Book Chapter – Just Pedagogy

Recognition & Belonging in Enabling Education

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Introduction

As an enabling educator at a South Australian university, my educational project has involved making senese of the transition between secondary school and first year undergraduate study where I have sought to understand where the students have come and how we might prepare them for university. Enabling programs are defined as award programs of instruction that incorporate enabling subjects or modules designed to develop academic skills to facilitate the transition of students into higher level award programs (National Association of Enabling Educators in Australia, 2019). I have come to recognise the role of enabling education in disrupting a number of pedagogical problematics in secondary schools and universities such that young people, who have previously been denied, can access and participation in higher education (Hattam & Bilic 2019).

Over the last decade, the enabling sector has flourished across Australia where practitioners and educators have begun to define a distinctive approach to teaching students in preparatory programs as well as courses taught in universities. Attention to a scholarship of teaching in enabling education over a period of time has culminated in a collective teaching philosophy informed by pedagogies for social justice that is increasingly known as 'enabling pedagogy' (Bennett et al., 2016; Hattam & Stokes 2019; Stokes 2014). Although embedded within the Higher Education (HE) institutions, the 'enabling' space is distinct to traditional HE due to the higher representation of students from recognised equity groups (Bennett et al., 2016; Crawford, 2015; Stokes, 2014).

Our enabling program is taught at UniSA College (of University of South Australia) which was created to closely align with Australia's widening participation targets, specifically the 2020 target that "20 per cent of undergraduate enrolments in HE should be students from low socio-economic backgrounds" (Bradley 2008, p. xiv). Sixty four percent of students that enrol in our pathway programs belong to a defined equity group, with 56.5% of the 2019 student cohort coming from low socio-economic status groups (SES) where equity categories often intersect, and our students experience 'insersectional' marginalisation (Burke, Crozier & Misiaszek, 2017).

The UniSA College programs offer an alternative pathway into university for students that have either not achieved the entry score needed for a Bachelor program or for students who have not completed Year 12 at high school. The program is supported through adequate resourcing both institutionally and Federally, with a full-cross disciplinary suite of courses that are taught by experienced teaching academics with post-graduate qualifications. The program currently sits outside the Australian Qualification Framework and South Australian Certificate of Education requirements, so we are permitted a significant level of freedom over our curriculum development. The most popular pathway program in terms of volume of students is the Foundation Studies program and is completely open-access and fee-free. The twelve-month program offers a range of academic literacy courses as well as discipline-specific courses to prepare students for their destination degree. Numbers have grown from

approximately 300 commencing students in 2011 to over 1,000 commencing new students each year since 2016. The College also offers a suite of two-year Diploma programs as well as an Aboriginal Pathway Program that is offered in the metropole and across five different regional sites.

My own professional inquiry has led me to question why students do not take a traditional pathway to university. I am interested in what occurs during their secondary years that limits or inhibits their completion of schooling as well as learning about what we can do differently in the enabling space that can better engage the disengaged. As a sociologist, I am concerned with the social reproduction function of education (Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977) and the inequality created within and by the system. This documented inequality reveals that more young people from middle and upper-class backgrounds enrol into and complete tertiary study than young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Lamb et al. 2015). In a just society, all should have the opportunities to reap the 'benefits' from further study (Atherton, Dumangane & Whitty 2015, p. 10).

However, from anecdotal discussions with students in our enabling programs, I developed a picture that some high schools in South Australia engaged in a range of 'exclusionary' (Sibley, 1995 p. ix cited in Smyth & Hattam, 2004. p. 10) practices contributing to students making the decision to leave school early. These discussions led to my formal inquiry into students' experiences of enabling education, in comparison with their secondary schooling. I interviewed ten students who self-identified as early-school leavers. In this chapter, I discuss research findings from two of the interviews as well as advance the concept of 'critical' enabling pedagogy by aligning it with critical pedagogy and emotional work enacted by enabling educators in higher education as 'emotional champions' (O'Shea, 2019). The students accounts are located inside the cultural geography of a school (Smyth & Hattam, 2004) and aligned with Fraser's 'Partity of Participation' that describes the feelings of misrecognition/recognition.

Background: The 'Widening Participation' Agenda

Despite a neo-liberal logic that is increasingly shaping the university sector, universities have an established and widely accepted agenda of WP education for underrepresented groups (Bennett et al., 2012). The Federal government reports an increase in high school retention over the last twenty-plus years with a jump from 66.9% Apparent Retention in 1997 (ABS figures 1997) to 84% Apparent Retention in 2019 (ABS figures 2019). However, the problem remains that the lower school completion rates and the possibilities of entering university for students from low-SES backgrounds. Other studies provide a more nuanced account according to demographic factors show that 26% young people do not complete year 12 by age 19 with 40% of low SES young people not completing year 12 by age 19 (Lamb et al., 2015).

WP initiatives have increased participation of students from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds into undergraduate programs. Between 2008 and 2015, there was an increase of 50.4 per cent of student enrolments from lower-socioeconomic groups into university programs (NCSEHE, 2017), with a significant number entering via enabling pathways. However, completion numbers according to socio-economic band reveal a disparity as 68.9 per cent of students from lower-SES backgrounds complete their university degree compared with 77.7 per cent of students in the higher-SES band (Edwards & McMillan, 2015, p. 6). While a deficit explanation would attribute the lower completion number of working-class students lack of

resilience or low aspirations (Burke, 2002), there are strong and continuing arguments regarding problems with HE pedagogy.

Pedagogical problems in higher education

WP policy is focused on increasing access and entry routes into higher education. Burke et al. argue the policy should pay attention to the "ways that higher education pedagogies might also be complicit in the reproduction of inequalities *even after entry* to higher education has been achieved" (2017, pp. 1-2). Participation and inclusion of diverse identities focuses on

> transforming the individual student subject, which is constructed through discourses of 'neediness' and connected assumptions of lack and deficiency, to become a particular kind of (neoliberal) participant that is 'independent', 'resilient', 'confident' and 'employable' (p. 2)

It seems that HE pedagogy relies significantly on the 'banking method' of education (Freire, 1973) with one-way communication from teacher to student typically in a lecture format or online reading. The problems with HE pedagogy are not just symptomatic of the power dynamic between teacher and students but also the way that universities define who belongs and its exclusive culture (Habel & Whitman, 2016). Traditionally, a 'proper' university student (read legitimate) is confident and independent, and someone who has a voice (but knows when to be quiet) (Burke et al., 2017). The subject position of the legitimate university student is constructed along class, ethnic and gendered lines, and according to these qualities is more likely to be white, middle class and male (Burke et al., 2017). Academics frame the problem of difficulties of "fitting in" with the university culture" as a deficit of non-traditonal students (O'Shea, Lysaght, Roberts & Harwood, 2015, p. 3).

Moving beyond the deficit framimg, Burke et al. (2017, p. 3) propose HE institutions work towards *pedagogic participation* that 'considers the relationship between formations of difference and higher education participation in and across contested pedagogical spaces'. Adopting Nancy Fraser's '*Parity of Participation'* with attention to 'redistribution', 'recognition' and 'representation' could produce such outcomes. Significantly, for the pedagogic interventions that have occurred in enabling education programs, "*participation* is more than having access to financial and material resources or cultural and social capitals" (Burke et al, 2017, p. 31) but also for the "person to be recognized and have access to representation as a fully valued member of the community" (Burke et al. 2017, p. 31).

While they describe processes of misrecognition as driven by 'institutional values and judgements that are imposed on the misrecognized person in ways that effectively exclude her/him from parity of participation' (Burke et al. 2017, p. 31) as occurring in universities. What enabling educators have attempted to do is shift attention away from "deficit discourses to directing attention to transforming institutional spaces, systems and practices, which are implicated in reproducing exclusions and inequalities at cultural, symbolic and structural levels" (Burke et al. 2017, p. 30). The outcomes of this shift away from deficit framings is explored in this chapter.

Advancing reseach designs

Looking at the problem of early school leaving, prominent South Australian education scholars John Smyth and Robert Hattam (2004) provide an in-depth account of the reasons young people

do not complete high school. Between 1997-1999, Smyth and Hattam interviewed over two-hundred early school leavers on their experiences of secondary school. This research was significant because it aimed to shift the framing of the retention 'problem' away from 'students-at-risk' frame in order to give students a 'voice' (Smyth & Hattam, 2001). Smyth and Hattam revealed student voices that expressed a myriad of 'gatekeeping' mechanisms and strategies implemented within schools, illustrating the ways educational participation is complicated by class, socioeconomic status, and other inequalities. As Sibley argues, paying attention to "exclusionary practices are important because they are less noticed and so the ways in which control is exercised in society are concealed" (Sibley 1995 p. ix cited in Smyth & Hattam, 2004. p. 10).

Smyth and Hattam (2004) offer useful conceptual tools that describe a 'cultural geography' of schools that is either 'active', 'passive' or 'aggressive' and plays a contributing factor to students' choices to leave school early. Their 'active-culture' approach recommends that students are 'listened to' empathetically and teachers actively connect with student lives. Educators are also urged to focus on ensuring students have a sense of belonging and can negotiate the curriculum, content and assessment. The cultural geography is thus a useful framework that highlights the importance of the cultural messages of schools.

Dimension	Aggressive	Passive	Active
Inclusion/ Exclusion	Trouble maker removed	"ease out" those who don't fit	Those who traditionally fit the least are most welcome
Students' lives Emotions	No space for dealing with emotions	Acknowledges them but deals with them immaturely	Students are listened to, atmosphere of trust
Pedagogy	Condescending way of treating students	Uninteresting classroom practice	Enlarges cultural map of students. Negotiation of content and assessment

Table 1: School Cultural Geography around leaving school

My study also attempts to give 'voice' to students' experiences of secondary school that have contributed to their decision to leave school early by focusing on two aspects. Firstly, I investigate whether the students experienced gatekeeping mechanisms in secondary school and if educators 'misrecognise' (Fraser, 2003; Burke et al. 2017) the capabilities, traits or behaviour of the students such that they might continue with their studies at secondary schools or aspire for a place in higher education. Misrecognition is described here by Burke (2015) as the

> processes in which a pathologizing gaze is projected on to Other bodies that have historically been constructed as a problem, and as suffering from a range of deficit disorders (e.g. lack of aspiration, lack of motivation, lack of confidence and so on). Through such processes, Other bodies become marked as different through (often implicit and subtle) reference to racialized, gendered and classed discourses. The injuries of misrecognition are embodied, through the internalization of shame, and are tied to the emotional level of experience (p. 394).

This study provides the space for students to reflect on the process of misrecognition (Burke, et al. 2017) in their high schools as well an account of how a cultural geography approach might be a useful framework to explain the particiapants experiences and feelings that led to leaving school early.

This Study: A Pedagogical intervention

While the team of teaching-focused academics had experience of teaching undergraduate students, it was quickly understood that approaching teaching of enabling students with the same pedagogy found in undergraduate teaching could lead to increased attrition, reduced student satisfaction and negative experiences of higher education (Bennett et al., 2016). We concur with Olds, Jones and Lisciandro that 'transitional education is a unique space that often places academics in a pedagogical pastiche that layers multidisciplinary knowledge with academic skills development, and elements of pastoral care' (2017, p. 37).

The academic team in our enabling program have developed their curriculum, assessment and pedagogy to align with critical teaching approaches. The aim of the 'critical' enabling educator is to create an inclusive and care-full (Motta & Bennett, 2018) learning environment that is democratic and dialogue is shared (Shor & Freire, 1987). In addition, assessment is scaffolded, curriculum is negotiated, the tasks are challenging and clearly explained, diversity of individuals are valued and effort is made to connect to the students life-worlds (Moll et al., 1992). Through enabling pedagogy, the student is recognised for their strengths and the processes of learning are adapted.

In contrast to the traditional 'banking-style' of HE, we adopt a dialogic approach to teaching that sets out to 'not talk knowledge at students but talk *with* them' (Shor, 1992, p. 85). In this way the program adopts an 'active' culture across all student interactions, from orientation to enrolment and right through to the academic review process (see Hattam, Stokes & Ulpen, 2017) and actively works to ensure all teaching staff have the knowledge of enabling pedagogies through a series of professional development opportunities (see Hattam & Weiler, 2020). The core teaching team have also collectively engaged in three-years of action research in enacting enabling pedagogies across our courses (forthcomimg edited collection, Hattam & Hattam eds).

My study involved conducting semi-structured interviews with ten students who self-identified as early school leavers. The interview questions provided opportunity for participants to reflect on their experiences at high school as well as their experiences at university, and specifically their account of their studies in our enabling program. I conducted a thematic analysis of the interiews to detect the common themes regarding the dimensions detailed in the cultural geography framework of inclusion/exclusion, students lives and emotions and pedagogy. For the purposes of this chaper, I will provide accounts of two student 'voices'. These accounts demonstrate some of the gatekeeping processes occurring in secondary schools where specific teachers enact their own doubts and assumptions about student's motivations and capabilities (Cuconato, du Bois-Reymond & Lunabba, 2015).

Findings: Student voices of misrecognition, disconnection, recognition and belonging

In the broader study, students gave 'voice' to the processes of misrecognition/recognition they experienced as they traversed from secondary school to enabling education, often with a significant lapse in time between engagement in education. In line with Burke et al (2017) this work takes on an understanding of misrecognition as the students are discounted from a university pathway years before the opportunity presents itself because their 'difference' at the age of fifteen or sixteen is viewed as 'high-risk' and threatening to academic standards (Burke, Crozier & Misiaszek 2017). The students experience also speak to the generation and enactment of a 'passive' or 'aggressive' school culture.

'Lillian' grew up in a lower socio-economic suburb of South Australia in a single-parent household. Her mother struggled with Lillian's older sibling's drug and behavioural issues and Lillian describes how her mother "was working as hard as she could and wouldn't be able to afford to put me in any (university) courses and I didn't really know about HECS as an option so didn't really think I could go anyway". She didn't complete the South Australian Certificate of Education[1] but rather was advised by her teachers to attend TAFE[2] in order to complete a hairdressing certificate. She describes the coercion she felt to enrol into the TAFE program when in year 11 by her school and the sense that they,

> gave up a little bit once I was in that course cause they thought "oh she's doing something now. She's got something. We don't really need to spend any extra time with her". I feel like they almost set us up for failure. Now that I think about it, it was almost like they were succeeding, still getting us into TAFE courses and they were getting us into job. But they in turn weren't because they were not really giving us really any other choices.

The process of misrecognition that occurred in secondary school for Lillian is reflected in her feelings that the school 'aggressively' (Smyth and Hattam 2004) moved her out of the secondary schooling system because she was seen as a "ratbag". Her teachers did not present tertiary study as an option for her, or lead her to feel as though she was recognized as a 'legitimate' student to complete the SACE and participate in a university context. She compared her experience of secondary schooling with enabling education as like 'night and day'. Here, her sense of belonging and feelings of recognition as a legitimate university student were described as 'being treated like an adult compared to being treated like a child'. Her reflection speaks to the adoption of democratic approaches to the curriculum and 'dialogic' elements of Shor's (1992) framework as he emphasises that "an empowering teacher does not talk knowledge at students but talks with them" (p. 85, emphasis in original).

Lillian also reflected on feelings of being supported by the UniSA educators in stating: "I don't think I would've been able to do it if I didn't have the support that I did". Having left her marriage due to domestic violence Lillian enrolled in the program as a single parent of two young children under the ages of 3. She communicated that she was able to juggle study with the children due to the support shown by the academics to bring the children on campus to classes that made her feel really "comfortable". The recognition of the importance of the affective domains in critical enabling pedagogy is evidenced here where educators often take on the role of 'emotional' champion as described by O'Shea (2019). O'Shea argues that access to "productive relational networks" contributes to students persistence to complete higher education. Lillian's comments reflect on an 'active' (Smyth & Hattam, 2004) culture enacted through processes and actions of the educators to reach out to the students and create a sense

[1] The South Australian Certificate of Education is the final schooling certificate.
[2] TAFE is the name of Austraia's Vocational Education and Training institution.

of belonging in the university spaces, through the curriculum and the focus on communicating an ethos of care across the program.

In a second example of misrecognition Fatima, a Muslim student experienced Islamophobia at her regional high school and chose to leave her family and community to move to a city and enrol into the foundations studies program. Fatima's dream is to get into a Law degree, that she "is realising every single day with getting high grades, that I never thought I would get". Where Lillian experienced an 'aggressive' school culture that contributed to her leaving school early, Fatima also recounted that her school "didn't care whether I was attending the classes or not" and worked as a 'passive' school culture that contributed to sitting the exams in year twelve and limiting her options for a university degree.

> They were encouraging people that didn't want to go to university not to do the exam, even though they were able to do it. Like I was able to do it, because I studied like year twelve head on, but because they were saying that "if you don't want to go to university then don't do the exams". But you see like how the exams, one persons marks can affect another person's, and then the overall reputation of the high school.

Fatima also reflected on how teachers didn't invest time or attention in her learning because she was seen as a "rebel" and put in detention a few times in her earlier years of secondary schooling. Her interview echoes Lillian's account of 'misrecognition' as the youthful misbehavior was interpreted as academic disinterest, or incapability of achieving academic 'success'. Neither Lillian or Fatima were treated as legitimate students that the school should invest resources or time towards. Fatima provided further examples of a 'passive' culture at her school in their lack of response to Islamophobic comments from other students. She recounted that "when there were two girls that were always picking on me, and saying like 'Take off your turban, take off your curtains. Why are you wearing a curtain on your head?'. She (teacher) would hear all those stuff but she would never intervene". Fatima consequently completed year twelve without a tertiary entrance score due to the advice of her teachers not to sit the exams. She reflected on this period as quite dark, where she felt like ' there was nothing, my life had no purpose'. After hearing about the enabling program through a family member, Fatima left her family and moved to Adelaide.

Once within our program, Fatima spoke positively of critical enabling pedagogy approaches implemented such as connection between realworld examples or assessment tasks and academic themes, such as 'writing a radio script' in one of her English classes. She recognized a key difference between secondary school and foundations studies as being told: "You're capable of doing this, you're capable" and the "continuous encouragement" by UniSA educators and identifies this as being key to her motivation to study. Her message to other students also demonstrates the significance of 'emotional' championing in enabling programs: "Even if you think you are not smart like I thought, or you can't do it, you are going to be able to do it, because you will have so much support, and everyone will be there standing behind you and telling you that you can do it". These words, to other students, demonstrate feelings of *recognition* as a legitimate participant in the university context, and as a young Muslim woman who has previously experienced misrecognition and marginalization.

The way forward

While the research participants revealed similar themes of exclusion as offered from Smyth and Hattam's study from the late 90's, my study offers a counter-narrative due to the implementation of a WP policy agenda since 2008 such as the Review of Australian Higher Education (Bradley et al., 2008). This chapter shows that the focus on the 'cultural geography' (Smyth & Hattam, 2004) through cultural messages about who belongs and the enactment of 'critical' enabling pedagogy has produced feelings of *recognition* for students in our enabling program.

In spite of the issues with how the WP agenda has been implemented across the university sector, my hopeful idea is the opportunities for 'radical teaching' (Hattam & Stokes, 2019; Shor, 2007) and pedagogical interventions in enabling education could influence mainstream undergraduate and postgraduate pedagogies to become more inclusive. This chapter offers a positive intervention or disruption to the framing of the problem of high school retention rates as the study provides an account of *what works* for the previously disengaged students who have chosen to re-engage with education.

In accordance with Burke, et al. (2017), I have emerged from this study thinking that 'the project of changing pedagogical spaces in higher education is necessarily long-term and challenging because it is about eradicating deeply entrenched, historical inequalities and misrecognitions' (p. 142). It is possible if teachers and leaders in higher education, take seriously, the role they have to play in widening participation, such that it's not just the concern of those working in enabling education, the 'radical teachers' or social justice warriors

The enabling approaches employed in the program demonstrate how the role of the 'emotional champion' (O'Shea 2020) that we play has made a significant impact on the confidence and motivation of the student, but also the outcomes for the student in terms of level of engagement, feelings of *recognition* and belonging, ultimately articulation into a university undergraduate program. Smyth and Hattam's study was conducted before the growth of enabling education offerings so this contribution marks a hopeful 'turn back around' (Smith, 2017) to education that the participants in our study have taken.

In conclusion, I advocate that critical enabling pedagogy can be applied across all levels of education to disrupt social reproduction and work towards Fraser's (2004) '*parity of participation*'. To borrow from Burke, Crozier and Misiaszek (2017), I do not mean inclusion in the sense of moulding and shaping our 'diverse' students to take on the middle-class, mono-cultural practices, identities and norms inherent of universities, but recognizing and valuing differences that encompasses intersectionality of the student cohort. Findings here suggest that despite disengaging from the secondary system, marginalised students can experience a moment of 'turning back around' to education with the enactment of an 'active' culture that embraces critical enabling pedagogies and provides *recognition* for students such that they develop a strong sense of belonging at university.

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