

Why do you want this job?: Transferring learning, transforming learning and lifelong learning

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Abstract

As part of a recruitment process for a position, candidates are often asked their reasoning for applying. While the question may seem straight forward, it is one in which during a recent interview, I felt challenged to provide a succinct response. In this article I discuss the possible reasons as to why I could not provide a clear answer. In particular I explore three elements of my work, study and research experiences: transferring learning, transforming learning and lifelong learning. While my response remains less than concise, these ideas entwine together to form the basis for why I 'want this job'.

Introduction

Twice I have been asked the question: Why do you want this job? The first time was during my second-round of interviews for the position, Coordinator [of] Learning and Information Services at the public library in my city. The second time was in my first team meeting after I was awarded the position. While the question may appear to be straight forward, it is one where I was (and am) challenged to provide a concise answer. Undeterred by my feelings of disjuncture, I began to explore elements of my experiences which enmesh together to underpin my drive for applying for the position. In this article I discuss three of these elements: transferring learning, transforming learning and lifelong learning as I delve into my transition from the known – in my case academia – to the unknown, the public library sector.

Transferring Learning: A Twofold Transition

The concept, transition, can broadly be defined as a shift from one life phase to another (Sedler, 1989). In contemporary times people can make multiple transitions over their lifetime.

Kearns (2021) identifies these multiple transitions illustrative of a “longevity society” (p. 3), where people will continue to shift in phases over their lifetime. While traditionally, transitions occurred in infrequent, well-defined stages (e.g., from school to work), technological and health advancements (leading to a longer lifespan) and various ways of working have enabled more frequent, planned and unplanned transitions over a lifetime (Pickerell & Borgen, 2023; Sedler, 1989; Sullivan & Ariss, 2021).

In educational contexts the term, transition, is often used when referring to students moving from university to the professional field (Butler et al, 2017). It is a process that involves adapting to change and drawing on transferrable skills and knowledge such as critical and creative thinking, to successfully transition from student to emerging professional (Barrie, 2012; Butler et al., 2017). I view one of my transitions as student to professional as twofold. First, after twelve years of teaching and research in higher education, I have somewhat established myself as an early career professional in academia. Second, I am emerging from student to specialist as I have recently completed my Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in education. While I have spent many years utilising the university library resources, my new role in the public library involves a transition to a new field. I can therefore explore these two areas of my professional transition in relation to my new role (and why I want this job).

My teaching and learning experiences have taken different forms. I have taught in primary and middle schools, both in regional towns and remote communities. In moving to higher education, my teaching areas comprised: pre-service teacher education, research methodology and methods and the social sciences. My portfolio expanded to third space activities, including: curriculum development, industry accreditation and quality assurance. Connecting each role was my fascination with philosophies of teaching and learning, in particular: why and how academics made a difference to the engagement of students. My fascination led me down the path of doctoral studies which I successfully completed in 2021.

My Ph.D. focused on student engagement. Engagement (as a concept) is challenging to define, and this conceptual ambiguity makes it a challenging area to research. Rather than apply

one definition therefore, I synthesise those provided within the literature and present student engagement as: involving teachers supporting students to exert cognitive, behavioural and emotional efforts to meaningfully engage in purposeful activities to learn and achieve (Coates, 2007; Fredricks et al., 2004; Henrie et al., 2015; Krause, 2005; Kuh, 2001). I also adopt Zepke's (2017) perspective of engagement where the concept can become a "metaphor; a prism through which we can discover diverse understandings of what can lead to effective learning and teaching" (p. 8). These conceptual lenses informed the way I approached my study.

I framed my research with the interpretivist paradigm. A paradigm is a "framework or philosophy of science that makes assumptions about the nature of reality and truth, the kinds of questions to explore, and how to go about doing so" (Glesne, 2016, p. 5). The paradigm works to guide the development of research questions and which methods to apply. An interpretivist-framed study takes the position that there are multiple, socially situated realities which are constructed by individuals and groups (Glesne, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Interpretivists seek to understand, to find out *with* others, within the context in which phenomena occur (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). For me, this way of 'finding out with others' is underpinned by the practice of ontological humility, which invites multiple perspectives to lead to deeper understandings and ways of working, as opposed to seeking a fixed truth (Holland, 2013). With this underpinning in my study, I gathered data in social ways (i.e., interviews and focus groups), and applied a suite of thematic analysis strategies to co-construct holistic insights into engagement approaches of academics.

What I learned from my research (in the context of my study), is the way engagement is a dynamic process that is enmeshed, inseparable and intertwined with student engagement philosophy, pedagogy and evaluation (Goldie, 2021). In essence, how an agent (i.e., an academic) approaches engagement (what they think, do, and why) will be informed by their own conceptualisations of what the concept is (or could be) (Goldie, 2021). Ideas of the term are therefore, nuanced and grounded by an individual's ontologies and epistemologies. This is important because those enacting the engagement – the engager – are attributed to being the single

greatest influence on engagement (at about forty per cent influence) (Hattie, 2003). This contrasts with traditional ideas of engagement which measure what was achieved or learned by the 'engagee', while simultaneously silencing those enacting the engagement. For me, such understandings can apply across contexts where teaching, learning and engagement are seen to play a part, such as public libraries.

Transformative Learning Experiences

The more educational experiences I have had, the more cognisant I have become that engagement is not bounded by classroom walls. While this type of understanding is not novel, a transformative learning experience for me was when I could see how my particular understanding of engagement could transfer across to the public library context. Transformative learning is defined as a "deep and lasting change, equivalent to what some people term a developmental shift or a change in worldview" (Stevens-Long et al., 2012, p. 184). For me, engagement is complex and multifaceted. Rather than comprising a single, simple definition, various groups and individuals can have different interpretations and counterexamples of the term which can change over time (Goldie, 2021). These nuanced views then inform how they engage with others and / or resources at a particular time, place and space.

In application to my work in the library (so far), the term: engagement is often used. As well as being used with reference to daily programming, iterations of the term: engagement, appeared as part of the recruitment process. For example, in my position description (at the time it was advertised), 'engage' appeared five times. Three of these times, engagement was used in reference to an 'engagee' (e.g., readers engagement, community engagement), however two of the references piqued my interest. In these two mentions, the term was used with more emphasis on the 'engager', where the role specifically required me to 'build engaged teams' and 'undertake community engagement... to understand their needs'. Here I could see where my insights into engagement could help me in my new role. This is because I have learned that the idea of 'engagement' is grounded in ontologies and epistemologies. The first step of engaging *with* others

therefore, is to develop shared conceptual understandings of the term with consideration of the temporal and spatial context in which it can occur. As these shared understandings are connected with a time, place and space, they will require ongoing reflection and learning as part of my role as Coordinator [of] Learning and Information Services.

Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning is where individuals continue to exert effort and energy over their lifetime to gain new knowledge and skills (Rînciog, 2017). This type of learning can be connected with lifelong transitions (Kearns, 2021). While my schooling experiences were not necessarily constructive to lifelong learning, my own personal drive for understanding has remained. I therefore have been able to make multiple shifts requiring “learning and transforming” over time (Scott & Gratton, 2021). Prior to beginning undergraduate studies (as a mature-aged student), I completed an apprenticeship. The apprenticeship consisted of a combination of theory and skills practise which provided me with a useful scaffold for learning and developing (both personally and professionally). In reflecting on my work in schools and universities, I realise that I have continued to ground my practice in evidence, remained ontologically humble and open to new ideas, perspectives and change. It seems these qualities are also visible in the public library sector, however they are offered through a different (and what I see as a more ethical) services model. For me, this is another reason as to ‘why I want this job’.

Public libraries are closely connected with the ideas of lifelong learning and transformation (Yoshida, 2021). These ideas are realised through the enactment of formal programs as well as the provision of resources and facilities for individual self-directed learning at low- or no-cost (Gilton, 2016). On the contrary, with increasing university fees and ongoing discussions on the student-as-consumer positioning (e.g., Guilbault, 2018; McCrohon & Syland, 2018), the services model of public libraries continues, in my opinion at least, to be one which strives to offer a more ethical approach to lifelong learning. This is because access is determined by free membership (via provision of identification with an address which can be readily extended over a lifetime). This contrasts with

library access determined by course enrolment with specified entry standards, end dates and graduation conditional on paid late fees. For me, this seemingly boundless access to learning and information is also why 'I want this job'. Not only does the wide access to information support my own lifelong learning processes and transitions, but expands to include information in various formats to diverse members of the community for a variety of needs.

So: Why do I want this Job?

My ongoing drive for understanding and practicing teaching, learning and engagement are key reasons as to why I want this job. From my perspective, I can continue to apply my transferrable skills and knowledge in an ongoing process of transition in my role. My aim is to also continue to deepen my understandings of engagement, from both the perspective of 'engager' and 'engagee' within the public library sector. In drawing from my research, when both the 'engager' and 'engagee' have shared understandings of the concept, engagement can become more meaningful. The process of developing shared understandings however, is not simple nor straightforward and will involve ongoing learning and reflection with diverse stakeholders. Such learning is enabled by more equitable (and seemingly boundless) access to information such as that provided by a public library. This provision of access to information by the public library supports my own lifelong teaching and learning transitions and others who are akin to the process.

Conclusion

In this article I worked to address the question: Why do I want this job? I was asked this question as part of my recruitment process for a coordinator position at a public library. At the time, I grappled to provide a concise response. Undeterred, this disjuncture led me down a path of exploring elements of my professional and learning experiences which entwine to underpin my reasoning for 'wanting this job'. These ideas of transferring learning, transforming learning and lifelong learning, draw together my work in teaching, learning and engagement research as I transition from a career in academia to the public library sector.

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