Critical and Reflective Practice in Education

Editorial: the university as a dialogic space

The publication of the first number of the first volume of this new journal *Critical and Reflective Practice in Education* in the autumn of 2009 marks a significant point in institutional and personal academic trajectories. The editors' host institution, University College Plymouth St Mark and St John (known as UCP Marjon), has had an interesting history. St John's College Battersea was founded in 1840 by Edward Tufnell and Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth (the latter being the College's first Principal). St Mark's College Chelsea was founded in 1841 with Revd Derwent Coleridge (son of Samuel Taylor Coleridge) as its first Principal. From the very start of their lives these Colleges were involved in critical and, indeed, reflective debates about the education of teachers and about the way teachers educate their pupils and students, especially when faced with the cut-backs imposed by the Revised Code of 1862.

Both Principals of the founding colleges were committed to educational and social reform (within the limits of Victorian liberalism). For Kay-Shuttleworth at St John's the two were inseparable. They were both convinced that adequate schools for the poor required well-trained, sympathetic and committed teachers using the 'progressive' methods of the day. Turning this vision into practice required sustained and skilled dialogue with skeptics and critics ranging from factions in the Church of England opposing High Anglicanism to politicians, to romantic novelists including Charles Dickens. The two drew upon their own classical educations, educational evidence and social connections to get their way.

The two Colleges merged in 1923, establishing a single institution in Chelsea and the College moved to Plymouth in 1973. Its status is linked to the Church of England as independent and voluntary. UCP Marjon gained Taught Degree Awarding Powers in September 2007.

Two years on, the relationships between the institution, its staff, its students and the outside world have developed, and these articles on the theme of 'the university as a dialogic space' give examples of the strength and complexities of these internal and external relations. We have been fortunate to have had the support of experienced university academics across the UK and around the world who have acted as reviewers in the spirit of positively critical reflection. A mix of external and internal reviewing has widened both the experience and the academic horizons of contributors,

and the perceptions of those reviewing for the first time. Reviewers have been drawn from England, Scotland, the USA, South Africa and Australia. Contributions in the form of articles have come from the University of Plymouth; the University of Exeter; the Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland; the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, as well as from University College Plymouth St Mark and John. Here we have representations from old and new universities.

The theme itself derives momentum from a fusion of medieval and modern ideas about the nature of a university. Dialogue has obvious connections with the notion of 'dialectic', which means 'the art of debate'. The first university in modern Europe was founded in the Italian city of Bologna between 1190 and 1211. According to Quentin Skinner (1998) the foundations of modern political thought, and the modern notion of civic society, came from just this area – the cities of northern Italy, and at this time. The authors of Thomas Bender's (edited) *The University and the City* (1988) write about the university as a place of widening participation where the children of the rich and the poor could mix. The internationalism of the university ideal was supported by the portability of degree qualifications across the known world. Indeed, the sometimes uncomfortable coexistence of the mercantile life of cities and the intellectual life of universities is seen as a necessary mutuality by J.K.Hyde (in Bender, 1988), in the sense that trade involves travel and communication which can break down barriers of social class, culture and ethnicity. UCP Marjon has prided itself on widening participation and within its campus the ability to celebrate the interdependence of academic rigour and vocationalism has been a great strength. Of course within this relationship achieving clarity in shared understandings through dialogue is a valuable outcome.

In the opening article Paul Grosch examines the very nature of a university and questions what mix of subjects is necessary to provide a suitable balance. Using the ideas of Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Oakeshott and (Cardinal) John Newman, he draws on a number of historical and philosophical models (including Aristotle and Aquinas) and traces the development of different approaches to agreement and disagreement within university structures, subjects and rationales, moving across 'unconstrained agreement', through 'constrained agreement' to his preferred model of 'constrained disagreement'. What is demonstrated here is that some models of bureaucratic and managerial models are inappropriate for a university that seeks to promote constrained disagreement. This has echoes in David Harris's paper *On dialogue in universities*. Paul

Grosch steers with sensitivity a difficult path between liberal and more traditional models to recommend the identified final approach and in so doing fully addresses the journal theme of the university as a dialogic space.

Just as a follow-on from Paul Grosch's article, it might be worth commenting that MacIntyre's well-known plea in his *After Virtue* (1985) for a new St Benedict to offer solutions to our modern problems and conflicting ideologies, may well find an echo in the similarities that there have been between the parallel developments of monasteries, towns and universities. The rule of St Benedict requires vows of *stability* (to remain in the same monastery), *'conversatio morum'* (an idiomatic Latin phrase suggesting 'conversion of manners', an Oakeshottian as well as a Benedictine notion), and *obedience to the superior* (in the case of the Benedictines because the superior is the representative of Christ on earth). Of course although obedience as a concept is no longer in vogue in universities the rigour of Public Statutory Regulatory Bodies (like the QAA and Ofsted) means that quality assurance and public accountability are never far from the overall agenda. Nevertheless, the motto of UCP Marjon *'Abeunt studia in mores'* implies that character will be formed by study and universities can indeed lead to a change of life. All institutions have a managerial and bureaucratic element which can have varying degrees of democratisation, participation and representation. The increasing confidence of people in the later Dark Ages – when considering a safe place in which to live – in choosing towns near monasteries shows that they provided a species of stability. Often universities grew up and flourished alongside. It is possible that universities can foster at least two of the features of Benedictine monasteries: stability and a conversion of manners. The stability is afforded not only by a qualification but also through the very nature of an institution which through the enabling of staff to test their ideas and research through time can help to provide the context for greater stability among students. The place of dialogue in these processes is crucial.

David Harris writes with insight about three models of dialogue within universities: managerial, emancipatory and pedagogic. Drawing on a range of mainly European philosophical schools (especially the ideas of Bourdieu, Habermas and Passeron), he examines the suitability and applicability of each dialogic model for a university and finds some ironic anomalies, one of which is the strange archetype of the professor-manager. The thesis presented here makes for troubling reading because as David insists, neither managerialism nor credentialism are going to go away. He highlights the tensions between the ideal and the real university, and the difficulties of sustaining dialogue in the current climate of assessment and accountability. The 'emancipatory' and 'liberating' use of the Internet by tutors and students offers a freedom to create, enjoy and sustain dialogic space within a variety of knowledge and subject structures, breaking down bureaucratic barriers and making access to knowledge and debate far easier. There is some constrained humour here and some anecdotes such as the increasing possibility of dialogue with famous academics, and indeed their availability for this, through email, on the Internet.

Pauline Couper, Colin Dawson, Sue Lea and Lisa Spencer write about the challenges they faced when seeking to create a creative dialogic space for a research community. They tell the story of how they overcame perceptions of hierarchies in seeking to find an egalitarian spirit for mutual encouragement, and this is an example of a model of university collaboration that takes forward some of the ideas discussed by David Harris in the previous article. The use of conversation in this piece illustrates actual and transformative dialogues which served as landmarks in the process of creating meaningful mutual and individual research identities. The article draws on the ideas of Buber and, significantly some very fundamental principles of relationships including the 'allowing' of each others' being.

Annie Fisher has come to specialise in dialogic teaching (and learning) and draws on her recent research to demonstrate how a range of dialogic methods can be applied in the education of teachers and also, correspondingly, in the praxis of individual student teachers. This is underpinned by the work of Bakhtin, Mercer and Littleton, and Alexander, and provides another example of a mutual exchange of ideas in fusing vocational professionalism and philosophical insight. The article includes the actual voices of students and reflects the importance of conversation and listening in the process. What is highlighted is the deeper level of dialogue needed to challenge students' deeply-held epistemological assumptions.

Gilly Stoneham and Richard Feltham in writing about the use of role-play and the use of an actor in clinical simulations describe a different kind of vocational training and education (speech and language therapy), but are essentially using in their teaching the (cognitive and empirical) modelling of situations that students are likely to encounter. Bandura's notion of triadic reciprocality in the interrelationship between environmental, behavioural and personal factors is developed through the stages of rehearsal, incremental change and vicarious learning. This objective of using

role-play to change behaviour in stages, and in learning through imitating and reflecting on the actions of self and others, has much in common with other methods in education for teaching. This is set within the paradigm of Schön's model of reflection-in-action where participants are encouraged to make 'online' decisions as their actions are being undertaken. It is interesting that Gilly and Richard use the work of Thomas (2008) in their analysis, reflecting that ' … being real is more important than being perfect or right. The facilitator enters into a collaborative learning space, and their presence is a powerful vehicle for noticing behaviours and for supporting change'. This resonates with much other writing in this journal number, especially perhaps with the work of Joanna Haynes.

Paul Sutton has drawn on seven points provided by Juway et al. (2004) to discuss aspects of a crucial form of dialogue that universities need to examine: the dialogue of feedback. He analyses differences in perceptions and expectation between tutors and students. Like Annie Fisher he recognises the usefulness of the ideas of Bakhtin in defining the parameters of dialogue (especially the unfinalisability of comments and the role of a multiplicity or polyphony of voices). He, also, is aware of the University College motto 'Abeunt studia in mores' and of the potential of effective feedback (written but also, and preferably, face-to-face) to strengthen character. The spirit of sharing of the meaning of academic literacies (Lea & Street, 1989) in teaching and learning has similarities with the nature of the work among staff examined by Couper et al. in seeking to travel from academic identity to research identity. The epistemological and ontological dimensions of feedback, especially around reaching a mutual understanding of meanings and purposes involves the recurrent theme of gaining awareness of the effect of power relations but also trying to find ways of enabling empowering dialogue to take place.

Joanna Haynes describes how dialogue in contexts of 'philosophy with children' is 'experienced as a lenient and permissive space in which it becomes genuinely possible to 'play' with ideas'. One aspect of Joanna's work is her willingness to use personal experience and reflection. She describes, using the language of P4C, her work as a university researcher with children, using picture books as stimuli for discussion. 'Leniency and permission' describe well the sense of freedom that is created around these dialogues. Drawing on the work of Van Manen (1997), the poetic nature of these anecdotal narratives enables this researcher to write about lived experience by getting to the very heart of the inter-relationships between pedagogy, living,

thinking, situation and reflection. Using this very method Joanna describes how she was affected at a workshop led by the Dutch philosopher Karin Murris, by the presence of Karin's baby boy and his older sister, and by her warmth in interacting not only with her own children but also by the thoughtful way she listened and responded to the workshop participants. Here we have models of dialogue as well as critical reflections on them.

Wayne Hugo and Carol Bertram present aspects of discourse and therefore dialogue as key features of the curriculum recontextualisation process in post-apartheid South Africa, focusing on the subject of history. Partly using the theories of Bernstein, especially the notion of 'Pedagogic Device', they examine various stages of the transformation of the history curriculum through university pure academic, government official and school and training phases of recontextualisation. They regard some of the outcomes of this process as unsatisfactory as each stage relates to degrees of consciousness-control ('rulers of consciousness'). They show the potential of the role of the university in deconstructing the less positive aspects of the hybrid recontextualisations that can occur. This falls within a growing body of writing which finds common ground across the world in significant factors experienced in curriculum development.

The critical analysis of reading as part of education by Anna Janus-Sitarz highlights the function of reading to empower students from the youngest ages upwards to inhabit other worlds and to hear the voice of the other as well as the self. This is seen not only from a particularly Polish point of view but the article has universal and international implications as a decline in reading has been a feature of many societies. The socially responsible role of the university in identifying and explaining the decline of reading and in addressing this is presented as a critical factor.

Finally, a sermon by Michael Langrish, the Bishop of Exeter to mark the Golden Jubilee of the Mary Harris Memorial Chapel in the University of Exeter on Sunday 22nd June 2008 has been included because it touches on important dimensions concerning perceptions of knowledge, conviction, belief and openness within a university. The problems touched upon have strong resonances with those highlighted by Paul Grosch.

Here then is a collection of critically reflective articles which in many different ways offer a series of snapshots of life in universities in the twenty-first century. Dialogue between tutors in different universities, between tutors and students, between tutors

themselves, and between tutors, students and children in schools is examined in all its philosophical and practical richness.

The Editorial Board would like to thank all contributors and reviewers for helping to create this first number of the first volume of Critical and Reflective Practice in Education. The very act of putting this together has involved layer upon layer of dialogue and now this journal occupies its own unique dialogic space.

References (not in the rest of the journal)

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