RESEARCH PAPER

The *inedito viavel* (untested feasibility) of practitioner imaginations: Reflections on the challenges and possibilities of dialogic praxis for equity and widening participation

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Drawing on Freirean notions of *praxis*, employing Nancy Fraser's three-dimensional framework of social justice, and implementing Burke's *Pedagogical Methodology*, this practitioner-developed paper investigates the dynamics of a critical and reflexive approach to re-imagining university outreach and classroom teaching practices. This introspective work acknowledges the ethically fraught terrain of equity and widening participation outreach. It resists positioning stakeholders of practice as research participants, instead folding the research gaze back onto the practitioner-authors and their 'unfinishedness'. Dialogic relation, critical reflection, and then interrogation of recorded versions of these relations and reflections, are the main methods of enquiry as we extensively contextualise and interrogate our practices. The dynamics producing and/or limiting the possibility of praxis that emerge include enabling and disabling power relations, resistance of hegemonic time structures, and co-developing dispositions of critical hope and unfinishedness to sustain provocation of the practitioner imagination. We carefully advocate for developing a generative instability; a contextually aware set of practices and meta-practices; a praxis that is continually and explicitly (re)situated in open, social, messy programmatic contexts.

Keywords: praxis, equity, widening participation, practitioner imagination, critical hope, pedagogical methodology

"I'm just - I'm finding that I'm stopping myself from just giving answers now."

Introduction

Drawing on critical, feminist and post-structural perspectives and theory, this paper developed as we investigated the underlying, generative dynamics of our collective, praxis-based approach to re-imagining university outreach and classroom teaching practices. We, the authors, are positioned professionally as an 'equity and widening participation' practitioner in an Australian higher education institution and as a secondary school teacher for the NSW Department of Education. We position ourselves personally as 'academic imposters'. We do so in the spirit of serious play (Lemke, 1995), appointing ourselves as Promethean-style characters (Horton, 2014); reaching into the literature to acquire the flame of critical praxis for a field increasingly

plagued by ethical dilemma.

The term *praxis* has a rich and contested history. Theorists and philosophers including Aristotle, Marx, Engels, Sartre, Sahlins, Bourdieu and Elliott have represented praxis as a form of cultural-doing (Allsup, 2003). This paper borrows explicitly from the notion of praxis offered by Brazilian educator and theorist Paulo Freire who saw it as a singularly human endeavour involving cycles of critical reflection and critical action directed at the structures to be transformed (Freire, 1972). Freire's influence directly shaped our investigation into recorded dialogue sessions upon which we reflected collaboratively over time, within a praxis-based approach (Burke, 2012).

Freirean perspectives on praxis, reflexivity and imagination (Freire, 1972; 1985; 2005; 2014) guided an optimistically critical interrogation of our facilitation of an outreach program exploring ongoing participation in forms of education with students from refugee and refugee-like backgrounds. We do not present our study as research on or with these young people. Rather, the paper is an investigation of *our* praxis as we engaged with a range of conceptual tools that form the foundation of the work of the university research and practice hub to which we both belong. Along with Freirean notions, Nancy Fraser's three dimensional framework for social justice assisted us to, firstly, attend to the fluid power relations circulating within our dialogue (Burke, 2012) and, secondly, to identify the ways our meta-practices might provide/limit the possibility of holding redistribution, representation and recognition (Fraser, 1997) together in ways that were of collective value.

One purpose of this paper is to explore the challenges and possibilities of a praxis approach to program development and practice. We do so in the critical hope (Bozalek, Leibowitz, Carolissen & Boler, 2014) of provoking the imagination of all persons working across the ethically fraught terrain of equity and widening participation policy, research, theory and practice (Burke, 2012; Southgate & Bennett, 2014). We do so respectfully, acknowledging the rich experience, knowledges and strengths practitioners hold and exhibit every day across the schooling and higher education sectors. We also acknowledge that there are many ways to understand reflexivity, and to practice reflexively.

A secondary purpose of the paper is the explicit production of an artefact. This paper represents a milestone on a purposefully endless journey of sensitising ourselves to the dimensions of inequality at play within our programmatic contexts. We feel this journey is the responsibility of the equity and widening participation researcher-practitioner given the potentially transformative yet often treacherous moral territory of the field. We promote this responsibility as a respectful form of accountability, particularly given the ongoing significant investment in equity and widening participation schemes against the backdrop of a neoliberal "war waged by the financial and political elite against youth, low-income groups, the elderly, poor minorities of colour, the unemployed, immigrants and others now considered disposable" (Giroux, 2016, p. 191).

The paper first sets out our methodological commitments and our methodical choice making processes in theorising our contexts and uncovering the generative dynamics of our collaboration. We then reflect on the power relations circulating within our dialogic relations, identifying their enabling *and* disabling impacts. We move to consider how hegemonic constructions of time impact on the possibility of praxis, and advocate for the 'making of time'. We explore how the concepts of critical hope, 'unfinishedness' and practitioner imaginations can operate to produce a complex praxis; one that is open to the world yet acknowledges the

multiples social contexts of practice and is aware of the ways these relate to wider power relations. We conclude by returning to the purposes of the paper, and point briefly toward ongoing praxis-based efforts to reimagine and reconfigure practices.

Multiple contexts of the paper

In this paper, we advocate for consideration of the multiple contexts in which equity and widening participation activity initiatives become constructed. We therefore believe it is important to discuss the multiple contexts of the paper. To do so, we draw on Lynch, Walker-Gibbs and Herbert (2015) who, in reflections on the design and evaluation of a university outreach initiative conducted in Australia, detail the *performative, policy and local* contexts of their work. We re-orient these dimensions in recognition of the way the policy and local contexts influence the performative.

This paper emerged in a policy context comparable to that identified by Lynch et al. (2015), that is, in an Australian university setting, working within policy and funding structures that relate to notions of access to higher education. The Australian higher education sector has experienced significant and ongoing Federal Government investment focused on equity-oriented activity since the Bradley Review almost a decade ago (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008) that led to the establishment in 2010 of the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP). Certainly, Widening Participation (WP) has emerged as a policy concern in a number of national contexts (Burke, 2017). The existence of the work referenced in the previous sentence – 'Access to and Widening Participation in Higher Education' representing 'A' in the *Encyclopaedia of International Higher Education Systems and Institutions* – speaks to the growing international significance of the widening access or participation discourse and associated activity.

Sociologists of education have demonstrated the ways in which those who occupy privileged social positions are often able to leverage powerfully their capitals and networks to 'game' schooling and higher education systems, thereby perpetuating privilege (Whitty, Hayton & Tang, 2016). Initiatives undertaken by universities to encourage and facilitate participation and success in and through higher education with underrepresented groups has become known as 'Widening Participation', in a linguistic and discursive importation of a problematic UK policy and program context. From a critical perspective, the field of Widening Participation is an ethically difficult one (Stevenson & Leconte, 2009; Burke & Hayton, 2011). One troubling discourse is the 'poverty of aspiration' that conflates the idea of material poverty with that of some assumed aspirational poverty. In this way, groups and individuals are constructed as 'lacking aspiration' for participation in higher education and, therefore, in need of having their aspirations 'raised'. Despite extensive critique in the UK and Australia, the discourse continues (for example, see Regional Universities Network, 2017). Thus, as an additional means of locating ourselves, we reject the premise of the 'raising aspirations' discourse and do not find that this deficit construction of persons 'lacking aspiration' even approximately represents our experiences working in strong and rich local communities that experience underrepresentation in further and higher education.

The partnership component of HEPPP aims "to increase the total number of people from low SES backgrounds who access and participate in higher education through effective outreach and related activities with appropriate stakeholders" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010, p. 16). Burke (2012) has critiqued the largely atheoretical nature of much widening participation practice, research and evaluation. In addition, as Harrison and Waller (2017) have identified in the UK, there is increasing research and policy interest in higher education participation across

parts of the globe, with a particular focus on determining the effectiveness of initiatives, often by measuring the easily measurable. For a comprehensive and rigorous review of initiatives across the student lifecycle in Australia, see the *Equity Initiatives Framework* (Bennett et al., 2015) that presents an appraisal of the evidence of impact.

We position this paper as 'close-up' and 'contextualised'. We therefore believe the localised and personal contexts of our investigation require explanation. One role performed by Sheena in the local community is that of teacher at a public high school in Newcastle. As part of her role, she currently coordinates a 'Refugee Transition Program' that was initially funded by the NSW Department of Education Multicultural Programs Unit and is now funded via the school's annual resource allocation model that includes equity 'loadings'. Sheena has run this program since 2013, working with students from refugee and refugee-like backgrounds to co-develop cultural awareness of paid work and employment opportunities in Australia and the pathways of access to these. A considerable portion of the program is devoted to an authentic or rich task; whereby students identify an issue of importance to them and develop ways to raise awareness of the issue or in some way resolve it. Her role is multi-layered, often as facilitator, and reliant on the direction that the young people are keen to take. It was via program visits to the local university that the authors began to collaborate. In 2016, the *Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education* (CEEHE) seconded Sheena one day a week to engage with the praxis-based, conceptual framework adopted by the Centre and to consider the ways students from refugee backgrounds navigate education systems. This has provided the opportunity to reflect on practices, read key research in the area, and to dialogue reflexively in partnership with Matt.

Matt's commitment to the field of access to education developed through experiences as a community development professional working on projects in Australia and in parts of Asia and Africa, and as a classroom teacher in Australian high schools. Originally from the mid north coast of NSW, he is careful to note that as a white male raised by two passionate educators in a home free from violence, misrecognition or hunger, his capacity to understand and interpret experiences of underrepresentation and marginalisation is limited to his empathic capacity. Since 2011, he has worked at the University of Newcastle as an outreach practitioner and is currently enrolled in a PhD with CEEHE, investigating the concealed impacts of outreach connections. He has an interest in the ways sophisticated participatory methodologies have the potential to make evaluative processes more productive, and to deliver nuanced and contextualised understandings of the underlying dynamics that produce program impact.

We want also to locate this paper in the socio-geographical history of Newcastle, although we recognise that a thorough treatment is not possible within the scope of this paper. With a long and rich Indigenous and European history and culture, the Hunter region and surrounds can currently be broadly characterised as transitioning to a post-industrial socioeconomic position, with a modern history of now obsolete steel production and declining yet still large-scale coal mining and export via ongoing shipping operations from a working harbour. The University of Newcastle is the primary provider of higher education in the region and has a long history of engagement with local communities. It is easy to mis/re/present the region, in deficit terms, as *dis*advantaged (McManus, 2006). This is because the region *can* be characterised by lower histories of participation into and through further and higher education compared with state and national averages, along with lower rates of employment compared to state and national averages. It is our position that we refer here to the Hunter as having *strong communities surviving various forms of oppression and marginalisation*.

Stephen Ball (2003) in 'The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity' presents

performativity as "a new mode of state regulation which makes it possible to govern in an 'advanced liberal' way" (p. 215). A performative context of this paper is a sense of responsibility to communicate the usefulness of an approach we have taken as practitioners to understand, evaluate and improve our practices. The perception of pressure to perform 'successful' use of funding/time is not unique to our context yet we have used scarce resources (HEPPP funding) over a precious duration to develop what we understand to be knowledge through dialogic action and reflection that is 'close' to practice. We feel this as an ethical, moral responsibility to demonstrate progress, yet that it is one that is shaped by a wider performative culture. Approaches that resist the dominant practices, as praxis-based frameworks might do, can also be mis/understood, and therefore a discursive practice in this paper, while attempting to maintain a critical awareness of our relative privileges and biases, is to challenge our own imaginations, and those of practitioners operating across the field of access to forms of education. Critical awareness of these types of performative and ethical considerations can be developed through praxis-based methodologies, and in the next section we detail one such approach adopted for this investigation.

Methodology

Situated across and within multiple educational contexts, we aimed to use critical action and critical reflection to investigate our own equity and widening participation practices, and our practitioner imaginations, as we engaged with educational structures and other participants in a process of (aiming to) 'make a difference'. We therefore chose a Pedagogical Methodology (Burke, Crozier & Misiaszek, 2017) to guide the research design, the methods of data production, and the iterations of analysis and interpretation.

Pedagogical Methodology (PM) aims to, "cultivate spaces of praxis and critical reflexivity for 'research that makes a difference'" (Burke et al., 2017, p. 49). While Burke and colleagues accept and explore the ways difference-making is a fraught concept, we were enticed by PM because we understood it to provide the possibility of, "opening up collaborative, collective, dialogical and participatory … spaces which, through the research processes, engage participants in pedagogical relations" (p. 52). This approach to research suited our study in terms of developing something of a dialogue *about* praxis as it emerged – an intersubjective meta-praxis perhaps – by entering into investigation of our social realities of educational practice yet with the intention of continuing to act upon the structures requiring attention if 'difference' was to be made (Freire, 1972). PM draws broadly on post/structuralism, Freirean perspectives and feminism to build an approach that is oriented toward more socially just possibilities in that it can facilitate research processes that unearth deeper understandings of material inequality, social structures, and various types and levels of misrecognition.

Our approach has also been guided by a methodological framework for evaluating equity and widening participation practice that is under ongoing construction at CEEHE (Burke & Lumb, forthcoming). This methodological framework for evaluation builds on PM to accept a depth ontology, bringing into focus the stratified nature of our multiple social fields to allow for a collective theorisation of the dynamic forces that cannot be simply cast as variables in programmatic contexts, yet directly produce the impacts observed. Burke and Lumb (forthcoming), while not presenting their methodology as 'realist', cautiously draw on realist onto-epistemologies (Bhaskar, 1979; Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Clegg, 2016) to identify opportunities for collaboratively theorising the causal structures and forces that operate at depth within our social practices to produce the intended and unintended 'outcomes' observed in the various contexts of our practice.

Our methods reflect the nature of the methodology outlined above. Over the space of nearly twelve months, in parallel to ongoing 'acting' in our roles, we audio-recorded ourselves in multiple extended sessions of intentionally 'Freirean' dialogue. Freire (1972) understands dialogue as a relational process between equals, one that requires mutual trust and respect, care and commitment. The dialogic method of enquiry then requires each participant to question what they know and to accept that the dialogic process will make it possible for existing thoughts to shift and for new knowledge to be created (Freire, 1972). Our dialogue consciously attempted to reflect and express the methodological elements embedded in PM – for example, recognising power relations, remaining as aware as possible of the difficulties and importance of holding together the dimensions of 'representation, redistribution and recognition' (Fraser, 1997) and thinking about our embodied subjectivities (McNay, 2008; Burke, 2012). The purpose of the dialogical relations remained focused on the challenges and possibilities of past, present and future equity and widening participation practice. The audio from these sessions was transcribed and the transcriptions read and re-read by both of us multiple times, over many months. This transcription data was thematically coded by each of us separately and then multiple sessions were held to draw out emergent and collectively valued themes for further analysis and interpretation.

We also used our reading and writing as methods of enquiry. Many journal articles and some books were read closely in parallel and discussed at length, including *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1972) and *The Right to Higher Education* (Burke, 2012). Through this process, we unpacked the unfamiliar, redistributed understanding back and forth, and found ways to represent our stances on concepts and the links with our practice. We also read much literature from the more focused field of educational access for students from refugee backgrounds, not to develop research findings on or with this group, but to further contextualise our dialogic praxis. Written reflections on practice became milestones of insight and understanding to guide our co-theorisation of underlying dynamics in and through time. In referring to *dynamics* here, we are borrowing from Burke and Lumb (forthcoming) when they describe the nuanced, hopeful, collective theories of possible change that constitute the explanation of the relationship between program resources and program impacts.

A key aim was to create for ourselves a generative space for the researcher-practitioner imagination. We wanted to acknowledge the discourses of deficit and the politics of misrecognition at play within our own practices; discourses that construct underrepresented groups in particular ways, preventing the possibility of more socially just educational realities. We wanted to provide space for critical questioning and dialogue against the backdrop of increasingly dominant neoliberal agendas for globalisation, privatisation, and decentralisation of education (Naidoo & Whitty, 2014).

Having introduced the multiple purposes and contexts of the paper, and provided a brief treatment of our approach to producing practitioner knowledge, we move now to the first of many generative dynamics we found at play in our dialogic praxis: that of enabling and disabling power relations.

The power (relations) and (potential) paralysis of dialogic praxis

In this section, we discuss the (at times simultaneously) enabling and disabling power relations circulating within the dialogue of our collective praxis. We also share briefly our difficulties in developing theory, and acknowledge the limits of shared understanding. To do so, we are guided directly by our Pedagogical Methodology (Burke et al., 2017) which engages post-structural understandings of power, along with the three-dimensional conception of social justice

developed by Nancy Fraser, identifying the ways *redistribution*, *representation* and *recognition* provide the possibility (when held together) of navigating participative projects, including collective praxis.

In dialogue with each 'other', we sought to recognise the 'true word' (Freire, 1972). We wished to speak authentically in the world. It was not easy though, as we had to come to know each other, in a particular way. Reading the transcripts across the sessions of dialogue, an early pattern emerges: that of the positioned knower, the PhD student and full-time member of CEEHE (i.e. Matt) who, it seems accidentally, yet for large sections of earlier sessions, takes on the role of the question asker. An unintended method emerges here, as one dialogic participant unwittingly slips into the role of the realist interviewer (Manzano, 2016), testing existing personal/sociological theory rather than being entirely open to the possibility of the conversation. Over successive sessions, however, a more authentic parity of dialogic status between Sheena and Matt emerges and co-theorisation becomes. Freire's (2014) *Pedagogy of Hope* describes how the emotive, passionate dimensions of silence shattering dialogue can call into possibility a 'lovelier world', an anticipation of valued change. In the later transcripts, we begin to challenge one another, as equals seeking a new pedagogical paradigm, and we begin to (re)imagine practices in, at times, quite radical ways.

This shift reminds us that we should not imagine power as a solely oppressive and repressive social dynamic. Burke (2012), drawing on Foucault, explains how "no particular manifestation of power is inevitable but that 'freedom' concerns the will to exercise power differently" (p. 47). A particular passage from the transcripts illustrates the possibility of dialogue where power is operating in productive ways; where we (towards the end of a session) respectfully challenge one another around the notion of student choice, a vexed prospect in the current neoliberal climate:

> Matt: *Just posing the problem. Opening it up and then … For example, when they talked about the doctor. You know, wellbeing and the solution for them might have been having a doctor at the school. And to that situation you brought your experiences of what, how– not how possible – but how plausible that could be as a project.*
>
> Sheena: *Yeah exactly. That almost canned it. Because my picture was, how on earth are we going to do that? You know, I want it to be authentic. But just by accessing support within the school, we were able to shift it.*
>
> Matt: *I think for me – this is an interpretation of this notion of choice making processes – is that it's constantly negotiation.*
>
> Sheena: *Which I think that's the Freirean thing, isn't it? That it's the truth sits between the arguments and the perspectives. It's in there somewhere. So it's not just all driven by the student or the teacher. It's shared. But I guess the onus is on the teacher to be very mindful of their own potential power and role.*
>
> Matt: *Absolutely. The influence. Their position, power that flows from that. I think the way forward is always that critical reflectivity. This exhausting process of constantly monitoring assumptions and things you are bringing to those moments. A meta reflexivity.*
>
> Sheena: *Absolutely, it really helps to talk it out doesn't it?*

There is a danger, however, in dialogue where it is felt that power relations appear to have been

revealed and resolved. Also, while the capacity to work collectively towards new understandings is a powerful tool for praxis, if the 'equality' of these relations becomes 'familiarity' and 'comfort' it can also slide easily, rather unfortunately, into unquestioning reinforcement of a new collective understanding, or a sense that one exists where it does not. Dialogic praxis, as Freire regards it, needs to be inherently unstable, critical and self-referential. Moreover, as Lemke (1995) explains:

> If meta-theory means theory about what theories are and should be, then meta-practices are practices which practice on themselves … If we do this sort of thing, then our practices (and meta-practices) will be *unstable*, because at every turn we must step back into and so out of that turn, making the next turn at which this must happen yet again. This is not so easy to do, or to live with. Praxis is its own meta-praxis. (p. 158 [original emphasis])

We end this section by acknowledging the potential for paralysis when entering regular purposeful, reflexive dialogic relation within a praxis-based framework. Present within our sessions of dialogue was the potential trap of developing 'theory for theory's sake', as was the trap of seeking 'truth'. It was, however, the Freirean understanding of dialogue situated within praxis that provided us an escape from this potential paralysis, by reminding ourselves that the goal of theorisation by critical *reflection-action* is not to produce theory as an end-goal, but to produce theory as a tool for the next round of critical *action-reflection*. While the limitations of research processes - including, for example, administrative technologies of ethics approval - prevent us from sharing in this paper our experiences with students, we certainly did act-reflect within the context of our widening participation practice. This action-reflection will perhaps be shared in a subsequent paper. It was, however, these theories as conceptual tools - including 'everyday' theories of getting on and getting by, and program theories about change and development, and established sociological theories - that provided a way out of the dialogue and into the process of praxis in the world. We recognised that this coming to terms with the challenges and possibilities of dialogic praxis takes time. The next section explores in more depth our experiences of *time* and the way it influences our practices and meta-practices.

'Making' time

We focus now on how time structures influenced our reflexive dialogue and, in turn, influenced our knowledge of the role of time in WP and classroom practices. We also link our experiences to recent literature on the concept of time and advocate the importance of 'making time' for dialogue within praxis, while identifying some difficulties with this very proposal.

Bennett and Burke (2017) articulate the differences between relational, non-neutral time as opposed to linear, objective, neutral notions of time that are disconnected from the events and people it influences. Drawing on Adam (1998; 2004), these authors provide a view of the construct of time as a plutocracy of 'timescapes', a function of the social position and location of each individual person, in which all people experience time differently.

We trialled reflexive dialogue with an open, investigational attitude that involved weekly meetings over a twelve-month period, usually lasting 90 minutes to two hours, depending on our recent readings, our experiences and recorded reflections. We allowed for relatively open-ended meetings rather than limited, shorter timeframes. In keeping with the chosen methodology, our intention was to practice Freirean dialogue, attuned to Nancy Fraser's multi-dimensional social justice framework. We also borrowed carefully from different yet related insights into the undercurrents of our embodied habitus (McNay, 2008) and embodied subjectivities (Burke,

2012) to recognise as integral and valued components of the process, our emotional perception and experience as *humans*. It was only upon this process of reflecting together and reading/coding transcripts of dialogue that we identified our experience of traversing back and forth between our reflexive dialogic timescape to the timescapes of our roles as educational practitioners outside of this dialogic context.

Freire (1972) discussed a notion of dialogic praxis in which a social being is regarded as a creative anticipation of future uncertainty. We noticed that extensive time allowances for dialogue within practice provided the possibility of a transformative *mesh* of shared experience, understanding and questioning. Freed from conventional, performative time-that-is-limited pressure (and although we still had other work and life commitments) we were able to generate our own knowing and *not* knowing with a sense of enjoyment and enthusiasm, calm and quiet, rather than fear and inadequacy, invisibility and anxiety (Fraser, 1997). Over time, we carefully listened to each other, simultaneously explored and expressed ideas, thought aloud, and queried. We felt free to wonder and make linkages between our experiences and emotions, and our insights into theory and research in order to inform our praxis and shape how, as practitioners, we might work differently with students and community members in their journeys of discovery, struggle and navigation of education systems and processes. We were safe to 'imagineer' possibilities for the future (Dubin & Prins, 2011). The resulting *mesh* could be viewed as a complex and dynamic temporal artefact, constituted in a crucible of evolving and socially derived emotional knowledge, transforming our perceptions and actions – all contingent on the availability of adequate time.

Freire (1972) talks of the humanising, recuperative value of reflexive dialogue and praxis. Although individual experiences of this liberation are likely to be as varied as there are humans, Sheena describes her own experience as 'lifesaving'. Indeed, her initial response to the dialogic timescape was a sense of novelty, relief and release. Yet Sheena's prior identification with dominant meritocratic hegemonies of productive time management, developed over a lifetime and particularly during 17 years as an educator in the schooling system, led to some difficulty as she began to negotiate periods of reflective thinking and reflexive dialogue. Her reflections during this time capture a sense of disquiet, insecurity and guilt – and herein lies a challenge for our advocacy of 'making time for praxis'. The sense of inner conflict experienced by Sheena when attempting to explain this dialogic, time-rich process to fellow educators may highlight how strongly teachers (and other professionals) identify with notions of 'productive' or 'responsible' time use, achieved through effective 'time management'.

Bennett and Burke's (2017) discussion of time provides some insight for Sheena's inner conflict, sitting between realisation and betrayal. Drawing on Adam, Heidegger and Deleuze, they expose the way time defined as 'neutral', acts as a function of the dominant meritocratic hegemonies which emphasise homogenous, as opposed to varied, experiences of time, and what this means for educators and WP practitioners. The meritocratic ideal: "time is money" is transmitted throughout the sector, equating to expectations for productivity because of time 'spent'. The ability of individuals to perform complex tasks in time-limited formations is reified, while individual performance relative to this paradigm also determines who is deemed 'aspirational' or worthy. Sheena reflects below on the way this dominant hegemony of 'neutral' time operates to shape teacher identity as a secondary school teacher:

> Teaching is recognised to be a caring profession, however, what's not recognised as
> visibly, is the reinforcement of neoliberal ideology within the system, which leaves
> little time for caring. My participation in this time-limited and segmented system has

therefore structured my thinking processes on what I have to do, meaning how efficiently I can process the syllabus into 'suitable' content for the students within an extremely crowded curriculum. Simultaneously, my teacher-centred (rather than student-centred) approach to this dominant hegemony of productive time positions me, the teacher, as the most powerful and knowledgeable representative of the system in my classroom in relation to my students, as varied consumers of this knowledge. Additional pressure to maintain the pace is applied via the measurement of my performance, digitally and in real time, weighing my ability to add value to the knowledge and understanding of my students whose own learning performances and products are graded digitally and monitored remotely via management software.

Sheena then describes the broad impact these structures have on her pedagogical approach:

Influenced by this notion of productive time and performance pressure, my relationship with my students is consequently tenuous. There is never enough time to properly build connections and authentically trusting relationships with students, to properly unpack issues they have in relation to their learning or, more importantly, to unpack their perspective on what is important or relevant to them or at the very least, to properly investigate the designated content.

A stark contrast to the deeper levels of conceptual development she experienced immersed in time rich reflexive dialogue, the temporal constraints that previously shaped Sheena's identity as a teacher when deconstructed in dialogue simultaneously revealed their inherent limitations as a paradigm and a pedagogical process. In accordance with Freire's (1972) notions of continual becoming, humanisation, and *recuperar* (to recover or reclaim), Sheena began to think about her world differently. The paradigmatic transformation she experienced gives insight to the possibilities for the processes underpinning collective praxis.

Ultimately, however, Freirean praxis determines that our reflection must inform action and vice versa. As a consequence of this intensive and complex reflection, Sheena's practice did fundamentally change. She was no longer unconscious to the power hegemonies operating within the education sector or her embodiment and reproduction of these hegemonies. Furthermore, she felt compelled to act in accordance with the insights she had developed. In small ways, in her own classroom she began to practice discussion that acknowledged her students as young people with multiple pressures, simultaneously influenced by enabling/disabling power relations. Taking small steps, undertaking lines of questioning and discussion with her students in relation to the unstable, hegemonic nature of course content, she started to reinvent her pedagogical practices.

With reference to this transition, the following sample of dialogue sees us as two practitioners using our time to focus, and to search: listening inside and outside for insight to emerge, participating in a reflective dialogue about choice making, willing to be confused or wrong, prepared to keep listening and expressing, digging down to the meaning - being heard.

Matt:	*But it's about being careful, or just being sensitive to the power relations that flow through choice making processes. I don't know. Does that land for you?*
Sheena:	*Would that be for me to, sort of, inform myself, that actually … No I don't know.*
Matt:	*I don't know if it's helpful at all.*

> Sheena: *Choice making process ... Oh, well maybe the awareness is about sort of talking with the students about how there's actually ... Sometimes in a group, someone ... Okay maybe asking the question. "Okay, do you find that when you're in a group, when someone says, 'We're going to do it this way' if they are the popular person, then everyone agrees?" Maybe looking at it that way?*
>
> Matt: *Yeah. I guess you could even ask an even broader question and see if they would present that scenario too. Like, even asking a broad question about ...*
>
> Sheena: *Yeah. Like how do we make choice?*

By giving open-ended or extensive time to reflexive dialogue, as opposed to limited, defined time, we provide the possibility of voice and representation. When we make time, we can more easily recognise the other. We are renewed.

In this section we have explored the way time critically impacted our dialogic encounters, within our praxis-based approach. In the next section we theorise the ways dispositions of critical hope, 'unfinishedness' and practitioner imaginations operated as generative tools to produce a complex and contextualised praxis.

Critical hope, 'unfinishedness' and the practitioner imagination

Paulo Freire built many ideas on the notion that we are incomplete. In this section, we again examine our dialogue and reflections to theorise how a critical form of hope fed the flames of our praxis, helping us to see ourselves as 'unfinished', and opening us up as practitioners to imaginal provocation which, in turn, helped to reshape our practice.

Horton (2014) contributes to our historical understandings and implementations of the concept of hope, explaining how the classic story of *hope* emerges from Greek mythology with a description by the historian Hesiod of the character of Prometheus in the play *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus. Prometheus stole fire for humanity from Zeus, and paid a heavy price. In this act, he provided though, a hopeful human future, a portal to liberating knowledge, and an example of altruistic agency. Horton shows how the torch of hope is picked up repeatedly throughout civilisation's history by influential figures, albeit in very different ways, including these luminaries: Francis Bacon, Immanuel Kant (and the Kantian scholar Hannah Arendt), Georg Hegel, Karl Marx, Ernst Bloch and Paulo Freire. As highlighted above, Freire, for example, draws on Ernest Bloch's seminal work *The Principle of Hope* when exploring ideas related to incompleteness and a utopian approach that is not about the construction of some ideal end, but more fundamentally, that change is possible. Our Freirean dialogue retained a critically hopeful tone, as the baton of purposeful conversation was handed respectfully back and forth, resembling a dialogic praxis that is a "creative anticipation of future uncertainty on the part of social actors" (McNay, 1999, as cited in Burke et al., 2017, p. 123). In his discussion of open social systems, Lemke (1995) uses a flame metaphor as a think piece, explaining that a flame is a border zone with a dynamic structure that must stay open to its environment to survive. This metaphor strikes us as apt for considering how co-produced praxis operates in terms of requiring a constant (re)contextualisation of itself. In our experience, dialogic praxis perishes (becomes uncritical reflection or action) when the fine balance between internal and external nourishment is lost. This precarious state is important. Without it, praxis, as we understand it, would not be possible.

In 1987, Paulo Freire and Myles Horton engaged in dialogue to 'speak a book' together. The result was *We Make the Road by Walking*, a conversation that meanders through Freire and

Horton's perspectives on education and social change. The exchange opens in an awkward yet illuminating manner, with Freire suggesting that they commence by talking about all things unrelated to the point of the book. He suggests instead that they embark on their extended and purposeful dialogue by saying something to each other about their "…very existence in the world. We should not start, for example, speaking about the objectives of education. Do you see that this is not for me?" (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 5).

When considering the transcripts of our own sessions of purposeful dialogue, a curious pattern is discernible. The richest insights appear to develop where the conversation immediately prior has traversed the terrain of the practitioner's existence in the world rather than the objectives of the practice. It almost feels as though insight requires metaphor or allegory, that it cannot necessarily be instrumentally acquired via focused attention. It is as though a peripheral sociological viewpoint is helpful in unearthing dialogic insight. Lying beyond a basic production of 'common ground' or even 'kinship connections', we refer here to a constant re-contextualisation of the conversation in the world.

This is where understandings of practice emerge, and the imagination is provoked into a consideration of the *untested feasibility*, toward the *limit situation* (Freire, 1972) of the practitioner's imaginable reality. There exists an awkwardness in the data too, as the creation of a new dialogic timescape commences, as the discussion moves from our existence in the world across to our objectives in purposeful ways. Recognising these transitions, and coming to embrace them, have become useful for our form of practitioner collaboration.

Sheena:	*Yeah, it's kind of - it's a - it's a bit of a - it's tricky, isn't it, because you've, you know, for example, you know, because I've read Freire right, you know that my perspective has really changed radically, and my teaching. It's started to change my teaching practice too.*
Matt:	*In what way?*
Sheena:	*I'm just - I'm finding that I'm stopping myself from just giving answers now.*
Matt:	*Wow.*
Sheena:	*More so, like, I'm just finding that I'm…*
Matt:	*What do you do; do you run out of the room? [laughing] No.*
Sheena:	*I just - I start to and then I go, "But - but what do you think? Do you think," you know, like, I just - I sort of find myself starting to make it…*
Matt:	*Wow, that pause.*
Sheena:	*Yeah.*
Matt:	*Wow. Isn't that powerful?*
Sheena:	*Yeah, it is powerful. I mean, you know, it's not happening all the time. It depends on what's happening in the room.*

An interpersonal hesitance appears in our dialogic data in two ways. Firstly, it appears in the early fumbling stages of each session, and throughout most of the earlier sessions as unaddressed power relations undermine the process, as a form of *awkward insecurity*. Secondly, it appears in the latter stages of each session, and throughout most of the latter sessions as humble and equal dialogic relations developed, as a form of *generative instability*. This second form is crucial for dialogue and for praxis. This productive instability is an openness to the social system, to the 'other', to the world. It is an acceptance, as practitioners, of our vulnerabilities and our unfinishedness as an act of resistance against hegemonic structural forces demanding sleight-of-

hand performances of confidence and guarantee, of generalizable evidence for 'what works', of certainty and spin. The notion of unfinishedness, a critically hopeful and utopic resource, fans the flames of open, reflexive praxis.

Unfinishedness has a direct and important impact on the practitioner imagination. Dubin and Prins' (2011) work on the development of an 'imaginal literacy' in educational settings is useful here to consider the implications for programs of practice whether they be in a school classroom or lecture theatre, in a community setting, a health facility, or other context of 'practice'. The unfinished practitioner is a lifelong learner, seeking pedagogical insight in every experience, wringing from each social encounter a new perspective, a formative evaluation of impact, a critical reflection-action on the next possible action-reflection. If, as Freire contends, all educational processes are political, then the edu-political imagination is also provoked via this paradigm of unfinishedness, providing the possibility of stakeholders collectively identifying and documenting (Appadurai, 2006) oppression, misrecognition and marginalisation where they inevitably exist.

Our experience of intentionally Freirean dialogue provided a relatively safe space for our practitioner imaginations to embrace its own vulnerabilities as a form of resistance against the prevailing hegemonic forces. We used the available time and space to create a praxis proposal that broadens participation beyond the authors in what we understand to be ethical ways. We struggle to imagine what will happen, which we feel is important.

Concluding thoughts

In this paper we have explored ways practitioners can consider our own *inedito viavel* (untested feasibility) in terms of our imaginations developing always toward new possibilities. We want to conclude with one example of how our practice changed via the approach investigated.

As noted earlier in the paper, Freire (1972) understood praxis as critical reflection and critical action directed at the structures to be transformed. It was in this spirit that the authors dialogued within their praxis to re-imagine a dimension of their shared work – an annual visit by school students from refugee backgrounds to a university campus. Visits to university campuses by school students and community members are a common element of outreach projects designed to widen access to higher education (Bennett et al., 2015) yet critical approaches to campus visits are rare (Campano, Ngo, Low & Jacobs, 2016). By reviewing our previous campus visit practices, we felt it would be appropriate to support the student group to deconstruct collectively the opening pedagogical space (the lecture theatre in which school students and university students met). This translated into a lively, facilitated discussion about the physical positioning of the lecterns, chairs and screens, and the power relations this spatial arrangement might establish. As the opening experience of the visit, it established a potent platform. We intend to explore the implications of these reinvented practices via a separate paper, where there is the appropriate space to unpack and theorise the consequences and impacts of the approach. Although the re-invented campus visit had unintended consequences these tended to emerge where we as practitioners were working through the more complex understandings of the responsibilities inherent in preparing critical pedagogical spaces.

> *Matt:*   *It was interesting wasn't it? Because it didn't turn out the way we thought, and that's great! I think it was part of the magic of it. Even though it had its rough edges, because there was a sense that it was evolving a bit. It wasn't too manufactured.*

We found that campus visits curated as critical, open theatres of dialogue, rather than as prescriptively directed 'scenes', afford the possibility of emergence – for a broader range of actors and their ideas. This is not to say that the responsibility or duty of care of the practitioner disappears. The responsibility increases. The duty of care expands. The approach requires care-full (more than just careful) attention and a moment-to-moment reflexive response.

It is not our intention to present this small, reflective piece as 'evidence'. Nor do we present this paper to advocate for the reproduction of our own processes in different contexts. We agree with Clegg, Stevenson and Burke (2016) that much 'evidence-based' policy and practice is constructed on questionable foundations. We also recognise that we have chosen to build on relatively unstable ground, and that our approach and the methods implemented will cause some to read with suspicion. This reaction, we welcome. For, as Lemke (1995) notes:

> Praxis is unstable and unpredictable; each step we take along this road makes new possibilities that were not there for us before ... *Critical praxis* practices the hermeneutic of suspicion (Ricoeur, 1970); it assumes that we *are* part of the problem, that even our most basic beliefs and values should be suspect. (p. 131 [original emphasis])

The problem of *generalising* 'what works' across contexts has been heavily critiqued (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Instead, we seek a critical *specification*, and advocate for ongoing iterations of consideration in terms of the approaches taken to equity and widening participation research and practice. We humbly advocate for re-shaping community connection via contextually aware practice; a praxis that is 'reflexive' in that it is endlessly and explicitly (re)situated in our open, social, messy programmatic contexts. In thinking beyond this paper, we see ourselves as 'unfinished', exploring our own untested feasibilities so that we might continue to work with, in ever emerging and creative ways, the many different stakeholders we encounter through our practices.

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