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Property Education, Training and Phenomenalism

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The purpose of this paper is to review several major issues as they affect the design and presentation of property courses. It is argued that university level courses differentiate themselves from technical training programmes by equipping students with background and depth considerably beyond what is necessary for a particular occupational role. This type of education should equip the student with a broad background to the nature and operation of occupational roles and their relationship to human society.

By contrast, technical training is directly related to conveying expertise in occupational skills. Training under this definition is highly job related and may avoid any depth or breadth that is not clearly related to immediate occupational requirements. The technically trained person is immediately employable and productive, but is incapable of responding to the challenges of change or to the interpretation of the relationship between his or her occupation and the polis.

Property courses need to contain both education and training. The balance between the two is considered in the light of phenomenological approaches to education that have gained acceptance in recent times. These approaches can be interpreted as taking training to an extreme, where practical competencies can be rapidly developed with negligible background understanding. The applications and challenges of these approaches are considered with a focus on its application to university programmes. The paper concludes with recommendations for the design of university level property programmes.

KEYWORDS

Property education and training, phenomenalism in teaching

BACKGROUND

Over the past century, university education has tended towards vocational preparation and away the general background study of the liberal arts once thought necessary as a foundation for any educated career. To some extent, the process began much earlier than the twentieth century and the early intrusions of vocational study have made the interpretation of recent developments all the more difficult. The purpose of this study is to review the fundamental issues that lie behind the distinction between education and vocational training, use them to review the development of property education in Australia and consider directions for the future. The emerging popularity of phenomenological pedagogical methods will be used to review the issues involved in future programme innovations.

The university began as a tertiary institution of learning, predominantly focused on the liberal arts. The liberal arts included history, the classics, philosophy and theology, with each of these subdivided into sub-disciplines (Small 1995). The purpose of the liberal arts was to explore the biggest questions that face the person, questions regarding the nature of existence and the role of the acting person in it. From the former study in the Aristotelian scheme of the sciences, the physical, or natural, sciences (physics, chemistry, etc) developed, from the latter developed the practical sciences. These two classes of science were limited in that they could not prove their own principles, or starting premises. As a result, they were always recognised as subject to review by the higher sciences, or queen sciences, particularly mathematics and philosophy (Wallace 1977). Mathematics provides a flexible set of tests and predictable relationships for the lower sciences

while philosophy provides the fundamental logic of enquiry and the ability to make the statements of being that form the building blocks of any science.

Today, the dependence of most sciences on mathematics is clearly evident in the extensive use of mathematical models and analytical tools. The role of philosophy has tended to become less apparent as the premises for argument have moved from metaphysics to empiricism. This is not to say that philosophy is any less important in the construction of scientific knowledge, but rather that it tends to be obscured behind the dominant methodological paradigm[1].

The distinctive feature of this schema of the sciences is the initial absence of vocational study. Persons engaged in physics or ethics are interested in exploring the objects of these sciences for their own sake, and only secondarily for the purpose of productive work in the economic sense. The physicist is primarily interested in the behaviour of the particles under investigation and only remotely motivated by the application of that behaviour for the production of goods and services. Today that separation is less distinct, but it is still conceptually useful. By contrast, the engineer is engaged in the application of the natural sciences, such as physics and chemistry, for some useful service to society. Such a service becomes an economic commodity and enters the realm of vocational activity.

The science of economics is classically a sub-discipline of moral philosophy, as evidenced by the focus on the common good found in the political economy of the classical economists. The *father of modern economics*, Adam Smith, was a professor of moral philosophy who specialised in political economy. John Locke is studied more for his philosophy that his economics, though the latter flows from the former. John Stuart Mill likewise straddled the two disciplines with more of a contribution to philosophy. Modern economics is best understood as a behavioural science, a sub-discipline of social psychology (Small 1998). As such, it traces its pedigree back with other behavioural sciences, such as sociology and psychology, to the philosophical specialisations of epistemology and politics (a sub-discipline of morals). Economics is therefore not strictly a vocational study, but a branch of philosophy in the classical scheme. It has a natural place in the classical university.

The early university vocational studies were closely tied to the pure sciences. Law is closely related to morals and politics. Medicine is closely related to biology, chemistry and anatomy. The other distinguishing features of these disciplines are their importance for society and the level of skill required for their practice. Small has described how these qualities contribute to their distinction as professions, especially when it is recognised that it is impractical for the community to be able to assess the quality of their exercise (Small 1999). It is useful to note that even the early professions did not always go to the university for their vocational training. Medical practitioners learned their trade as apprentices, as did lawyers, though the latter were the first to enter the university.

Engineers were late entrants to the university. In the case of engineering, the distinction between education and training is more evident. The naïve inventor or designer may be moderately successful without a formal knowledge of physics, chemistry, or even mathematics. Effective vocational skills could be learned as an apprentice to a practitioner with observation informed by common sense. However, a formal education in the sciences greatly aided practice and the best practitioners became those with university educations. With apprentice engineers swelling the ranks of those doing physics and other natural sciences, the obvious next step was the development specialist programmes of study designed to educate these students more specifically in the application of the sciences to practical problems. Thus evolved the applied sciences.

This account of the evolution of education tends to obscure an important aspect of vocational study. While the engineer may have benefited from the study of the applied sciences, professional practice continued to revolve about practical skills that were never derived from the sciences. Technical drawing, the operation of

[1] For example, (Boland 1992) demonstrated the necessity of metaphysics in the understanding of economics and reviewed the history and shortcomings of its omission from the science.

various machines, and familiarity with the specific, often positive, codes and rules of practice are good examples, amongst the many that underpin practice. These are technical skills, or crafts, and training in them remains better suited to learning through doing, usually on the job.

Vocational skills training has crept into the university syllabus and may be argued as suitably located there for the following reasons:

- Some skills are necessary for the advanced study of applied sciences.
- Complete vocational preparation in one package is easier to deal with.
- Skills training activities by academics may subsidise university pursuits, such as research.
- An interest in skill areas may stimulate research derived from these areas.

On the other hand, an emphasis on skill training at a university obscures the importance of scientific education and appears to threaten a loss of an understanding of what distinguishes science and education from craft and training. To learn how to operate a computer package, or how to apply the critical parts of a statute pertaining to professional practice requires little critical thinking compared to mastering electronics or the concept of justice. When the university teaches both, and they occur in subjects with similar credit points, students can be excused for concluding that they are of similar value. The problem is that this perception tends to degrade the status of the more challenging content, especially when it does not correspond as readily to day to day practice. Professions in the transition from technical to university modes of vocational preparation can be expected to have greater difficulty with resolving the education versus training balance. In these, existing practitioners and teachers both tend to have backgrounds that emphasise training and vocational skills. Hence, the distinctive contribution of the university, being able to provide deep background understanding that forms the ability for critical thought and provides insights into background issues that lie behind the day to day issues of practice is not well understood by the peers of the profession who are responsible for directing the transition. As universities take on more vocational programs, especially where the training/education balance is compromised, the true balance is further obscured.

HISTORY OF LAND ECONOMICS TEACHING

Programmes in business studies are amongst the most recent additions to the university offering. The practice of commerce for most of human history has not demanded academic study, and even in the modern era up to the twentieth century, the only necessary skill was the arcane art of double entry book keeping which was passed on through practitioners, not universities.

Evolution of Property Education in Australia

Property course were first introduced in Australia on 12 July 1927, when the Real Estate Institute (REI) through the Extension Board of the University of Sydney offered a course of twenty lectures and awarded a “certificate” once the student passed an examination (Kass, p82). The course continued (with some changes) and was aimed at increasing the *professionalism* of the industry. From 1 September 1960, the “first year” course became mandatory for real estate agency licensing purposes in NSW (Kass, p168). This course was over three years, those completing the first year were eligible for real estate licensing and those completing it were eligible to be valuers after a *viva voce*. Valuation registration came with the Valuers Registration Act, 1975. The REI ceased its courses in 1978 (Kass, p221) by which time “real estate agency practice” was also being offered at Technical colleges (later known as TAFE Colleges).

The first course at undergraduate level in Australia commenced in 1982 at the Hawkesbury College of Advanced Education (now the University of Western Sydney). There are now some seven similar courses offered throughout Australia (Newell et al) plus several *fringe* property related courses.

The curriculum for the early property courses in Australia was strongly led by industry and was developed and structured around the TAFE college real estate and valuation courses. Targeted to the valuation and real estate professions, these property courses offered the full spectrum of property studies, including valuation, property investment, property finance, property development, property management and property market analysis.

By the late 1980s, the Australian property market was booming leading to arge scale investment and development. The relationship between finance and property became even more important with the development of new cash flow techniques. At the same time there was the establishment of *securitisation* of property with publicly listed Property Trusts. These developments resulted in the property industry demanding a more knowledgeable property professional. The establishment of the Society of Land Economists and its merger with the leading valuation body, the Australian Institute of Valuers (now known as the Australian Property Institute) also was compounding the need for property courses to begin to broaden their focus. The property courses now began to take on a more business and financial curriculum focus with new emphasis on property investment, property finance and asset management. It also required the property professional to have knowledge of equity markets, international property investment, portfolio investment analysis and environmental studies.

The Land Economics discipline is a special *niche* discipline as it can relate to both the built environment and business. In USA, most of the courses are offered in the finance and business related faculties, whilst in the UK they predominantly placed in the building related faculties. In Australia, the majority have followed the USA affiliation and are placed in the business faculties.

Nomenclatures

Concurrent with the changing nature of the courses, the nomenclature of the property courses has also experienced an evolution. The first course offered in 1982 was the Bachelor of Business (Land Studies). As the development of the courses took a more overall property discipline, the nomenclatures began to incorporate “Applied Science”, “Land Economy”, “Property” and so on. Today, courses in Australia have a variety of names, (Newell et al), including:

- Bachelor of Applied Science
- Bachelor of Business (Property)
- Bachelor of Commerce (Property)
- Bachelor of Land Economics.

POST- GRADUATE PROPERTY EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

The growth of the property sector in Australia has been responsible for an increase in demand for property courses from other related industries.

With entry into the property professions available via an approved undergraduate property degree, the demand for post-graduate programs has increased significantly in the last five years. This reflects the need for specialist skills (eg: property investment, finance, development), as well as those professionals with related degrees seeking property expertise.

A non-university provider (the Property Council of Australia) is now offering a two-year part-time Graduate Diploma in Property Investment and Finance, similar to the equivalent stockmarket investment course offered by the Australian Securities Institute.

Property research degrees at both Masters and Ph.D. levels have also begun to attract students. Whilst the numbers in Australia are small, they are growing and indeed most of the academics teaching in the property disciplines in Australia hold post graduate qualifications. Areas of research interest are property trusts, valuation of contaminated land, international property, property finance, property cycles, market dynamics and corporate real estate.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The incursion of training into university programmes challenges the integrity of the meaning of education and the distinctiveness of the university as a provider of knowledge. This trend is itself related to developments in epistemology, especially the popularity of most-modernism. Post-modernism is fundamentally a philosophical paradigm that underlies a broad range of human pursuits. In art and architecture its underlying tenant that there is nothing distinctive in belief or the association of concepts has freed these activities allowing for a refreshing injection of creativity (Small 2000). In epistemology the outcome is less satisfactory. Thinkers such as Derrida and Lacan believe that there is no objective knowledge and even assert the paradox that a person's statements are the opposite of their own belief (Grosz 1990). While this position frees the hearer totally from any compulsion to accept what is heard, if it were believed and applied to its own utterance it would be rejected. The post-modern university is the one where the students teach themselves what they choose to believe, unconstrained by prior learning, and where grading is meaningless. The notion is absurd when faced directly but current pressures and educational fashions are already moving in that direction.

The assessment of the quality of education has moved away from objective measures to measures that are little more than student popularity. This type of quality assessment implies that students are the best assessors of subject quality, and that delivery is more important than content. These assessment instruments are currently being used extensively to assess quality for a range of purposes, including promotion and funding.

The education/training issue has application in this context. Training is by nature less demanding and more vocationally relevant compared to education in content derived from the sciences. Programmes that emphasize training are therefore more likely to score better on the current scheme of assessment. This is not to totally absolve programmes that score poorly, as there may be correctable problems in delivery and effective educators tend to encourage better learning by stirring up the interest of their students. Rather, the point to note is that the qualities assessed lie skew to the real goals of eduction. Perhaps effectiveness surveys completed by employers may be more effective, but even these could over-emphasise skill issues rather than education.

The risk in implicitly promoting skills training rather than education in the sciences is that such an emphasis has considerable long-term costs. The reason that the professions came to the university in the first place was to acquire deep background knowledge that could be applied to practice in order to solve novel problems. This strategy has successfully fuelled much of the technological advancement of the last century. Training, strictly speaking, does not prepare students for novelty and change.

The tradition of education of the last century forms a type of intellectual capital reserve in the professions that may buffer the negative effects of current teaching trends that stress training. While property studies do not have such an explicit tradition, a careful inspection of the content of property programmes reveals a heavy reliance on areas such as economics, law and finance. These do have the educational depth which may be currently being traded for immediate vocational skills.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL TEACHING METHODS

The most potent development in this regard is the recent trend to use training methods to teach background sciences. Over the last half century or so, there has been a movement towards experimentation with pedagogical methods based on phenomenological principles. Phenomenology is the view of the world that focuses on one's understanding of the world purely as it is perceived. We say that the sun rises, even though we know scientifically that the earth rotates. Phenomenological education is interested more in the sun rising than the earth rotating. It teaches useful applications of scientific principles very rapidly, but it omits the systematic understanding of causality that leads true understanding forward.

(Flesch 1955; Flesch 1981) studied the history and politics of the approach in its application to literacy, where the method of *"whole word"* reading has been adapted to enable students to rapidly learn to read entire books within a couple of weeks at the very start of their schooling. Students are taught to recognize the appearance of whole words without the tedium of first learning the alphabet or the principles of phonic word construction that lie behind over 90% of English words. On the first day, a five year old can be taught to recognize a handful of words and within two weeks master up to twenty. Carefully graded books containing only the words memorized are readable almost from the first days at school to the delight of parents. This system has been in use in the USA for some time and was introduced into Australia in the 1970s as the *sight word* method of reading. A similar system has been used for mathematics (Kline 1973).

Against the apparent success of the system, long-term results have not been encouraging. Students are trained to identify specific words that are relevant to their immediate reading requirements. As they develop, their vocabulary expands, however, unless they work out the key of how the alphabet is used to construct words, their reading vocabulary will never expand beyond the limited set memorized. The system reduces English words to a random symbol set similar to Chinese. The achievement of using an alphabet is opaque to persons trained in the whole word system. A visible gap has developed between countries that have adopted the methods and those that have not (Davidow 1977). Literacy levels in Australia have fallen following the introduction of the system and remedial reading classes have blossomed. Interest in recreational reading has fallen, not only because of alternatives such as television, but because texts that are not carefully groomed to fit with a person's reading vocabulary contain words that are totally incomprehensible. The risks, frustration and embarrassment that comes from tackling such texts are obvious.

Phenomenological approaches to mathematics have a similar profile. The use of calculators promotes the approach to problem solving that is based on learning rote solution algorithms without mastering the mathematical relationships that underlie them. That approach enables students to rapidly learn how to solve complex problems without the pain of learning exactly lies behind the steps involved. So long as the student can identify the appropriate solution template, or algorithm, for the problem at hand the solution is possible. Mathematics training becomes the collection of an increasing number of templates. Similar to reading, the solution of common problems very efficient, but tackling novelty is impossible (Small 1995).

Universities inherit the problems from both of these instances of phenomenological teaching. In the mathematical area it is evident in students who display three common characteristics:

- An expressed dislike for mathematics (born of fear of stepping outside the boundaries and having never learned mathematical science).
- A demand for worked examples (templates) for all problems likely to be encountered.
- A lack of awareness of elementary mathematical principles, such as the number laws of algebra.
- A difficulty in tackling even simple problems that contain novelty.

This is not to say that the use of solution templates, or practice on past examples is necessarily a bad thing. Rather, it is the raising of these learning tools to a position of dominance, that is problematic. The matter is often not clear-cut. Sometimes students do manage to learn the logic behind the algorithms and for these novelty is not a problem. It is regrettable that such insights are reserved for the highly intelligent who must acquire them despite the educational system. The way that the intelligent are constrained by the method is evident in the relative proportions of high school candidates for different grades. Many schools no longer bother to offer the highest levels in senior high school and in NSW at least, a worrying number of university matriculants have only studied Mathematics in Society, a level originally designed for the lowest level of student who were

retained in the school system as a result of high youth unemployment levels. The difficulty for universities is all the greater when industry expects vocationally prepared graduates who can tackle novel problems.

Phenomenological teaching suits training. Applied to the sciences, such as mathematics, it converts true education into a form of training. It has the attraction of making students job-ready very quickly and inspires pride in the rapid acquisition of apparently difficult abilities. Were universities to adopt this mode of teaching more widely, especially when assessment is conformed to testing the application of a limited template set, rather than critical ability to use the underlying principles creatively, they could expect to score greater popularity with students. The reason is that student assessment is focused on very short-term impressions and the return for effort using these approaches is very high in the short term. It is only somewhat later that the costs become apparent and even then, it is very possible that student will never realise what they have missed.

In the case of the schools, the long term use of these methods have produced an entire generation who have no knowledge of their subject areas beyond what they have been taught using these methods. This is dangerous because even if these methods are judiciously employed they must be designed and controlled by an academic elite, who do know what they are doing. If there is no one left to fill this role, obviously the system will eventually falter.

In the case of economics and property, this means that if property courses are permitted to sway towards training and phenomenological teaching of the sciences, then the level of understanding, and hence ability to scientifically practice, will both atrophy. This would suggest that investigation in topics such as the following should not be permitted to be limited to that required for professional practice:

- Algebra and general mathematics
- The meaning of property
- The validity of received theories of economics, law and finance
- The social obligations of practitioners and property owners

As it stands, these topics are often presented to students, but only as they pertain to the current milieu of property practice. Even at the post-graduate level, there is a tendency to present material that appears to be more aligned to advanced practice training than a deeper exploration of the scientific foundations.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper has outlined the challenges of balancing the provision of education and training within vocational courses in Land Economy. Education been shown to relate to the study of the pure sciences while training relates to vocational skills. The notion of applied science has been shown to apply to specialisations in the pure sciences appropriate to vocational practice.

The history of Land Economics programmes illustrates the tension between the provision of education and training. The recognition by the professions that the extra depth of university education would enhance the abilities of practitioners moved property courses from technical colleges into universities. The challenge for universities is to uphold this expectation and not to merely offer technical training at a greater intensity.

The trend towards phenomenological teaching methods highlights this tension by offering apparently fast-tracked learning of identified skills at the expense of ignoring the background science. It may be concluded that both education and training have a place in vocational courses, and there are even places where phenomenological methods may be appropriate. However, it must be recognised that the pressures to dilute true education only offer short-term benefits that will produce regrettable long-term results.

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