

Critical Essay

POLICE INSTRUCTOR OR POLICE EDUCATOR?

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The past few decades has seen a high degree of scrutiny on police and police instructional techniques, with various researchers recommending engagement with adult learning principles. However, what is lacking in contemporary research is any discussion about the role of police instructors and whether they are able to engage with adult learning principles. This critical essay commences that discussion and offers suggestions on how to transition the police instructor to become an effective police educator. It is argued that police instructors undertake several informal roles that are in contrast to the role of an educator; and place the police instructor in an abnormal position of power. Further, it is proposed that the current required training qualification for police instructors is an inappropriate and ineffectual qualification for police educators. This critique concludes by offering some suggestions that are likely to overcome potential barriers to increasing the competency of police instructors.

Keywords police instructor, police educator, qualifications, perceived barriers

INTRODUCTION

There is considerable literature produced outlining specific pedagogical approaches, in addition to highlighting the need to develop varying informational/education programs for dealing with various sectors of the community, along with proposing sociological and/or criminological approaches to policing (see Birzer, 2003; Etter & Griffin, 2013; Oliva & Compton, 2010; Marenin, 2004 as examples). What is missing in the literature, in equal measure, is a review of the role of the police instructor/educator and their ongoing development, particularly in Australia. This critical essay discusses this issue

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and offers suggestions as to how to police agencies might consider transitioning their police instructors to become effective police educators.

It is argued that police instructors do more than provide instruction and they undertake several informal roles that are in contrast to the role of educators; and place the police instructor in an abnormal position of power that is not enjoyed by aligned professions. These roles include acting as a recruiting gatekeeper ensuring that the new recruit can be worthy of being called a police officer; and a socialisation and orientation agent to move the recruit from civilian to police officer.

Further, it is argued that the current Australian qualification of a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment is an inappropriate and ineffectual qualification for police educators. It is asserted that this qualification, at best, encourages knowledge transfer through a process of *watch me do it, watch me slow, let's do it together, now off you go*. This encourages mimicry as a form of competence demonstration, but does not provide the new police officer with the skills to deal with situations outside of the mimicry environment and does not facilitate strong critical thinkers.

The term *instructor* denotes how the current role is perceived; the term *educator* denotes the preferred approach to police instruction. Also, while the discussion is based in the initial police recruit training phase, there are intersections with the role of the instructor as discussed with other police training courses, such as courses for specialisation and/or promotion.

HISTORICAL ROLE AND FUNCTION

Historically, the role of the police instructor was to educate the civilian into becoming a police officer (Scott, 1939; Frost, 1959). Yet, police instruction, and by extension, the role of the police instructor, has moved to separate the police officer from society and turn them into a police officer (Ryan, 2010). Or, as it was once described to the author by a police recruit, instructors assist the recruit to transition from being a civilian through “the act of becoming blue”. This separation is in contrast with the Peelian principles of policing which are still discussed today. For the purpose of the argument here, the key principle states that:

Police, at all times, should maintain a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and the public are the police; the police being only members of the public

who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence.

Scott (1939), as an historical reference, considered that police training should create an enlightened educational approach. This “enlightened approach” would include the subject of psychology, which would permit the police officer to “study his community with sympathetic understanding,” so he could see crime as “not being an outcome of a defective moral sense, but as a mental or emotional defect” (Scott, 1939, pp. 246–7). As such, the police officer will see the criminal as a sick man who must be cured. Conti (2010, p. 6) observed that police instructors model a type of behaviour that demonstrated the “kind of heart that a cop had to have and then go on to discuss the solidarity that existed among officers as they are collectively running towards trouble while everyone else was running away.”

A more contemporary view of the police instructor is that they actively participate as an extension of the recruit selection process through monitoring the “progress of the recruits and detecting significant personality and/or performance characteristics” which would render them unsuitable to be a police officer (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology Education Unit [RMIT], 1986, p. 50). This places the instructor in a conflicting dual role; the first being that of an instructor training the person in the tasks of policing, and that of a recruiter identifying suitable persons to remain in the police academy and continuing the journey to become a police officer.

The role of police education, and thereby extension police instructors, has been seen as one to help shape the recruits to become a police officer and into the role and discipline of policing. For example, Moriarty (1929) as an historical reference, indicated that that the goal of the police instructor is to gauge the recruits and determine the recruits “possibilities as a policeman” (p. 459). Further the police instructor could only teach a person how to act like a policeman as it is only the “practical work out of doors” (p. 466) that will teach a person to become a police officer.

More contemporary literature provides a view of police training as a model that emphasises reactive policing, offender apprehension and processing skills, with a greater focus on practical street knowledge and skills to function in the everyday policing practice (Jaschke, 2008). The police educational model, and by extension the instructors, is observed as wedded in a behavioural list-

orientated competency-based training model with a greater focus on order maintenance, law enforcement, and general service; with the training and operational environment bedded into a quasi-military management style which is antithetical to a democratic management style (Cox, 2011; Ryan, 2010; Pitman and Barrow, 1995).

Police training appears to rely heavily on the rule of law and organisational procedures, with a training model as one that reflects “pedagogical practices that reflect doctrinal values rather than educative values...[that] limits intellectual stimulation” (Densten as cited in Ryan, 2006, p. 7–8). McCoy (2006) stated that police training, and by extension police instructors, as being wedded in a “very behavioural and militaristic environment” (p. 29). This approach, according to Ryan (2010), is characterised by an ‘insular and defensive culture,’ that seeks to maintain the status quo and as such “positions training in a traditional, technical framework” (Ryan, 2006, p. 3) where “learning is at best trivialised, at worst, never evaluated, taken-for-granted,” ... “that displays a certain “operational concern that is bound up in notions of liability and control” (Ryan, 2006, p. 4).

Other researchers, such as Conti (2010) view the role of police instructors as one that embeds organisational cultures and values into police recruits. Conti (2010) contends that this de-civilianisation is best achieved through the traditional high stress paramilitary training. Through his research, Conti contends that this training approach aids in the “excision of the civilian identity and transmission of the demeanour, bearing, and competence befitting and idealized sense of police character” (Conti, 2010, p. 5). Conti (2010) observed that socialisation also occurs through the use of “war stories or parables told by instructors” (p. 5), and it is through these narratives that the notion of “weak links” and “warrior hearts” is reinforced (Conti, 2010, p. 5). Conti states that the notion of warrior hearts is articulated and reinforced by academy staff who talk about “the kind of heart that a cop had to have and then go on to discuss the solidarity that existed among officers as they are collectively ‘running towards trouble while everyone else was running away” (p. 6).

Chappell and Lanza-Kouduce (2010) also identified that police training socialises the recruits into the police force, and excises them from the general community by encouraging recruits to “break ties with former ‘nonpolice’ friends” and that the “instructors modelled this behavior by making it clear to recruits that their peer group was made up of fellow officers” (Chappell and

Lanza-Kouduce, 2010, p. 203). Ahern (cited in Van Maanen 1972, (pp. 12)) articulates the de-civilianisation of the recruit:

The day the new recruit walks through the doors of the police academy he leaves society behind to enter a profession that does more than give him a job, it defines who he is. For all the years he remains, closed into the sphere of its rituals...he will be a cop.

MOVE TO EMBRACE ADULT LEARNING PRINCIPLES

In the past decade, police researchers and academics have advocated the use of adult learning principles by sworn police instructors — specifically those espoused by Knowles (see Birzer, 2003, 2004; Cleveland and Saville, 2007; Etter, 2000, 2011; McCoy, 2006; Shipton, 2009, 2011). It is asserted that by introducing adult learning principles such as problem-based learning, peer-to-peer learning, and self-directed learning approaches to police education, recruits will embrace a community-orientated policing methodology. Further, by abandoning the methodology of paramilitary training and embracing adult learning principles, police officers will recognise their place in society as opposed being separate to society as a whole, and be better equipped to make decisions with and in consultation and consideration of the community they serve. It is asserted that by having a focus on student-centred problem-based learning, police officers will graduate better equipped to deal with the unpredictable nature faced in day-to-day policing.

However, there has been some research that indicates that police instructors are either not capable of embracing adult learning principles as they either do not understand them, have no awareness of them, or are unable to incorporate them into their instructional practices (McCoy 2006; Shipton, 2009, 2011). Further, some instructors indicated that there is insufficient time in their curriculum to integrate student-centred educational practices (Basham, 2011, McCoy, 2006).

OVERCOMING PERCEIVED BARRIERS

The argument of insufficient time is not considered a valid defence to not engaging with adult learning principles. Rather, it is suggested that the barriers to implementing true educational practices within a police academy lie in the following areas:

- an ongoing culture that only police know how to educate police and therefore traditional non-police educational approaches are not considered relevant or appropriate;
- an ongoing adherence to the position of instruction that has a greater emphasis on the art and craft of policing;
- having the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment as the only required educational qualification for instructors;
- a lack of ongoing professional development that encourages instructional/educational staff to investigate adult learning principles and apply them to their day-to-day educational activities; and
- the policy of a limited time-in-position for sworn police instructional/educational staff.

To overcome these barriers the following remedial actions are proposed. These recommendations stem from the author's personal observations based on his educational experience, though they resonate with the subject literature.

The need for greater emphasis on education and not just instruction; that is while recognising the need to educate police officers in the vocational aspects of operational policing, there needs to be a greater emphasis on not just showing them what or how to do, but also why. By developing a deeper understanding of the *why* police officers will develop a quicker and greater understanding of the “what and how.”

Police instructors should advance their knowledge of pedagogical practices through undertaking additional courses such as the Australian qualification of a Graduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education or a Graduate Certificate in Tertiary Teaching and Learning. They can build on current professional practice thereby providing instructors the ability to explore learning and teaching at higher level and be exposed to theoretical knowledge that would move them beyond the current teacher-centred approaches to engaging with learner-centred approaches to police training (McCoy, 2006) Within these tertiary qualifications, it is important that there are modules on learning principles in general and adult learning principles specifically, pedagogical practices, and effective assessment and evaluation that move beyond the competency-based mind-set.

These qualifications are viewed as what is needed within the competency-based system, but it is argued that the generic Certificate IV in Training and Evaluation is an inadequate qualification for the tasks that police educators undertake. By way of example, some of colleagues of the author were required to upgrade their Certificate IV. The units they completed had little emphasis on pedagogical practices. The textbook provided contained approximately seventeen pages on generic learning theories, out of approximately 270 pages. This is viewed as scant coverage and hence inadequate for an adult education environment as well as for an occupation that requires its graduates, unlike other professions, to be competent in tackling a variety of situations once they become operational.

Some policing organisations impose a maximum time-in-position for sworn police staff. It would be difficult to imagine any other educational institutional advising their academic staff that after three years they must leave. As such, this approach is short-sighted and inhibits the retention and continuity of organisational and educational knowledge and history. It is also inconsistent with developing effective and engaged academic staff. As such, it is argued that such policies should be abolished.

The justification for this rotation is that policing organisations assert that beyond a three-year timeframe the police officer loses their operational contextuality and experience. This rationale appears to be a carryover from a competency-based training regime rather than a capability focussed educational system. This is not to say that educators should not have an understanding of the operational environment, but if the only reason why police officers are rotating out of the educational environment after three or four years is to make the competent and current, then this could be overcome by requiring those officers to undertake regular sabbaticals in the operational domain.

For example, every 18 to 24 months a police educator could be required to work in a supervisory capacity at an operational/training station for a short period—approximately three months. The supervisory capacity, as opposed to working the van/car, best positions the police educator to view the impact that the education process has on the recipients, i.e. operational police officers. It would also allow the educator to gain experience as a supervisor and all the tasks associated with that role should they seek to go down that career path in the future. Additionally, if managed effectively, the ongoing sabbatical rotation would enable other operational police officers an opportunity to teach at the

academy on a secondment basis, thereby increasing their theoretical knowledge for when they return to operational duties.

Further, and in conjunction with the sabbatical proposal, it is recommended that police educational staff should become participant-researchers and engage in an evaluative research process to examine instructional/educational practices within their facility and organisation to ensure that where possible they are using best practices; and share their success and failures with others. This is no different to other experts who work in the educational domain, for example academic lecturers.

Academic lecturers are not only required to remain abreast of contemporary knowledge and approaches they are also required and/or encouraged to research and publish on contemporary educational issues in their area of expertise. By encouraging police educators to become police researchers they will not only be increasing and advancing their knowledge, but the overall knowledge of the profession. Furthermore, this research approach may assist in closing the gap between what is often termed “the real-world” and “academy-land.”

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, international research suggests that instructors are still engaged in a teacher-centred, chalk and talk model of instruction (Basham, 2011; Birzer & Tannerhill, 2001; Cleveland & Saville, 2007; King Stargel, 2009; Shipton 2011). This model of instruction, which is based “both on a behavioural and militaristic model of training rooted in obsolete and counter-productive practices long ago abandoned by educators and other occupational and professional communities” (Cleveland and Saville, 2007, p. 3), it is posited, is no longer suitable as it does not create thinking police officers.

There is a need for police *educators*. An educator is one who not only understands the subject and its application in the operational environment; but also the student, and how to reach those police students through various approaches, (including targeting dominant learning modalities), and approaches that cause the police student to not be able to just ask how, but also why.

The argument here is not advocating against the competency-based development of police officers; nor is it offering suggestions for the ongoing professional development of operational police officers. What is being argued is

the development of a professional police educator. Policing needs to move on from taking an operational officer off the road, equipping them with the Certificate IV and placing them in front of a class of students, whether they are recruits or current serving members seeking a skills upgrade or promotion, and assuming they are able to educate their students.

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