

## CHAPTER ONE

# Researching Futures Oriented Pedagogy

Leonie Rowan and  
Bruce Allen Knight

### Abstract

*This chapter explores the challenging contemporary environment currently negotiated by educators across all sectors. It emphasises the diverse range of ways in which individuals can respond to this context and argues the importance of futures oriented pedagogies for those wishing to contribute to the creation of relevant and challenging educational spaces.*

### Changed and Changing Times.....

In the last weeks of the year 2000, it seems more than a little axiomatic to say that we live in changed and changing times. Indeed, there are many ways in which this expression appears to have become the mantra for modern times and, like many mantras, its rearticulation can have a rather hypnotic effect. The increasingly frequent acknowledgment that the world, as we know it, is in a constant state of flux—with instability being the new form of stability and change being the new norm—can lead, perhaps paradoxically, to a situation where the mere *acknowledgment* of change is taken as evidence of an attempt to *respond* to that change.

Educators across all sectors, however, are required to respond to this contemporary environment in real, immediate and practical ways. This involves more than the occasional use of a new technology, or vague references to life-long and flexible learning. Educators today are challenged to negotiate the multiple needs of their students as well as the increasingly complex demands of their institutions without losing sight of their own fundamental principles; their own educational beliefs.

Throughout the papers in this collection, individuals working across a wide range of educational sectors explore some of the ways in which they have responded to the specific educational and cultural environments they are located within, in order to respond effectively to the needs of students. Together the papers work to identify ways in which educators can face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the day-to-day business of education.

Underpinning all of these papers is the recognition that effective, efficient and equitable education is necessarily dependent upon the development and practice of quality pedagogical processes. In using this term here we signal our appreciation of the central role of pedagogy in any educational context; whatever the age or discipline area of the learners. No matter where the learners are located and whatever their mode of study, they continually negotiate the pedagogical practices of those who conceptualise themselves variously as teachers, educators, lecturers, facilitators, mentors or managers.

As such, any attempt to construct educational programs that respond to 'new times' must focus not only on the 'what' and 'where' of education, but also on the nitty-gritty associated with 'how'. This may seem like an obvious point, but one of the greatest risks associated with the fluidity and instability of contemporary life is that in the rush to

respond with the necessary speed to a particular challenge or development (and the associated need to publicise loudly *what* we will teach and *where* we will teach) we will lose sight of key issues associated with *how* we will teach and *how* we will learn.

While clearly educators need the ability to respond effectively and with all due speed to the demands of the market place, in anything other than that shortest of short-terms, our ability to meet the needs of students, employers or professional bodies, will ultimately be measured against our ability to identify, respond to and respect diverse learning needs.

Which returns us to teaching and learning as the core business of pedagogy. Pedagogy involves a repertoire of skills and practices used by teachers. How and when they are used and with whom varies as teachers strive to work with students to undertake a world of discovery into the unknown, to meet their academic and social needs. As teachers develop professionally there is a need for them to become aware of different strategies and to experiment with them in their classrooms. When faced with a teaching challenge there is always the comfort of reverting to "tried and true" measures. No doubt these may be successful to varying degrees but the point promoted here is to try and expand the individual's repertoire so that different teaching skills are developed. Pedagogy needs to reflect the broader changes in society that affect schools and their purposes. This will necessitate challenging some of the dominant discourses of teaching and learning.

Of course we acknowledge that pedagogy is but one part of the message system, the others being curriculum and assessment. It is essential that the three parts pull together and support each other as a strong foundation in understanding the process of learning.

A commitment to futures oriented pedagogy that is both flexible and creative binds together the papers in this collection. Covering diverse themes, using different resources, and relating to multiple educational sectors, all of the papers nevertheless explore important issues concerning the ways in which futures oriented pedagogy can be conceptualised and actualised.

The first group of papers explores one of the most common 'themes' within these new educational times: the use of information technology in educational systems generally, and teaching practices specifically. The papers also share an interest in actor-network theory (or the sociology of translation) and use this approach to study and reflect upon educational innovation. Chris Bigum's paper distinguishes between two frameworks for making sense of the innovation process—translation and diffusion—and highlights the strengths and weakness of both these models. Building on a similar distinction, Nola Simpson examines the integration of communication and information technologies into the curriculum at a primary school. Leonie Rowan completes this triad of papers by exploring the way in which the imperative to 'innovate' tertiary curriculum and pedagogy often leads to the use of web-based teaching; and she highlights some of the important (and largely under researched) issues associated with the move 'on-line.'

The second cluster of papers is focused on the preparation of teachers for the futures oriented classroom, and the pedagogical issues associated with this process. Louise Soper investigates the transition from secondary school to university and students preparedness for tertiary study. She implores relevant stakeholders to unite to provide a seamless academic pathway to ensure that students are sufficiently skilled to make the transition from one educational site to the next.

Following on from this, Mary McDougall focuses on student teachers' understandings of what it means to be a primary school teacher. Exploring common beliefs expressed by student teachers—'teachers like kids' or 'called to teach'—McDougall examines the way in which these early perceptions impact upon their consciousness of their image of themselves as future teachers.

The third cluster of papers crosses a range of learning environments to examine a variety of specific pedagogical strategies. Bruce Knight, Peter Freebody and Carole McDiarmid contrast process writing with genre theory and is an attempt to quantitatively recognise the benefits of writing. By comparing the amount and types of writing to highlight the benefits associated with both models, the authors argue for the need for teachers to marry the two approaches. Further research will attempt to discover the important principles behind implementing such an approach in classrooms.

By probing teacher's recollections of the ways they use models to teach science, Alan Harrison attempts to better understand analogical reasoning as a common mode of communication in classrooms. Harrison wants to know whether deep knowledge, mental models and partial experiences merge during analogical thinking. Future research in this area will attempt to answer such questions as "do teachers actually do this in practice? How do they select models? How does the teacher and student negotiate a shared understanding of a model?" The aim is to assist in the development of a model for teaching science in contemporary times.

Of course, in contemporary times and diverse learning environments, pedagogy and assessment are not confined to traditional academics and the educators do not just deal with formal, written curriculum. The final set of papers

explores two dramatically different challenges. Christine Lister's study focuses on the role of peer assessors who support trainees completing on the job traineeships. Lister makes the persuasive point that competency based frameworks also require clear articulation of the roles and responsibilities associated with the employer, peer assessor and trainee.

In a different field, Cecily Knight discusses the impact of social change on children and childhood. This final paper expresses concerns about how children respond to social change. Knight examines a framework for responding to the challenges and explores how the changing nature of society relates to social discourse on childhood. She suggests there is an immediate need to address ways children are positioned by social change and ways in which educators can best support children in coping with change.

It is the difference between the papers, as much as their shared commitment to futures oriented pedagogy, that illustrates the key point of this collection.<sup>2</sup> Educators at all levels face significant challenges in their quest to provide efficient, effective, relevant, interesting and equitable education. The ways in which individuals respond to this context will be diverse and changing. Similarly, the ways in which various issues are prioritised or marginalised will reflect the particular agendas of individuals and organisations. The papers in this collection illustrate the important point, however, that better pedagogy requires educators to ask themselves many questions; and this questioning process is, of necessity, an on-going process.

For this reason the themes identified in this initial collection of papers will be followed next year with a series of themed books, each one exploring in more detail the key issues raised throughout this book. At this point, we put forward these papers in the spirit of opening and continuing the kind of dialogic practice that appears to be a necessary pre-condition of futures oriented pedagogy.