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Developing and sustaining learning cultures in Higher Education

Academic biography

Tony Brown is Director of the UK Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Education (ESCalate), where he is responsible for policy and strategic planning. He originally worked in secondary schools and became Head of Physics before moving to the primary education sector where he specialised in mathematics and taught children from 6 - 11. He worked as a primary education curriculum adviser and head teacher in Cornwall before moving to the university sector in Wales and then England where he worked on programmes of initial teacher education and education studies. He was Head of the Centre for Learning Development at the University of Hull prior to taking up his current post. His interests and publications focus on pedagogy and didactics of mathematics teaching and the application of psychoanalytic and critical theory to teaching and learning in higher education. Publications include, *The Really Useful Maths Book,* and *The Psychology of Mathematics Education: A Psychoanalytic Displacement* to which he contributed two chapters.

Abstract

This paper considers some of the challenges to developing a more critical approach to pedagogy in higher education. It looks at teaching and learning through the lens of the UK subject centre for education (ESCalate) and explores higher education pedagogy in terms of cultivating critical, scholarly and research-informed approaches to the development of knowledge, skills and understanding. The paper acknowledges the increasing use of psychoanalytic paradigms to critique education (Britzman 2003, 2009; Brown 2008, 2009; Cho 2009; Todd 2001, 2003; Youell 2006) and argues for the use of a psychoanalytic perspective for exploring the challenges for those who seek to develop and sustain learning cultures for the benefit of students and staff.

Keywords: Higher Education Academy, ESCalate, subject centre, pedagogy, psychoanalysis, learning, teaching, staff development, relational theories of learning.

Introduction

The paper explores two important themes.

1. The need for higher education teachers to challenge tacit and uncritical theories of learning and to explore and question unfamiliar theoretical models.

2. The need for scholarship to embrace pedagogically oriented approaches to teaching and learning through a better articulation of teaching and research.

Psychoanalytic theory offers one example of an approach to developing more critical models of pedagogy than is available through the dominant models. Although psychoanalytically informed pedagogies are unfamiliar to many teachers and students working in universities within the UK, this theoretical model remains a familiar one to university teachers in much of mainland Europe. Psychoanalytic theory provides an important opportunity to go beyond constructivist accounts of teaching and learning by exploring the dynamic relationship between teacher, student, and the subject discipline. This approach presents the experience of education as unremittingly problematic rather than something that can be smoothed over. Education is interpreted as a deeply personal project that initiates and demands change, and which inevitably encounters resistance and ambivalence.

Education as disturbance is something that we all recognise as part of our personal history but it has become displaced from current models of pedagogy, partly through the imposition of managerial and commercial goals onto education, as characterised by the language of transport and selling that currently dominates much of the discourse in formal education: delivery, package, quick, efficient, effective,

consumer-oriented, etc. Psychoanalytic theory anticipates this displacement. Resistance is an unconscious process that is central to our relationships. We both welcome and fear the consequences of our education (Britzman 2003). Resistance (through denial, obfuscation, avoidance, postponement, …) is a strategy for defending the self from attack and the potential destruction that we fear might result from exposure to education and the changes it demands of us in expecting us to become 'other' through the force of its imperative.

Having explored the consequences of adopting a psychoanalytically informed paradigm for education, the paper looks at the implications for staff development when a scholarly perspective is adopted for the purpose of achieving greater critical engagement with teaching and learning.

Contextualising subject centres and their activities

Subject centres seem to be if not unique, then at least peculiar to the UK. Subject centres were initially funded by HEFCE (The Higher Education Funding Council for England) to ensure that universities took a stronger interest in the learning experiences of university students, by providing opportunities for:

- Networking;
- promotion and sharing of good practices in learning and teaching;
- knowledge brokerage.

There was a perceived need for structural change within the UK HE sector following the Dearing Review in the mid 1990s into teaching, learning and students' experience of HE provision. This structural change was initiated by HEFCE and its counterparts across the UK. Bids were invited from HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) across the UK to create the LTSN

(Learning and Teaching Support Network) (HEFCE, 1999), although the S is often interpreted as standing for Subject – as in 'subject discipline'. This network of 25 centres was located in subject departments in host HEIs. Most centres remain hosted by their original institution following the absorption of the LTSN into the Higher Education Academy in May 2004. The number of centres was reduced to 24 with the demise of the Generic Centre. The work of the centres remains to focus support for teaching and learning at the level of the subject discipline and to promote critical review and development of learning opportunities for students in higher education. Centre staff seek to achieve this in a number of ways, by:

- funding small-scale research into teaching and learning;
- creating opportunities for university teachers to develop and disseminate their ideas and resources;
- organising public events;
- commissioning and promoting the development of resources;
- disseminating resources across the sector.

Most centres engage directly with students as well as with teaching staff, often through their web sites and through student events.

There are variants of this model, although anecdotal evidence suggests that the UK version is thought by many from outside the UK to be the most ambitious and successful method of sectoral engagement with learning and teaching yet developed.

The tension between universities' roles as centres of pure and applied research and their responsibilities for teaching has been given greater visibility by the creation of the subject centres and the structural changes within HE that led to their creation. The

relationship between the two has been the subject of considerable concern and debate within the sector (Jenkins and Healy 2005). This tension continues to manifest as ambivalence within the sector and in government policy towards these two areas of activity. The popularity and success of the NTFS (National Teaching Fellowship Scheme) which has operated in England for ten years and currently is under consideration for adoption by the Welsh Assembly Government, has not led to a connection at policy level between the NTFS and the Research Excellence Framework (REF)[1].

The Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) supports initiatives and projects through discipline specialists, but ALTC is funded directly from federal government and does not have discipline focused subject centres. The Australian HE structure does not have equivalents to the UK national funding councils, (Higher Education Funding Council for England, HEFCE; Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, HEFCW; Scottish Funding Council, SFC). In Europe, Sweden has shown interest in discipline-focused pedagogical support for the university sector, (which included sending a senior government policy adviser on attachment to the HE Academy. There are currently some moves towards the creation of subject centres (for example an engineering centre) in Europe, but no other country – at present – has created at a national strategic level anything close to the UK pedagogic model for supporting discipline focused pedagogy.

Following the Dearing review, the creation of learning, teaching and assessment strategies by universities, and the development of policy around teaching and learning, the quality of learning became much more strongly framed around, the quality of teaching. While it feels like a commonsense

deduction to identify the quality of teaching as the major factor in student learning, there are consequences to such as approach, not all of which are beneficial if one takes a relational approach to learning that a psychoanalytically informed view would encourage.

Firstly, it encourages instrumentalist, performative approaches to controlling teachers' behaviour (as it has done in schools). This might be appropriate for simplistic transmission models of teaching, but these do not adequately describe the university experience for an increasing proportion of students, who may study independently, part time, through distance learning. For others who follow full time courses, a significant proportion of their experience can feature group seminars, tutorials, individual laboratory work, off-site work-based learning, group practical and industrial project development, and field work, for which transmission models of teaching are hopelessly inadequate. Partly to offset these naïve approaches to teaching and learning, subject centres spend a high proportion of their funding on addressing these areas of student learning. There are erosive and corrosive consequences of taking a simplistic approach, and there is considerable pressure not to stay with complexity.

Secondly, over-emphasising connections between the quality of teaching and the quality of learning tends to externalise learning to some extent. It privileges normative models of students. It creates an artificial separation between teachers and learners where learning and teaching are not recognised as a relational dynamic. It allows students to project feelings of inadequacy onto staff (never there when they're needed, didn't explain what they wanted, made things too hard, …) whilst also encouraging projection by teachers of unsatisfactory performance

onto the student, who framed in this way always lacks something, (study skills, motivation, intelligence, experience, tenacity, desire to read and make notes, …). Bad learning is then something that lies outside the relationship between teacher and learner. It becomes something that can be fixed by 'good teaching', and by interventions such as support for academic writing and study skill workshops. Critical analysis (and by that I mean amenable to research) of the relational dynamics between learning and teaching and learner and teacher are marginalised and no longer easily available for scrutiny.

To some extent subject centres are culturally constrained to operate within current models of teaching and learning. Some models are shaped by government policy. Some avoid drawing explicitly on theories of learning. Most of those who engage with HE pedagogy will recognise models that subscribe to:

- a rejection of theory as being relevant to an understanding of teaching, (often selectively applied to subjects like education though not to medicine, science or mathematics);

- teaching as the application of commonsense, (i.e. anyone can do it);

- teaching as the sharing of expertise, (often argued in relation to industry and business as something that can be addressed by encouraging 'experts from outside' into the classroom.

Many subject centres work closely with their respective professional bodies (law, social work, medicine, engineering,) and their joint work in challenging unhelpful models of teaching and learning is as crucial as it is difficult, given the policy climate within which higher education operates.

For the discipline of education constructivist theories of individual cognitive development are pervasive, particularly within teacher education. These theories developed out of studies of individual cognition in the mid twentieth century and were subsequently expanded to include theories of social constructivism. Their limitations are twofold. By and large they exclude the affective domain and its central importance for learning. Second they do not engage in sufficient depth with relational aspects of learning and the understanding of group processes as these apply to learning in higher education.

Subject centres have a role to play in mediating between the influences that dominant theories of learning exert on practice, and the emergence of new perspectives on teaching and learning.

Following a typically British policy approach of checks and balances, of contradictory objectives and diverse interpretations of university learning, the 24 centres have had sufficient freedom to critique current theoretical and practical models of learning and teaching, respond to the heterogeneous world of academia without being constrained to peddle policy on behalf of governments and funding bodies. As a result, from my biased viewpoint they have remained a productive source of discipline-focused resources, guidance, research, policy interpretation, and evaluations for teachers in HE to use, adapt and adopt. The emergence of medical education as a professional practice in its own right and as a gathering place for exploring strategies for developing the training of medics, has seen the relevant subject centre (MEDEV) as a central player. Equally, the creation of the centre for law has contributed to a massive change in the perceptions of lawyers and professional law bodies about the need to focus on

the relation between student learning and lawyer effectiveness.

Most subject centres offer competitively awarded grant funding to individuals and teaching groups seeking to develop, review, extend and evaluate resources for teaching, and learning, curriculum initiatives and pedagogic developments. In relation to subject discipline, the creation of the current centres was to some extent arbitrary, with some representing single disciplines while most have multidisciplinary interests. Some emerging subjects such as neuroscience and forensic science are supported across more than one centre.

An important question that deserves greater exploration is how to develop the pedagogy of research-driven teaching in research-intensive universities. It is vital that students in research-intensive universities work with staff who have developed a highly effective pedagogy. Many of these students and staff are highly mobile, moving in and out of the UK for work and study. Many have specific teaching and learning needs that must be addressed if the UK is to maintain its gold standard HE provision. Access to world-class research is undermined if students are being introduced to it through less than world-class teaching.

The role of higher education in the further education sector (often referred to as HE in FE) remains a challenge for subject centres and the HE Academy. A significant proportion of subject centre funding is derived from subscribing institutions, which includes universities but excludes FE colleges. However, funding councils have identified HE in FE as an important area of work for subject centres, which are expected to support HE students and staff wherever they study. Approximately 12% of higher education in the UK is located in further education colleges and

those students and staff have a right to expect subject centre resources to flow in their direction.

Teaching cultures as a basis for developing learning

The quality of student learning is likely to be improved, not so much by addressing technicist and performative approaches to the way teachers behave in lectures, seminars or tutorials; as by developing the ways in which teachers sustain a culture of scholarship for their students and themselves. A culture of scholarship is secured through the ways that teachers position themselves and are perceived by others, in relation to their knowledge and understanding of the discipline in which they work. The issue for learners is how they see teachers in terms of scholarship and how teachers communicate this scholarship to students. It is not a new issue but one to which universities have returned over the decades.

> To call for research-based teaching is I suggest, to ask us as teachers to share with our pupils or students the process of our learning the wisdom which we do not possess, so that they can get into critical perspective the learning which we trust is ours. Research-based teaching is more demanding than teaching which offers instruction through a rhetoric of conclusions. […] The knowledge we teach in universities is won through research; and I have come to believe that such knowledge cannot be taught correctly except through some form of research-based teaching. The grounds for this belief are epistemological. Knowledge of the kind we have to offer is falsified when it is presented as the results of research detached from an understanding of the research process which is the warrant for these results. (Stenhouse 1979: 1-5)

Pedagogy is a late addition to the areas of research seen as valid for higher education. The dominance of

positivist research paradigms continued unchallenged certainly into the 1970s. Those with long memories may recall the resistance to arguments by Stenhouse et al who were promoting the status of teachers as researchers, through the development of participative investigation into the effectiveness of one's own practice – i.e. *action research.* For Stenhouse, action research by teacher-practitioners is a wholly appropriate research vehicle for the investigation of a wide range of important topics in the humanities and social sciences. Strong if not aggressive challenges to this approach were directed at action research(ers) over issues such as validity, reliability and generalisation by those antithetical to alternative methodologies.

Pedagogical research in higher education faces three challenges:

1. Perceived relevance and reputation
2. Levels of research skills
3. Prevalence of uncritical pedagogies of learning

Until quite recently, pedagogic research was seen as impure and uninformative. The absence of reflexivity in most positivistic research paradigms has meant that the role of the disinterested, distant and impartial observer has remained a more familiar research position. At the time of the emergence of Stenhouse's views, the scientific paradigm was dominant. Later, a more constructivist approach developed an alternative paradigm, partly through a disparaging of the scientific perspective. Many opportunities were lost (educational research was heavily criticised for its irrelevance to practitioners and policy makers alike). Among others, Richard Pring attempted a third approach that argued the falsity of the perceived duality of *realistic* approaches and *constructivist* approaches to research.

It has been a challenging step for many university teaching staff to plan, conduct and report on research into their own practice as a teacher. For many, a lack of familiarity with the methods for establishing rigour in reflexively-informed research has been a challenge. What counts as data, triangulation, generalisation and analysis? What can be meant by validity, reliability and researcher bias? Do these terms transfer to constructivist-oriented pedagogical research paradigms in any helpful way? If not, can they be substituted in any way that leaves the research relevant and capable of offering new insights and generalisations?

Finding productive answers to the above questions has proved challenging for a significant proportion of busy higher education teachers and there are several valid reasons why this should be so. First, many staff who teach in the higher education sector receive little or no guidance and training in methods of pedagogic research and their application. Secondly, many have little opportunity or encouragement to conduct even small-scale research and those who do may find their employer unsupportive. Although much pedagogic research has the potential to benefit teaching quality and learning, it is unlikely to attract external funding and is therefore seen by some managers as an additional and avoidable cost. The RAE and its successor the REF are unlikely to have much of an impact on improvements in teaching quality and learning – which could be seen as a missed opportunity and one which could have contributed positively to improvements.

Finally, in much of higher education there is an uncritical approach to theories of learning. Even where theorised views of learning inform practice there is still the likelihood that they are adoptive rather than critically developed. The education

discipline within HE has been particularly vulnerable to pseudoscientific ideas about learning styles and exercising the brain, for example, (Howard-Jones, 2007, 2008, 2010). Many claims and practices are based on misunderstanding or crude manipulation of data from neuroscience and brain study research[2]. The gathering of evidence of neuroscience facts and myths is a current ESCalate project. Findings will be published in 2010-11.

Before developing the argument for critical engagement with theories of student learning, it is important to emphasise the essential role that research plays in effective higher education teaching and why all teachers in higher education should see effective teaching as built on scholarship that includes research. Research is not in competition with teaching. It is not an adjunct. Teaching and research environments are complementary. The best teaching has always integrated research into scholarship and practice and always will. I remember being told by a senior member of staff at the university of Glasgow that in the mid twentieth century only professors were permitted to teach first year undergraduates, because of all the staff, they were considered to be the most effective at bringing together good research and good teaching for this audience.

Many of the drivers that work for a separation of teaching and research do so in an attempt to introduce a particular sub-category of teaching and redefine it as second rate. This supposedly less important teaching is often identified as teaching that:

- takes place outside research-intensive institutions;
- does not lead to training of the next generation of researchers in highly specialised

fields (e.g. medicine, nanotechnology, nuclear physics, …);

- does not overtly or systematically present research findings to students as part of their course of study;
- does not use research to establish evidence-informed practice;
- does not use 'scientifically oriented' research to transfer knowledge of commercial, industrial, or business techniques so as to improve competitiveness, entrepreneurship.

By devaluing certain sub-categories of teaching and by being selective about the types of research that are esteemed, policy makers can marginalise categories of teaching and associated institutions. Teaching (in the absence of esteemed types of research) is then redefined as being curriculum delivery and training. It is a response to the massification of higher education that seeks to avoid equity of funding. One major consequence is the de-professionalisation of staff who belong to low esteemed groups. It is achieved by representing all research as belonging to a small subset of research activities.

The centrality of the research dissertation or thesis that forms the Honours element of undergraduate degrees is an important rebuttal of this position. Undergraduate research is a key factor in defining what is 'higher' in higher education. The three-year undergraduate degree has a three-stage cycle. A first year of coverage of the discipline, a second year of demonstrating depth of understanding and specialism and the ability to articulate key aspects of discipline knowledge. The third year demands the ability to enquire into the discipline in a structured way, by applying knowledge and research skills to personal

interest in an area of the discipline. The result is the thesis or dissertation.

No teacher worthy of the title in higher education should be working with students at this level unless they too are systematically enquiring into areas of the discipline in a scholarly way. However, the danger of erosion of standards does not come from within the teaching force but from those who seek to replace education with training, and who see teaching as instruction, guiding students through content and assessing knowledge and skills acquisition. Of course higher education can include training and often does: but one is not a substitute for the other. Student engagement in higher education is most effectively achieved when students participate as 'active stakeholders in a research community' (Jenkins and Healey 2009).

The need for a deeper pedagogical approach to teaching and learning

Discussion of learning and teaching is still relatively new in higher education in UK. It is easy to forget that a robust pedagogical frame for researching teaching and learning will take a long time to become fully established. At present much of what is claimed as pedagogy is under-theorised and uncritically applied. We can easily adopt the habit of treating our interactions with students as symptomatic of student failures, rather than testing our experience rigorously against theoretical positions and drawing on an evidence base. Indeed at present what constitutes appropriate evidence to form an evidence-base is contested. Un-theorised and laissez faire practice limits deep analysis of learning and learning cultures and it risks the perpetuation of simplistic viewpoints that would not be acceptable in other areas of university life where the analysis of research data is rigorously undertaken. That other desires are at work

is suggested by the relative paucity of articles that critique theories of learning styles and multiple intelligences and their use within education courses (but see Klein 2003).

Many of the prevailing theories of student learning derive from psychological theories of individual cognition, which marginalise the affective domain, the power of groups on learning and the centrality of relationships as fundamental to effective learning. The student's *desire* is taken for granted and this gives rise to normative descriptions of the student in terms of learning. The student is likely to lack something: language or study skills, sufficient prior knowledge to make a success of higher education, and so on. All will be better if the deficit is made up, and a veritable industry has been built up in universities on the basis of this thinking. When it has become 'obvious' what students need in order to improve their learning, we should be alerted to the danger of occupying an uncritical space where we are engaging in under-theorised models of learning.

Successful learning in a subject discipline implicates more than the student's cognitive processes. The way subjects (e.g. law, sociology, engineering, medicine, forensic science, history, chemistry) stand in relation to their impact on the material world and to social groups is critical to a deep understanding of the discipline and one's place within it as a student. Issues of equality and justice, global warming, and ESD are not only studied through the subject lens, the discipline itself has a direct impact on society, on resources, on issues like social justice. Study of the discipline creates the opportunity, if not the obligation for teachers to:

> … teach young people how to participate in and shape public life and exercise critical judgment, and provide

the pedagogical conditions that enable them to (Giroux, 2009: 250).

For this reason it is useful to engage with pedagogies of learning that are not based primarily on individual cognitive psychology. Instead, it is worth exploring theories that recognise the social dimensions of learning and the relational dynamics between teacher and taught. A core part of the higher education student experience is the learning that gives rise to identifications that the student makes with peers, tutors and the subject discipline. One immediate consequence of this approach becomes obvious when we draw the conclusion that if learning is relational, then disruptions to learning are located in the relationship, though not necessarily causally linked, and failures in relationship can be implicated in failures in learning. Now we can see perhaps, how much more comfortable the prevailing theory of learning may leave us as teachers. The unvoiced positivistic tendencies of prevailing models of learning position the teacher as looker-on in much of the student's learning – except in those circumstances when the teacher is actively performing in front of students. Because psychological theories of individual cognition tend to pathologise student learning, they tend to distance the self of the teacher from many of the scenes of learning. They tend to position the teacher outside the pedagogical space where much of the learning is believed to take place. This may prove less threatening but it severely limits critical study of the student learning experience as a relational experience.

Relational theories of learning

Relational theory is based on the assumption that human development is determined primarily by relationships rather than motivational drives. One source of theoretical framing comes from psychoanalytic theory, which has in recent years moved away from a study of *subject-object* relations (between therapist – analysand where the power dynamics of the therapeutic space tended to treat difficulties as emerging from the analysand's destructive inner world or the analyst's failure to understand the counter-transference). By contrast relational psychoanalytic theory has developed out of an expectation of more equitable relationships, and it looks for considerable reflexivity and openness between those involved.

Relational theories of learning are usefully applied to non-therapeutic settings. They describe self-recognition as derived from the 'gaze of the other' and argue that the construction of self is a dynamic and continuous process shaped by patterns of intersubjective recognition. Honneth's critical theory of self-recognition draws on the work of Winnicott (1958, 1991). In *The Capacity to be Alone,* Winnicott (1958) sets out the stages of self-recognition, beginning in infancy with dependence, leading to learning how to survive 'being alone together', and gradually developing towards self-realisation and autonomy.

Honneth's (1995) relational theory draws on the traditions of both psychoanalytic and critical theory and develops in part from the social psychology of Mead (1934) and the work of Winnicott. For Honneth self-realisation and autonomy emerge from the mutuality of self-other recognition. According to Honneth, self-realisation develops from this intersubjective process through the emergence of:

- *self-confidence*, which relates to elementary functioning that derives from an awareness or feelings one has about oneself;

- *self-respect* which derives from confidence in the value of one's own judgment;

- *self-worth* which derives from a trust in one's own capabilities.

Implications for higher education

Students stand in relation to tutors, their peers and to themselves as a self-object. The student who is progressing well in the study of the discipline is quite likely to adopt a self-identification along the lines of, "I'm a chemist", "I'm an economist", "I'm training to be an accountant", … Shifts in self-identification are inevitable in education, since a fundamental expectation of the education process is transformation of the self. Any education that leaves the learner unchanged has failed: and failed to be *an education*. However, the transformative effects of education can be both pleasurable and disturbing:

> Students often feel that once they struggle to know something, they can never be quite the same again. And, as if this struggle were not enough, the process continually returns, refusing to offer consolation for very long. Egos are not formed, nor are desires done away with once and for all. The ego is never finished, but always incomplete (Todd 2001: 433)

Students exist not only in relation to tutors and peers, but also in relation to the subject discipline and to the work they need to do in learning to fully internalise a viable disciplinary perspective. The discipline can be described in psychoanalytic terms as a *third subject*. (Ogden, 1994) The student and the tutor as *subjects* in their own right may well respond to the discipline by imbuing it with an independent existence (another 'subject' in the psychoanalytic sense of the word).

In prevailing theories of learning the student's work is defined mostly in terms of conscious activity. From a psychoanalytic perspective the student's work includes unconscious elements in addition to the conscious acts of discussion, reading, attending lectures, seminars and so on, and working to produce assessments. Ogden (1994) argues that this sort of work always has an unconscious element. He argues that the relation with the discipline can sometimes be subjugating, creating a tyrannical control. Tutor and student may well find that their opportunities for thinking, feeling and acting become limited, with neither one able to experience self or other outside of a very narrow range. This can create feelings in the student of crossing a threshold into a privileged world, of being inducted into a high status group – an exclusive society defined by access to knowledge. However, relations with this *third subject* can be dysfunctional and tyrannical control can emerge in other ways, for example when the tutor feels their knowledge, status of professional expertise is under aggressive attack, being challenged perhaps by a highly anxious student desperate to understand and intolerant of feelings of confusion. This view of the relational dynamic between tutor, student and the discipline connects with the work of Meyer and Land (2006) on threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge. In the above example the narrow range of thoughts and feelings can be predominantly irrational or can lock the relating pair into a 'compulsively repeated perverse scenario', leading to feelings of being excluded, attacked or dehumanised. Ogden's contribution is useful in reminding us that the student's work (to engage with and demonstrate understanding of a body of knowledge as the student of a tutor, includes a component that connects directly to unconscious processes that seek to secure the ego-stability and survival.

Staff development as a problematic activity

Staff development is highly dependent for its framing by prevailing pedagogies of learning, as well as social, cultural and political forces that impact on higher education institutions. A pedagogical shift towards those viewpoints identified in this paper, would inevitably produce a shift in staff development agendas. Or to consider the reverse scenario, the inherent conservatism of organisations may lead them to resist changes of social and cultural processes. Any shifts in one part of the system are likely to be difficult unless they are accompanied by complementary systemic shifts elsewhere. This is particularly evident in staff development in further education colleges which are subject to even greater financial constraints than universities, with middle managers likely to identify the 30 hours directive of FE tutor staff development time as an opportunity for training – to work more efficiently within the current system. Nevertheless, those FE teachers involved with HE teaching are among the most enthusiastic and creative users of resource for scholarly activity. Providing a distinctive higher education experience for FE based students is a challenging but rewarding preoccupation and one that can be supported in constructive ways by staff development activity.

However, tensions remain within the staff development envelope. The induction of staff new to HE often takes place against a backdrop of prevailing pedagogies of learning and to this extent may well perpetuate a lack of criticality in deconstructing the prevailing and often tacit theories of learning applied to higher education students. For those entering higher education as teacher educators, the challenge can be even greater. Children's learning is (fortunately) a highly contested area, and there is much work being done to better understand the

learning process. Unfortunately, ITE curriculum in England requires a regime change if it is to create the time and space for ITE students to develop a critical understanding of learning in relation to children. Currently, the training students receive is based on performative measures of competence that leave little space for critical thinking of the purpose of education and the students' role within the education system. The staff development needs of ITE teacher educators runs the risk of being shaped by the performative requirements of the TDA and OFSTED and these limit the opportunity for independent and critical thinking about higher education pedagogy and learning theory. Nowhere is this more sharply delineated than in the teaching of neuromyths of learning styles, brain exercise, and hemispherical thinking preferences, that have become faddishly adopted by some schools in disregard of the lack of evidence in the neuroscience literature. A staff development curriculum for the twenty-first century teacher educator (and an equivalent one for the student planning to teach in schools) should include a thorough knowledge of recent developments in brain studies, psychology and neuroscience and a de-bunking of neuromyths so that students and staff can acquire a solid grounding in facts about learning with which to critique and build learning theory.

ESCalate's engagement with learning cultures

Like the subject of Education, ESCalate is highly diverse in its interests and activities. A large proportion of our work focuses on Initial Teacher Education (ITE) for students intending to work in schools, and Post Compulsory Education for Teachers (PCET) where students study to work in further education. Like all subject centres, ESCalate seeks to mediate national policy initiatives and local needs as expressed by individual teachers and teaching groups

in higher education departments. It does so by translating policy initiatives into opportunities for action. The UK government's ESD initiative for example has emerged in Scotland, Wales and England in three distinct forms. In 2008-09 through our competitive funding awards process, research grants were allocated by independent peer review to groups interested in developing a response to ESD policy initiatives. This has led to the creation of the UK United Kingdom Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship Network (ESDGC) ITE Network at London South Bank University. In 2008 ESCalate launched an ESD web site (http://esd.escalate.ac.uk) to provide resources and frameworks for thinking about education for sustainable development and critical citizenship. ESCalate also has a voice on the higher education Academy's ESD policy group that leads the planning of ESD engagement within the Academy and across the 24 subject centres.

The ESCalate ESD web site draws attention to the developments taking place in England, Wales – where there is a strong emphasis on global citizenship, and Scotland where the ESD global citizenship agenda has found form within that country's *Curriculum for Excellence* initiative. Somewhat surprisingly, the site has received over 250k hits in just over a year and the web stats show a big growth of interest in China, around five university towns.

These ESCalate initiatives seek to develop and sustain learning cultures by providing resources and frameworks for critical thinking around the topics engendered by the ESDGC debate.

ESCalate has chosen to put considerable resource into paper-based publications, including a *Discussions in Education* series. The most popular throughout 2008-09 was, *We seek it here...a new perspective on the elusive activity of critical thinking: a theoretical and practical approach,* commissioned from Jenny Moon. The publication sought to provide a theoretical and practical resource for both teachers and students in higher education.

A very different approach was adopted in a collaboration with the Higher Education Learning Partnerships (HELP) Centre for Excellence in Teaching (CETL) based at Plymouth University. A writing group of CETL award holders was convened to explore personal stories of professional development. Award holders had received CETL funding in previous years to initiate development activities in their FE colleges which form a partnership with the university. Although all had successfully completed their funded projects, accounts of their experience had not been developed. The result of the workshops was a 100% contribution to a publication titled *Putting the I into Identity.* This publication provided a public space for writing about the personal experience of developing scholarly approaches to professional challenges in their respective FE colleges. The subsequent spinoffs have included several of the authors being asked to present at conferences and university departmental meetings on professional development and engagement in scholarly writing. Two further writing initiatives have been started in Wales and NE England.

The most recent project engages directly with student learning. The University of Exeter is developing a model of student engagement based on embedding engagement in the undergraduate curriculum. The Exeter project connects the need for undergraduates to acquire a good understanding of research processes and their desire to influence the university and subject departments, in raising the quality of the student experience. Internal funding was obtained to

enable individual students to bid competitively for money to support a research project that related to a particular learning issue that the student thought needed to be addressed in their department.

The students' experience mirrored that of their tutors. They learned to frame research questions, plan a research project, write a bid, and for those who were successful, conduct the research, gather data, analyse and present their findings at a student conference. The students' enthusiasm for the initiative was matched only by the engagement of tutors from several departments across the campus. Tutors and departments have begun to analyse the students' findings and recommendations, and engage with the challenges of implementing them with the hope of improving learning opportunities. Their summer conference in 2009 was a hit with both students and staff. ESCalate is working collaboratively with Exeter staff and students to structure the stories and the theoretical perspectives in a way that will be accessible to students and universities across the UK so that the model can be adapted to other locations.

Summary

This paper has sought to present higher education in terms of its potential for offering a wide variety of contexts for learning that are connected by a single desire for cultivating critical, scholarly and research-informed approaches to the acquisition of knowledge, skills and understanding in the discipline. It has sought to avoid technicist approaches to developing and sustaining learning cultures. Instead the paper follows two threads.

The first is the need for higher education teachers to challenge tacit and uncritically adopted theories of learning and to explore models of learning from unfamiliar perspectives in ways that seek to uphold

the traditional values of higher education institutions as seats of learning rather than places of training engaged in short-termist policies and practices.

Second is the need for scholarship to pervade both teaching and learning through a better articulation of teaching and research. This needs to happen:

- in relation to the subject discipline, where new forms of knowledge are emerging;
- through what is sometimes called didactics – the structuring of the subject curriculum to reveal inner links and relations in order to maximise learners' opportunities for understanding (e.g. by teaching related areas of content together, or by bringing together contrasting areas of knowledge to heighten opportunities for understanding of conflict or dissonance of ideas);
- in relation to pedagogy.

Psychoanalytic and critical theory offer models for thinking about the relationship between teacher, student, and the discipline, as a triadic dynamic of interaction which takes thinking and discourse beyond the frame of individual psychologies of cognitive development.

Staff development opportunities reflect the tensions that exist in the rest of the higher education system. Opportunities for nurturing independent thinking and scholarly approaches to subject study will be criticised as irrelevant by those who have imposed a performative culture and who seek to wrest overall control of curriculum and purpose from universities and impose a utilitarian model of education as training and compliance. A better articulated theoretical model could improve our understanding of the dynamic relation between learner and teacher, as well as supporting better thought out arguments

against reducing higher education to a space for training.

Notes

1. See http://www.hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/impact/. The lack of articulation at government policy level is at least in part due to the huge disparity between funding for research and funding to support developments in teaching and learning. However, a valuable opportunity to promote learning and teaching is lost by disallowing the REF process a strong connection with the NTFS and other recognition and reward processes.

2. This is the subject of a BBC radio 4 programme in which Claudia Hammond investigates how new findings in neuroscience are being developed for use in the classroom. (*Inside the brain of a five-year-old*, broadcast 29 March 2010).

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