classes conform to the dominant groups' ideas and interests.

hidden curriculum

Attitudes, values and behaviours learnt in formal educational settings that are not part of the formal curriculum and which are classed, raced and gendered.

meritocratic

Selection organised according to merit, an approach heavily criticised for lack of recognition of how performance and position are subject to opportunity or lack of it, as determined by social class, age or gender.

neoliberalism

An historically developed approach to understanding production, consumption, values and ethics based on the primacy of individual rights, competition, the naturalisation of the market economy and minimal state intervention. It is an economically based politico-ethical system of beliefs or points of view, which is most often left unrecognised for its contextual and historical specificity and, as such, for how deeply ingrained it has become in advanced Western capitalism. Often referred to as 'economic rationalism' in Australian popular discourse.

ontology

Is about the 'being' of things, which can be contrasted to the term 'epistemology' (also see above), which is about the 'knowing' of things and how we know them (the 'why'). In contrast, the 'being' of things (ontology) is about the 'what happens'—the 'what'.

pedagogy

a broad meta-theoretical term, spanning many different theories and approaches, about the practice of education and the study of how best to create the conditions of teaching and learning.

critical pedagogy

A broad church of critical approaches to education, learning and teaching which is premised in strengths based approaches to participants, democratises classroom relationships and teacher–student dynamics, and conceptualises the practice of education as a practice of freedom, justice and transformation (broadly defined).

prefigurative research methodology

An approach that seeks to be true to the grounded approaches, practices and ethics of the movement or practice studied. Prefigurative approaches aim to reflect the forms of commitments, social relations, culture, and experiences that are the goal of the entity studied. This is so that the research is attuned to, respectful of, and does not disrupt, the commitments of the research participants/groups being researched, whilst generative of the shared learning that the research contributes.

reflexivity

(of practice/research/relating) is the practice of critical exploration and examination of one's own, others' and wider socio-political assumptions and actions. It moves beyond mere personal reflection in that it is a continuous exercise of considering the self and others as implicated in wider socio-political contexts, and re/researching others and the field, and thinking critically about and 'bending back on' the individual or group assumptions exploring an action or analysis.

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Anna Bennett
Sara C. Motta
Emma Hamilton
Cathy Burgess
Bronwyn Relf
Kim Gray
Sharlene Leroy-Dyer
Jim Albright

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