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Reflections on SEDA Spring Conference 2017: The quest for teaching excellence and learning gain: Issues, resolutions and possibilities

Jenny Lawrence, Independent consultant

In conversation with Donovan Synmoie, a fellow delegate at the SEDA Spring Conference, we recognised a recurring motif running throughout our SEDA colleagues' interrogation of teaching excellence: the notion of teaching excellence is frustratingly intangible, a clear definition being hard to pin down. But a learner knows it when he or she experiences it, and that perception is very much a subjective evaluation of the educator's personal attributes, or charisma and ability to make a personal connection with the learner. Excellent teachers, it seems, are those that can build interpersonal relationships with their learners.

Interpersonal learning relationships

The notion of the educator's personal attributes as integral to teaching excellence was reflected in Sue Rigby's (DVC, Lincoln University) plenary. She told us, 'excellent teachers bring their own experiences and identity into teaching, and are emotionally invested in their students' outcomes'. Leanne Hunt, one of the student presenters, echoed this sentiment when she suggested educators' 'interaction with components of friendliness and care' (Altman, 1990) or rapport is crucial to her understanding of teaching excellence. For her both learner and educator recognising each other as whole beings, not merely the limited and partial view of the 'teacher' or 'student' presented in the classroom, builds a meaningful interpersonal learning relationship and is integral to academic success.

Interpersonal learning relationships: Why they matter

Interpersonal relationships within the learning community (learner-to-learner, learner-to-educator) create an inclusive, productive learning environment and foster for learners a sense of belonging. This is now understood to be crucial to learner retention, success and wellbeing. Looking to the learner presentations at the conference, we can suggest learners recognise that their relationship with, or their connection to, their educator underlies their understanding of teaching excellence.

Interpersonal learning relationships: The student's perspective

Session: Leanne Hunt, University of Bradford, 'The importance of rapport in teaching excellence and learning gain'

Leanne Hunt was also clear: her paper explicitly outlines the importance of rapport. She explains that the teachers who recognise and understand that the learner is a complete person beyond the 'learner' presented in the classroom, and that she may

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have competing demands on her time and energies, are those to whom she is most responsive. Sensibly, this understanding of the complete person was a two-way dynamic. She enjoyed and appreciated the insights into her lecturers' lives beyond the classroom.

Session: Rachel Arland, Edge Hill University, 'Student-led staff awards: beyond a popularity contest'
Rachel Arland's exploration of her university's student-led staff awards continued the theme. When nominating an educator for an award, learners are asked to explain how the educator has supported learning, or what they had done that marked them out from other educators. Rachel shared several quotes from a selection of nominations. A recurring motif was quite apparent within the selected quotes: students appreciated the efforts educators made in attending to the learners' personal wellbeing. They nominated educators that recognised the student as a complete, complex and whole being, not just the partial sight of the learner in the classroom. It could be understood that these educators built interpersonal learning relationships with their learners.

Session: Hollie Shaw, North Lindsey College, 'A widening participation student's perspective of teaching excellence in college-based HE'
Hollie told us that 'teaching excellence is flexible enough to respond to student learning needs, but strong enough to inspire interest in the discipline'. For Hollie, her personal tutor's ability to take a student-centred approach, and his personal investment in her success, motivated her to study harder. She wanted to succeed to make him proud of her, as much as to realise the academic ambition he had instilled in her. I sponsored Hollie's submission to the conference and was very impressed with the time, energy and commitment Dan Bown (Hollie's tutor) puts into building a strong, trusting and secure interpersonal relationship with the learners who desire such a bond.

These presentations bring hooks' work to mind: when discussing how to effectively offer a critical pedagogy, she suggests the building of learning communities is founded on equal relationships between learner and educator, and that this equality is bound up in recognising each other's situatedness, particularity and common goal – the academic endeavour. She also makes a case for not only the academically but also the politically and emotionally engaged educator as a transformative agent in the learner's journey to self-actualisation, suggesting this breaking down of the public and private persona in equitable learner-educator relationships imbibes a sense of the personal as political (hooks, 2003).

Barriers to building interpersonal relationships in the HE classroom

We must applaud these learners' candour and value their insights, and we can wholly understand learner-educator interpersonal relationships as crucial to fostering supportive and productive learning environments. That this is starting to drive the recognition of good teaching, as Rachel Arland's paper suggests, can only be celebrated. Although this is an important step away from early student-led teaching awards critiqued as educators' popularity contests, it has its own difficult complexity.

We must ask, is the educator's ability to build interpersonal relationships with their learners informing the NSS? And so giving shape to the metrics that contribute to TEF? Is it extreme to think the educator's personal emotional efficacy becomes a defining element in measuring teaching excellence? Although we can of course value the importance of mutually respectful, democratic and equitable learner-educator relationships, should we be wary of the learner's subjective reading of their educator, and assessing their educator's interpersonal faculties becoming integral to teaching excellence?

The globalised, widening-participation-diversified higher education sector – all facets of HE that one can only value and actively encourage – presents to the learner a vast array of difference. Different people, different social practices, different ways of being, different academic perspectives. The melting pot of the academy is one of its greatest strengths: it presents a cultural richness and breadth of experience of others that is integral to the learning experience and valuable

to the social and political awakening of the learner – it informs the widened horizons of our graduates and, as some universities cite in their recruitment materials, builds for them a sense of 'global citizenship'.

Although the sector has fully embraced the equality and diversity agenda, and is obliged to attend to inclusion through the (rightly) celebrated Equality and Diversity Act 2010, the legally bound interventions (equality and diversity impact assessments of policy and process, mandatory equality and diversity training) and top-notch information, advice and guidance available from respected national bodies such as the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), the Higher Education Academy and Universities UK, have not addressed the issue completely. There is still a white, male domination of senior positions and professorial roles in HE, women and minorities are behind men in pay-scales, and men more likely to secure research funding. It is a neo-liberal fantasy to suggest E&D 2010 has wiped out exclusive practices in HE, and important here, successfully addressed the deeply complex, murky issue of unconscious bias.

Unconscious bias can be understood as when, unbeknown to our reasoning mind, our unconscious self, informed by our cultural context and personal history, makes quick-fire judgments about a situation, group or individual. Most of the work on equality and diversity in HE reads bias as working within clearly defined and understood hierarchies of power – that is, of the employing institution to the employee, the teaching institution to the learner community, the educator to the learner, and finally the learner to the learner-from-under-represented-groups. We must ask why there is a dearth of material looking at learner-to-educator bias. Is it down to a perceived imbalance of power in pedagogic relationships – that educators, by virtue of their position of powerful authority will not be privy to disregard or bias by the assumed deferential, respectful, less powerful learner?

Educators are not immune to the unconscious bias of their learners. We can see it has a material impact on the learner's interpretation of the educator's 'performance'. Research exploring module evaluation reveals a latent prejudice of learners toward educators from under-represented groups in HE (Boring *et al.,* 2016). In 2015 the New York Times covered a story, based on an analysis of ratemyprofessor.com, which clearly indicates learners value male educators ('brilliant') more highly than female ('bossy'). What if, as pupils pick up on teachers' bias in the classroom, the quality of their work is reduced (Rubie-Davis, 2006), so too HE educators may pick up on learners' bias – to the detriment of their teaching performance? And so further inform negative learner feedback? Either way, in some instances, triggered by their unconscious bias, a learner may be resistant to acknowledging or even blind to comprehending the role certain educators may have played in their learning journey and so will be unable to testify or offer fair 'evidence of enhancing and transforming the student learning experience' (QAA).

In recognising that unconscious bias may be at play between educator and learner in the classroom, can we acknowledge that difference may interrupt interpersonal relationships therein? It is a difficult question: will unconscious bias mess with the learner's *experiences* of their educator, or mess with their *interpretation* of them? It could be argued these are one and the same. Either way, NSS and so TEF – both measures of teaching based in large part on student reports of their experience – may not work in the favour of the educator who does not establish interpersonal relationships with them.

The compromise to interpersonal relationships may be because the educator triggers some unconscious bias in the learner – they may be from a background unfamiliar to the learner, or engage in social practices in the classroom not understood by the learner. They may have a learning difference, or merely be a pressured professional distracted by workload or other pressing, possibly personal concerns. We must also be realistic – we can't and don't like or make personal relationships with everyone we meet. We may take political exception to another position. There is a question of authenticity here. There are also structural barriers to the building of interpersonal relationships: teaching to monster-size groups, having hundreds of students across your entire portfolio of teaching responsibilities, I could go on. Does this inexhaustible list of factors that may interrupt the building of interpersonal relationships between educators and learners make the educator any less effective in their professional role?

The issue of power seems crucial to this argument. Much work has been done to deconstruct authoritarian, hierarchical educator-learner relationships, and should be celebrated for the essentially democratic ethos. From Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2007), through hooks' *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* (2009), to the current thinking of students as partners, the active recognition of learning as a shared endeavour across learner-educator partnership drives contemporary policy, innovation and funding.

How can we transcend difference and diversity in the will to learn?

> *'Our loyalties must transcend our race, our tribe, our class and our nation.'* (Martin Luther King, quoted in hooks, 1994, p. 28)

As Freire would have it, we are 'conditioned beings but not determined beings' (Freire, 2007, p. 37), which suggests we can reshape our unconscious bias. It has long been argued the only way to break down bias is to embrace our differences, and reflect deep within ourselves to recognise, and fully own our prejudices (Freire, 2007; hooks, 1994; ECU, 2013). Even the most 'fair-minded' will benefit from such an exercise (ECU, 2013, p. 4). We must ask ourselves how this can be done effectively within the HE classroom.

The NUS in their open letter in response to TEF suggest they would 'rather help develop an approach that is based on partnership between students and staff; using better means of measuring and tracking quality enhancement' than follow the system suggested. Can we then suggest learners and educators work together to be constantly alive to the personal, political unconscious and how it may play out in the classroom experience, and the evaluation of that experience – and be sensible to where that bias may be directed? Can this be realised when the learning community takes active responsibility to 'create an atmosphere of openness in discussing biases and best practice to minimise them' (Muneer *et al.,* 2015)? Could we suggest that an honest dialogue about diversity not only does a service to our students, but to the entire learning and wider

community and so we are morally obliged to have those difficult, consciousness-raising conversations? Could this alone create a context where we can make connection and build interpersonal relationships in the classroom? Given the structural impediments described earlier, it does feel like the neo-liberal fantasy.

When reflecting on how Donovan Synmoie and I connected, we realised the obvious. We met for the first time at the SEDA conference, and can be understood to be quite different (a female northern critical pedagogue/philosopher who sometimes uses a walking aid and a male London-based academic developer), but connected through a shared political interest in this issue of interpreting teaching excellence through the lens of interpersonal relationships.

Could it be the shared endeavour? The learner/educator collaborative will to learn can unite diverse members of a learning community and be the locus for meaningful connection and the bedrock of interpersonal learning relationships. We are, remember, mutually invested in the subject. Can we hope the educators' 'joy, love and passion' (Sally Brown's comment in the panel 'What is the future for learning gain and teaching excellence in UK higher education?') for their discipline and for their role as a teacher creates a place where 'our loyalties can transcend our race, our tribe, our class and our nation' and translate into a positive experience for both learner and educator?

It may be the best we can hope for is to be mindful of all the issues at play that may, consciously or not, arrest a 'true' assessment of the educators' Teaching Excellence.

Acknowledgement

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The growth of HEA Fellowship – Does this impact on an individual's teaching practice and how can we demonstrate a change in the students' experience?

Kath Botham, Manchester Metropolitan University

The world of the Educational Developer has been changing constantly over the last decade and there are many factors that are currently affecting the role of Educational Development Departments. The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) (BiS, 2016) has created an interest in teaching quality, and when it was first proposed, I suspect that all Educational Developers felt like me: 'At last something that can drive real improvements in teaching quality and create a culture where good teaching is rewarded'.

This was then followed by the disappointment when metrics were announced that did not even mention teaching quality or teaching qualifications. Ashwin (2016) suggests this was because the government felt that the evidence that gaining a teaching qualification leads to teaching excellence was not proven. This suggests that, as a sector, we need to provide more 'proof' to convince government and University Vice Chancellors that teaching and learning CPD does impact on the practice of teachers.

Following the recent announcement of the first round of TEF awards, I wonder how many Heads of Educational Development Units have since been challenged to prove to the University Management how they were having an impact on teaching quality and how they can support their institutions to gain a Gold TEF award next year. I am concerned that this will create a real dilemma for Educational Developers. There is likely to be pressure for units to set impressive and probably unrealistic targets to raise the numbers of staff with teaching qualifications, so that the institution can then gain a 100% HESA return and use this as evidence within their claim for a Gold TEF. Should we bow to pressure and just go all out to get staff to AFHEA so that the institution can tick the box in the HESA return? This compliance approach is likely to have no real impact on teaching quality but the metrics will look good. Or do we continue to support and encourage reluctant staff to gain the appropriate level of Fellowship and engage in a scheme that is likely to be beneficial to their practice and personal development? I would like to think that we would all prefer the latter option but I suspect that pressure will grow 'to just get people qualified'.

To pursue the latter, I think we really need to have more evidence that true engagement with HEA Fellowship can have a positive impact on practice and the student experience. But the dilemma is: how do we prove this? Evidence that engagement with formal courses such as PGCerts impacts positively on teaching practice and quality is available (Gibbs and Coffey, 2004; Parsons *et al.,* 2012). However, the evidence that engagement with the more flexible, reflective process of gaining HEA Fellowship has a positive impact on academic practice and the student experience is sparse. As Educational Developers working on institutional recognition schemes, I am sure that anecdotally we can all say, 'yes, reflective engagement with the UK PSF really does change academic practice', but can we prove this and do these changes actually impact on the students' experience? More importantly, can we persuade institutional leaders that this will positively impact on the institution's TEF outcome? I am sure we can all name institutions with mature effective CPD schemes that only gained a Bronze in the TEF and institutions with no clear CPD scheme that gained a Gold award.

My role as Manchester Metropolitan University (Manchester Met) PSF Scheme Leader has given me a clear insight into the impact of institutional schemes on teachers and their practice. The Manchester Met CPD scheme was first accredited by the HEA in 2013 and consists of two routes: a Taught Programme Route linked to a PGCertLTHE and a Recognition Route that enables more experienced staff to apply for Fellowship via the submission of a reflective portfolio that is assessed through an institutional panel. To give the reader some context, Manchester Met is a large 'Post 92' institution with: 6 large faculties, 35,000+ students, 3-4000 academic staff, and it has recently gained a Silver TEF award. Between September 2013 and 2016, 151 staff were awarded an HEA Fellowship via the recognition route.

I carried out an evaluation of the recognition route to see if there was any evidence of an impact on teachers' practice following the achievement of HEA Fellow (Botham, 2017). This evaluation had two stages. Stage 1 consisted of a questionnaire to all staff who had registered an interest in the scheme between January 2014 and June 2015 (n=76), some of whom had submitted (n=47) and some who failed to submit (n=29). Stage 2 then consisted of targeted semi-structured interviews with six volunteers from the Stage 1 respondents. The project findings were summarised within two thematic networks: 'Teaching and Learning Practice Development' and 'Engagement with the scheme' (Botham, in press).

Following analysis of these themes, I have concluded that there were two types of applicants:

- The 'Early Adopters': the colleagues that you could have predicted would want to engage in something that rewards good teaching and who want to develop further as teachers

- The 'Reluctant Adopters': colleagues who have other priorities such as research, have been HE Teachers for many years and may not see the relevance of teaching and learning-related CPD and had often only engaged with the scheme because they had been instructed to engage in order to 'tick the box'.

My evaluation suggests that the 'reluctant adopters' were more likely to disengage with the scheme due to barriers such as time and conflict with other academic activities such as research. The 'early adopters', whilst they still recognise these barriers, were more likely to have the self-motivation to overcome them, as they could see the value of the process. The challenge for Educational Developers is therefore to influence the motivation of the 'reluctant adopters', as it appears that the 'early adopters' will generally engage anyway. Part of this involves changing 'institutional culture' typified in some departments by entrenched negative/ambivalent attitudes towards teaching-focused professional development. An example of this attitude was illustrated to me when a successful applicant commented on a colleague's reasons for not engaging in the scheme. The colleague was quoted as saying, 'I have a PhD in this subject, I've taught the subject for 20 years and I know what I am doing. How dare anybody challenge my ability to teach?'

This culture is probably something that is outside of the Educational Developer's direct sphere of influence and inherently difficult to change. Educational Developers are often seen as representatives of the 'centre' and in some cases viewed with suspicion. An applicant described to me a 'mental barrier and suspicion about anything coming from the centre, with resistance most commonly coming from staff that have been here the longest', coupled with a suspicion that 'something nefarious is going on'.

I therefore would recommend the use of champions from within the faculties to act as advocates for CPD engagement with central educational development departments as this can remove the resistance of engaging in an initiative that comes from the centre (Kynaston and Maynard, 2009). This approach has proven to be effective at Manchester Met. For example, I needed to improve engagement from a particular department. I therefore developed an alliance with this department's 'Teaching and Learning Lead' and supported her in delivering bespoke workshops and mentorship to her colleagues. This meant that the initiative appeared to be driven from within the faculty by someone they trusted. This resulted in the department moving from having no SFHEA to having the highest number of SFHEAs in the whole institution.

Overall, success does seem to rely on achieving wider cultural changes at an

institutional level and the key factor currently appears to be the need to create parity between teaching and research. Having equivalent Career Ladders and the recognised and valued opportunity of reaching Professorship via a teaching route were viewed by Manchester Met applicants as being a key stimulant for greater engagement with teaching-focused CPD.

The key question however is, 'Does engagement with this type of a scheme, whether reluctant or not, actually have an impact on teaching quality?' The one thing I can say is that the evidence from Manchester Met and anecdotally from other institutional schemes is that, yes, there is a definite positive impact on practice (Spowart *et al.,* 2015; Eccles, 2016).

The results from the Manchester Met study confirmed that for all successful applicants, including some 'reluctant adopters', there was an identifiable change in attitude towards teaching and learning and a resultant change in practice. These changes in practice were identified as:

- *Improvement in confidence as a teacher* – successful applicants felt that their current practice was being validated and because of this they were more confident in the classroom and more willing to try new approaches. One applicant described how before she engaged with the scheme she thought that 'she was faking it' and suffering from 'imposter syndrome' and now she was much more confident in her practice and was even willing to engage in debate with colleagues about effective academic practice

- *Increased engagement with scholarship* – the process of applying for Fellowship had encouraged staff to engage/re-engage with the scholarship underpinning their practice and this practice was generally maintained after they had received their fellowship. This led to more evidence-based innovation and a clear focus on evidence-based teaching practice. One applicant described how the application process had created a practice of 'automatically accessing literature as a resource to develop new practice'.

- *Increased engagement with reflective practice* – applicants recognised the actual benefits of engaging with reflective practice and were motivated to continue to engage in this process in the future. A number of applicants described the process of writing a reflective commentary as being the first time they had actually had the opportunity to step back and review their own practice through a positive lens and unpick 'key principles, outcomes and lessons learned', and this was something they intended to continue as part of their future CPD.

What was interesting was that when I was discussing the process with a number of 'reluctant adopters' they admitted that the experience of actively writing their Fellowship application had been positive and had resulted in a change in their attitude towards teaching and learning, their teaching practice and a willingness to engage further with teaching-focused CPD. One 'reluctant adopter' who had been instructed to apply for Fellowship by their line manager found that the process of reflection enabled them to see that 'what I did was actually good and would work in other situations'. They are now actively engaged with the scheme as both an assessor and a mentor.

Can I categorically say that these changes in practice then result in an improvement in teaching quality and subsequent improvement in the student experience? Hand on heart, I would have to say 'no'. However, do the applicants think it has improved their teaching practice? The answer would have to be a definite 'yes'. In the future, can we prove the link between this practice change and the student experience and the TEF metrics? Currently proving such a direct link is a real challenge because there are so many other factors that could influence these metrics and it is almost impossible to prove what influence a change in the teaching practice of an individual teacher has on the overall student experience. My only hope is that if this change happens with more and more teachers, it will result in a much clearer positive impact on the student experience.

To conclude, as Educational Developers we need to continue to champion the provision of true professional development opportunities and resist the current move to the 'tick box' approach. The evidence from Manchester Met does suggest that engagement with HEA Fellowship does appear to have benefits that positively impact on an HE teacher's practice; and if this is then associated with changes in institutional cultures towards teaching quality and teaching-focused CPD, it can hopefully have a real impact on what the student is experiencing within the classroom.

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Student Engagement at Birmingham City University

Sam Geary and **Jamie Morris,** Birmingham City University

Student Engagement has emerged at the forefront of Birmingham City University's strategic plan, with the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching and the Birmingham City University Students' Union leading innovative initiatives in this regard (Nygaard *et al.,* 2012). This dates back to 2008 with the creation of the Student Academic Partners (SAP) scheme, and the subsequent launch of the Student Academic Mentoring Programme (StAMP). These initiatives are designed to give students the opportunity to work alongside staff members on project bids that seek to enhance the student experience.

Alongside this, the Students' Union at Birmingham City University is also managing a successful student representation scheme, involving 710 Student Academic Leaders and 44 School Reps across the University, all tasked with gathering the 'student voice' to facilitate change. However, with growing concerns raised by employers around graduates and their lack of 'higher order intellectual capabilities', teaching practitioners such as ourselves now have the onerous task of providing students with the space and time to reflect on and develop these highly sought attributes (Gibbs, 2010). With this in mind, the SKILL course was modified to fit within this framework.

What is SKILL?

Student Knowledge in Learning and Leadership (SKILL) is an accredited SEDA course designed for BCU students who are involved in various student engagement initiatives through a role that has an impact on the learning environment. The first iteration of SKILL occurred in 2015 and the most recent iteration, which will be the main focus of this article, ran in June 2016 over the course of three days. A total of eight students attended and there was representation from each faculty within the university.

The role that a student has prior to enrolling on SKILL is often quite varied. As well as being a Student Academic Leader or a School Rep, there are also instances of students having a more direct impact on the learning experience by being involved with various mentoring schemes. There are also a number of roles that sit outside the curriculum and have been developed to help with the transition into Higher Education (HE). Although varied, all the roles that students undertake are designed to enhance the student experience in one way or another.

As part of SKILL, students are encouraged to evaluate their role within the institution and reflect upon their own experiences of HE. Students are also asked to reflect upon how these experiences have helped with their own personal development. It was apparent that some of the students involved in SKILL had experienced limited opportunities to reflect on their role as a student, perhaps due to the nature of their course. Having the opportunity to reflect on their learning and experience can help students to establish what they already know and what challenges them (Sackstein, 2015). However, it is important to note that simply giving students time to think about what they have learned is not enough, they must be taught how to use reflective practice in an effective manner which can help develop their practice (Sackstein, 2015).

As facilitators on this course we attempted to do this by encouraging students to question certain elements of the course and to question what they see to be knowledge in their own context. By doing this, students were actively engaging with their own personal epistemology which reflects an individual's cognition about knowing and knowledge (Ryan, 2014). This can be heavily influenced both by the social and learning environment that a student is in and by the teachers exploring a student's attitude to learning and how they perceive knowledge can be influenced by their teachers (Weinstock and Roth, 2011). For example, Ryan (2014) argues that teachers who adopt an approach where knowledge is certain and objective are less likely to provide assessment tasks which require students to engage with reflective practice. We initially found that some students were reluctant to ask questions, perhaps because they had not been encouraged to do so in the past. As a result of this we decided to use prompts that did in fact encourage critical, thought-provoking questions.

We had anticipated that students may not be comfortable with the notion of asking questions and reflecting on their experience at the start of the course. Participants on previous iterations had actually noted that the course had been very personal and this sometimes led to a negative experience. In order to combat this we set up a reflective blog where students were asked questions that encouraged them to reflect on their role, their own learning, and also how SKILL is impacting on them. It is thought that online blogs are a tool that has the potential to promote critical thinking and reflection on professional practice (Yang, 2009). Initially, blog entries were quite descriptive, which can be common for those relatively new to reflective writing (Jasper, 2003). However, we then took the opportunity to ask probing questions that encouraged further explanation and analysis.

SKILL also aimed to provide an introduction to various philosophies and values that underpin learning and teaching. This was particularly relevant to students whose roles involved aspects of learning and teaching, but it could be argued that this was actually relevant to all students as this could potentially be used as a tool to take responsibility for their own personal learning experience. By doing this in their own context they could potentially develop the ability for inquiry and critical evaluation (Candy, 1991).

Student Fellow

The UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) for teaching and supporting learning in HE supports the initial and continuing professional development of staff and offers the opportunity for formal recognition of teaching and learning.

This is measured through areas of activity, core knowledge and professional values. The levels of recognition currently range from Associate Fellow (D1), to Fellow (D2), to Senior Fellow (D3), and finally to Principal Fellow (D4). Although a student could apply for D1, there is an argument in how far a student could meet the requirements of certain areas of activity such as 'design and plan learning activities' and 'successful engagement in appropriate teaching practice'. In these cases a student would most likely need to have some form of teaching role, although this may be applicable to a small number of student partners, perhaps those working in a mentoring role. The majority of student partners do not have a role that involves learning and teaching and therefore they are unlikely to meet these requirements.

In relation to core knowledge, whereas student partners should be able to demonstrate subject knowledge, they are likely to have limited understanding of 'appropriate methods for teaching and learning in the subject area and at the level of the academic programme' or 'pedagogic research and/or scholarship'. SKILL aims to partly address this core knowledge by introducing a variety of different approaches to learning and teaching, and then asking students to relate these approaches to their own experience. A similar point applies to the issue of professional values and practice. Whilst a student may be very familiar with the values and practices expected in their own discipline, it seems that most student partners will struggle to meet the criteria for D1 as they are unlikely to be familiar with HE values, practices, research, and scholarship.

Upon successful completion of SKILL students will be awarded with the title of Student Fellow (DS). This award was developed as a foundation to D1 and as an accessible award for students. The development of DS has allowed the institution to recognise and reward the many students who support the learning experience through some of the roles that have already been mentioned. As well as acting as a reward for students, DS also introduces students to the wider context of HE beyond their own practice and also to the UKPSF. From the students' perspective, it is also important that many of the activities and values embedded in DS are transferable to other contexts and can be beneficial in the development of employability. The dimensions of the DS framework can be seen In Figure 1.

Descriptor Student (DS)

In order to achieve DS, students should show successful engagement with at least two of the four Areas of Activity in relation to learning and teaching practices. Students should also show appropriate knowledge and understanding of K1 and at least two further Core Knowledge dimensions. There should also be an awareness of appropriate Professional Values in relation to the facilitation of learning.

A student's ability to meet these requirements will be measured through their engagement with SKILL which will include successful completion of the assessment. The learning activities and assessment were designed to meet the criteria. For example, after providing an introduction to some best practice around formative feedback, students were required to provide feedback to their peers and reflect upon how they had given feedback in their role within the university. Within the assessment students were also encouraged to reflect on how they had supported learning and how they may look to change their approach in the future.

Students were enthused by the idea of receiving a formal recognition through the Student Fellow award; however, they were unfamiliar with terms such as 'fellowship' and 'UKPSF'. The notion of the UKPSF being associated with quality learning and teaching is something that has become apparent within the sector. So, if we want to work on a partnership ethos with our students, then it could be argued that we need to discuss and educate them about the wider HE context.

Challenges

One challenge students faced pertained to the application or relevant theory to their job roles in the summative

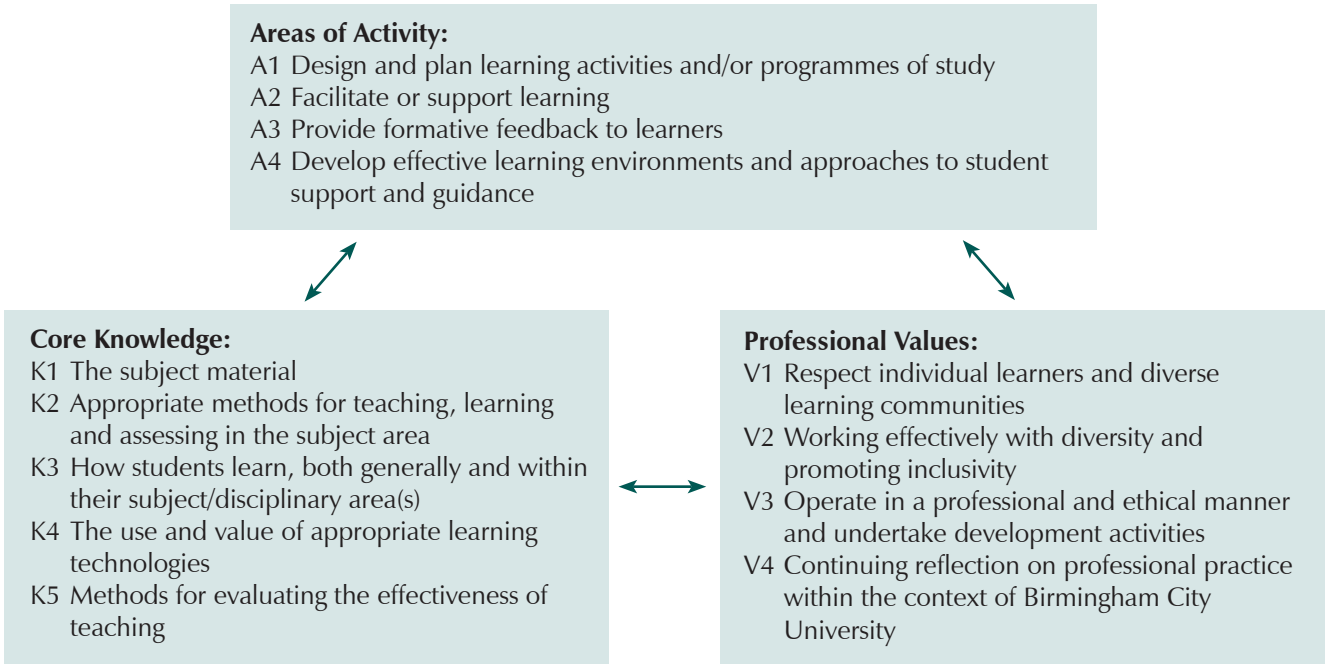

Figure 1 The dimensions of the Descriptor Student (DS) framework

assessment. The final assessment piece was split into two sections: a 10-minute presentation where students would reflect on their role and the various activities completed throughout the course, and a 1500-word essay in which students would discuss their role and the impact they are having within their specific context. They would also reflect on their approach and philosophy towards learning and teaching and whether it has changed or perhaps been reinforced as a result of SKILL. Transferring their experience to the written assessments proved difficult for students. In addition, students also struggled to apply theory to practice and present their work in an academic writing style. Instead, the majority of students utilised a more descriptive structure for their assessment.

Feedback gathered from the students upon completion confirmed this, with students highlighting that the written format required was also quite restricting, and that a broadening of submissions formats would be beneficial to engagement with the assessment. Moreover, it could be argued this was also down to students' efficacy with regard to writing reflectively. From our perspective, the positive feedback was caused by several contributing factors. Firstly, the activities that students participated in prior to this assessment were explicitly linked to their presentation. For example, the timetable involved a 'practice presentation' element involving group PechaKuchas. This was an important component leading up to the presentations, as asking questions and giving constructive feedback to their peers encouraged deeper reflection.

Combined with our own questions and summaries, students explored some elements of their own roles and articulated contributing factors in relation to their own practice. As Campbell and Norton (2007) highlight, student autonomy and individuality should be at the forefront of reflective practice. It was not until we explained that their presentation and questions were key components of reflective practice that students finally understood that they were *reflecting*.

Another challenge we faced revolved around student confidence. After arriving and meeting their course mates, some students believed their own roles were somewhat inferior to others and expressed a sense of anxiety. We attempted to approach this with an ice-breaker session, but upon reflection we could have built more personalised activities where students could gauge the characteristics of their peers and feel more comfortable around them. One student also commented on a feeling of 'inadequacy' around what they perceived to be 'highly educated' students, which was overcome by an unintentionally well-balanced group dynamic with highly sociable and friendly peers. This does present a problem for the selection process, as some students may be so overwhelmed by this feeling that they do not apply, nor attend if selected. It is also worth noting that these issues faced by students are not singular to them, but are growing concerns in relation to staff development as well.

Evaluation of SKILL

From the students' perspective, SKILL was evaluated quite positively with many students commenting on the reflective and active nature of the course:

> *'The session on "what to do when things go wrong" and "how has HE helped me" were most valuable because they led me to stop, reflect and appreciate the skills I have and how I can improve them.'*

This suggests that students do not always have the opportunities to reflect on their journey through HE and how it has developed them as an individual, which is something we anticipated before the course began. A similar comment can be seen below which also suggests that some students have had limited experience with reflective practice:

> *'I also wanted to learn about how I can critically reflect and plan for my future based on my personal and professional development.'*

As a result of these comments and the generic feedback received we plan to continue with the reflective and active nature of the course. There was a possibility that students would react negatively to reflective practice especially seeing as they were around students they had not previously met. This overall context could be seen as inappropriate and could therefore cause reflective practice to be destructive and traumatic (Yip, 2006). However, this did not occur, perhaps due to the small size of the group.

Throughout the course it became apparent that students do not often have the opportunity to work with students from different disciplines and faculties and this course was seen as an opportunity for them to be able to do just that:

> *'I wanted to get myself involved in more of a mixed group for further development.'*

> *'I enjoyed seeing the approach of other students.'*

> *'Meeting new people from other disciplines was amazing.'*

The diversity of students involved in SKILL helped enrich the overall experience. Students were able to offer different perspectives on the student learning experience and explain the different views the university has of them as students. An interesting example came in the form of an arts and design student who explained that they were seen as a professional rather than a student in their local context. Other students had differing opinions on how they were treated within HE, this being an example of how a diverse group can enrich a discussion. Going forward, we hope to have a diverse group of students who participate in SKILL in order to enrich the experience of fellow students.

It was encouraging from our perspective that the reflective and critical nature of SKILL had challenged students to question themselves and their position in HE. When asked what they found most challenging, students mentioned aspects such as the ability to reflect in a critical manner rather than be descriptive. We had anticipated this, especially as the course involved students from such a diverse background, but perhaps in future iterations we could place an emphasis on pre-session tasks to identify potential areas which we would need to focus on.

One of the main points highlighted via the student evaluation and general conversation throughout SKILL was the incentive for students to take part in this course. There was a balance between wanting to gain an extra qualification and the opportunity to engage with reflective

practice and gain a wider understanding of the HE sector. This small sample supports the stance that student motivation can be extremely varied, with some students initially seeking an extrinsic reward and some doing it for their own development.

One thing we have discussed as a teaching team is the number of participants we would like to be involved with SKILL. We did not get much response for the initial application and were predicting around 15 students based on previous numbers. That being said, the low number of participants did help create a safe learning environment in which students were encouraged to be open and to share their personal experiences, as reflected on in the student feedback we received. This type of environment also encouraged students to be critical of their local environment. From our perspective, it was refreshing to see a small group of students from diverse backgrounds within the university form their own community of practice where they felt comfortable sharing their own experiences. This also encouraged individual students, who were initially uncomfortable, to contribute to discussion and present their own individual reflections.

Future developments around the course mainly revolve around assessment. We felt that the presentation worked well because through questioning we were able to encourage a deeper level of reflection from students; however, the written pieces of work were often quite descriptive and failed to establish the link between theory and practice, something that students also stated they found difficult in the course evaluation. Upon reflection, maybe we were expecting too much from students considering this may be their only engagement with reflection and educational literature. In order to help with this we could look to provide some key readings rather than placing the emphasis on the students to find relevant literature.

It became apparent that the students who enrolled onto SKILL were involved in some unique initiatives that were impacting positively on the wider student experience. The individuals themselves were not always aware of how their practice has been influenced or how it was benefiting them in terms of personal development. This course has attempted to create an environment where students were able to reflect and appreciate what they have been doing as individuals. Going forward, we hope to look at ways in which we can make this course more inclusive to those individuals who are not involved in a student engagement initiative.

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Understanding Chinese students' learning needs: Tips for supporting Chinese students in the UK

Dr Xin Zhao (Skye), Sheffield University, with **Professor Sally Brown,** Independent consultant

Many UK universities are recruiting high numbers of Chinese students. This article provides a light-hearted overview of some of the most common cross-cultural challenges Chinese students and UK staff might face in working together in universities and offers some advice on how to make cross-cultural communications more effective. The article is based on the experiences of the first author, who has studied in the UK as an international student for over nine years and on the stories she has collected from her Chinese peers during her study. The author is now working as an International Student Teaching Associate at the University of Sheffield to support international students in their transition to UK universities.

It focuses on two main areas, the differences in Sino-UK students' communication styles and a number of differences in teaching and learning approaches between China and the UK. It is designed to help UK teachers and educational developers understand Chinese students better and provides some tips on how to offer effective support to Chinese students. It also calls on universities to consider providing 'cross-cultural competence' training for their staff as part of the transferable skills training to enhance Chinese students' employability.

China is the main provider of non-EU international students to the UK, followed by Malaysia and the USA. There were around 91,215 Chinese students in the UK in 2015-2016 (UKCISA, 2017). According to the UKCISA report, China is the only country that is showing a significant increase in student numbers coming to the UK. Each year, Chinese students bring in a large proportion of many universities' income and this helps UK HEIs to thrive financially. However, they can also present university staff with cross-cultural challenges, such as language barriers and integration issues.

Of course, it is important to note that China is a huge and very diverse country and that each individual Chinese student is unique. However, due to the differences in the education systems and social behaviour norms between China and the UK, some common themes emerge. Next, we will explore some of these challenges and propose some positive and manageable solutions.

Different communication style of Chinese students

Expressing politeness

Chinese students and home students in the UK might express politeness very differently. It may seem strange for Chinese students to see how often people in the UK say 'thank you', 'please', and 'sorry' to each other. In China, these words can create distance among close friends or families, therefore are used less frequently. Moreover, English-language teaching in China focuses more on vocabulary and grammar than on oral language skills or cultural etiquettes. As a result, Chinese students are not familiar with formal sentence structures and polite circumlocutions (for example, terms like 'Would it be possible for you to…?'), so they can be very direct in oral communication in English, without using 'please', 'thank you' and this can be interpreted by staff in the UK as inappropriate communication, brusqueness or even rudeness. This can lead to misunderstanding and negative emotions. However, Chinese students are more likely to express politeness through body gestures over spoken language compared with their British peers. Nodding, saying 'yes' while listening (while not necessarily meaning agreement), using both hands to deliver documents are all ways of showing politeness indirectly in ways UK staff may not notice. There can be a serious potential misunderstanding if teachers interpret nods or 'yes' as an actual agreement.

Building rapport

Chinese people largely prefer to achieve a certain level of mutual trust through building a social connection or 'Guanxi' and then start doing business or opening up to each other later. Depending on who you know, people can potentially bend 'rules' or get a better deal, and this is very different from how things work in the UK. Although people in the UK also use 'small talk' as a strategy to build rapport, this type of 'small talk' is usually very short, after which people will get down to doing business following accepted (but often implicit) rules and regulations. When Chinese students first arrive in the UK they might not know this 'professional' approach. Therefore, it might take them longer to form trust with counselling services and talk about their issues straightforwardly. For the same reason, students might not take 'no' for a direct answer when, for example, enquiring about the possibility of raising marks. Instead, they might consider that they haven't formed a good enough relationship with that particular member of staff and would try to come back to another member of staff with the same question.

Communicating over emails and telephones

Unlike in the UK, people in China do not use email as a primary communication tool in the work environment. Some Chinese students may not have an email account before coming to the UK. The most used communication tools among Chinese students are social media software – WeChat (which is very similar to WhatsApp), followed by QQ (which is similar to MSN). Since Chinese students are not used to sending or receiving emails, it can be problematic to get them to check emails regularly for university messages. It could, therefore, be helpful for departments to create a social media channel such as a WeChat official account (English version) to reach out to Chinese student groups and keep in touch with alumni in China. For similar reasons, Chinese students are less likely to be familiar with email etiquette. Many students may have been taught some standard email phrases or sentences in English before coming to the UK. The 'standard' sentences might sound less formal or even be considered excessively demanding in the English work environment. Sentences such as

'I look forward to your quick/timely reply', or 'please help ASAP', may sound a little 'pushy' to English ears.

Owing to language barriers between Chinese students and staff in the UK, telephone communication might also bring frustration to both parties. Often when there is a communication breakdown, staff in the UK might try to solve the communication problem by asking students to clarify each letter by using the phonetic alphabet (e.g. A for Alfa; B for Bravo), which makes the situation worse. It is important to remember that Chinese Mandarin/Cantonese do not follow alphabetical order. Instead of using the phonetic alphabet, it might be useful to have a website or online request form to which staff can refer students.

Chinese names and taboos

In China, people put family names first and given names last, which is emblematic of the fact that, in China, people prioritise family over individuals. Therefore, when registering Chinese students' names, staff in the UK often get them wrong. One good approach is to ask a Chinese student for the family name, then what is left in the name is his or her given name. It's not a good idea to ask for 'Christian' names as this is not necessarily a familiar concept. There are some taboos around Chinese names. For example, although the colour red is generally considered as a lucky colour in China (e.g. red envelopes, red couplets in calligraphy on Chinese New Year), Chinese people do not like to write their names in red or having a circle or square around their names. In ancient times, local judges in China normally used the colour red to write down criminals' names or would circle the names to show their decision of a death sentence. Therefore, Chinese students might feel uncomfortable when given red pens when filling in forms.

Some Chinese students prefer to choose English names for everyday use. If the students are from Hong Kong, they might already have English names as their official names on the passports. But mainland Chinese students do not normally have English names given to them at birth. They might, however, receive English names from their English teachers in China. Their English teachers are often Chinese as well. They might produce

a list of names at the beginning of the classes and hand the list to students from front row to back row for students to pick their names, which means that chosen ones are sometimes unusual names to English ears. Some students might pick their English names through watching dramas or from dictionaries, and some students even get attached to their English names. This creates difficulty for teaching staff in the UK who have to match students' English names and Chinese names when students submit work or when they are providing feedback online.

Different university systems

Raising questions in the classrooms

In China, students normally do not ask questions in lectures unless they are nominated to do so. Chinese students may consider that asking an individual question is a waste of other students' lecture time. Therefore, students tend to queue up at the end of a lecture to ask questions to show their respect to the lecturer and fellow students, rather than interrupt a class. Lecturers in China will leave considerable time after each lecture just to answer questions. When Chinese students come to study in the UK, they are expected to speak up within the lectures, but might be shy owing to language barriers or feel that they should leave their own questions to the end of a lecture. Students queuing up after the formal session has ended can cause problems for lecturers in the UK whose schedules are often very tight.

They might feel pressured when they have to dash off for another lecture leaving a group of students waiting to ask questions. Tactics to solve this dilemma include allowing specific time in lectures where they ask students to raise questions as a group activity, or use anonymous online platforms (such as Padlet) to collect questions from students during a lecture and then provide answers during lecture breaks or later. It's important for lecturers to make it clear that the commitments rather than rudeness cause them to leave quickly.

Seeking support

Universities in China often employ a year tutor or 'fudao yuan' to look after students from the same grade. Each class in a grade will have a class representative directly reporting to the year tutor. The year tutor will be the link person connecting students with academic departments and supporting departments. Therefore, Chinese students might not be used to seeking support independently from different tutors or know the different ways of supporting departments in the UK. Terms like 'Personal Tutor', 'leave of absence', or 'special circumstances form' are often alien to Chinese students. As a result, students might go back to China during term time without seeking approval from the departments or apply for condonement of marks owing to special circumstances after the exams are completed.

Since universities in the UK often do not usually have nominated whole-year tutors, Chinese students tend to rely heavily on peer support. This might result in a group of students blocking a reception area for one

individual student's inquiry or having one student with better spoken English to speak on behalf of another. The implication for the tutors is to spell out very clearly what are the rules and norms for submission and extenuating circumstances to avoid misunderstanding. It's really important that during induction and in course handbooks the proper channels for seeking support are spelt out clearly to avoid such issues.

Assessment

The majority of the university assignments in China are unseen, time-constrained, individual exams. Concepts around pass-marks and grades can be mysterious to Chinese students, who may be used regularly to having marks around 90%, whereas in the UK this is considered an exceptionally high mark. Chinese students who first arrive in the UK often get stressed when receiving a mark around 60 or less, feeling they are doing very badly. For similar reasons, students are often not familiar with essay-based assignments or the term 'plagiarism', since they are unlikely often to have previously encountered the expectation that they hand in work undertaken in unsupervised home conditions. As a result, Chinese students have a tendency to use famous poems or idioms to support their arguments rather than literature-based evidence. This can result in lower marks or even failure of a module owing to what is termed by the university as 'poor academic conduct'. Chinese students may also fall victims of essay sales companies (so-called 'essay mills') who target email accounts with Chinese names and ac.uk signifiers, knowing that such students may be struggling with coping in very different contexts. It is essential to pre-empt such problems by providing writing workshops for Chinese students and other students, where they can see examples of students' essays and tutors' feedback (Brown and Joughin, 2007).

Conclusion

Chinese students are the biggest non-EU international student group in the UK. If they are to succeed in their studies in the UK, they have to overcome many challenges, so it is important for educators in the UK to be empathetic and sensitive when supporting Chinese students, and to take their professional responsibilities to act and teach in cross-cultural ways seriously. Just as Chinese students have a duty to prepare themselves for very different learning environments, so also do UK educators have a duty to similarly explore the special cultural needs and expectations of their Chinese students, and indeed other international students, through effective staff development. As a contribution to this process, we finish with some tips on welcoming and supporting Chinese students:

- Note carefully what students choose to call themselves, and keep a record of different first and family names associated with the same student
- Recognise that concepts of politeness and rudeness vary from culture to culture, and don't jump to conclusions if a student behaves in a way that you find surprising
- Be aware that the words a Chinese student speaks are only part of the story: other messages are being conveyed through gesture, body language and overall mien. 'Yes' doesn't necessarily mean agreement!
- Develop a clear and inclusive communication strategy that takes into account some students' unfamiliarity with or reluctance to use email: it's as well to have back-up systems that take this into account
- Remember that the Chinese language does not follow alphabetical order and that misunderstandings easily arise when students are asked to spell things out, particularly on the phone
- Be sensitive about the use of red ink and the way you highlight names in text
- Recognise the importance of collective cultures in Chinese society: students may prefer to trade off confidentiality for peer support
- Prepare yourself for student expectations about support that might be very different from home students: it's helpful to set out what mutual expectations might be, for example, about how long you can give students after formal classes for informal interactions, and be clear, straightforward and kind in expressing what you can and cannot do
- Wherever you can, arrange effective and sensitive support for academic practices including academic writing skills, particularly by showing students good and weaker examples of academic essays so that they can adapt to the new academic culture by developing concepts of quality by seeing a variety of academic work (Sadler, 2010).

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Pedagogic frailty and higher education

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Academics who teach at university are embedded in a complex professional environment in which the potential for stress is high. In order to provide a greater sense of coherence to our appreciation of the teaching role and to help manage that stress, the model of pedagogic frailty has been developed to visualise the factors that jostle for position in our workplace. Where these dimensions are in tension with each other across the campus, an environment of pedagogic frailty will be observed to exist in which conservative, possibly out-dated, teaching practices are preserved. Where frailty can be managed and replaced by resilience, the outcome for the institution (and for the individuals within that institution) is likely to be greater levels of innovation and the development of greater adaptive expertise – rather than routinisation of practice.

The overall model of pedagogic frailty is summarised in Figure 1. The concept is composed of four connected dimensions:

- *Regulative discourse:* referring to discussions about the theories, values and beliefs that underpin teaching, rather than the more ephemeral discussions about the mechanisms of teaching (staffing, timetabling *etc.*) that tend to dominate discussions with a short-term focus
- *Pedagogy and discipline:* referring to the ways in which the discipline is practised and how that is reflected in the way it is taught. Colleagues often talk about 'authenticity' in the way in which a subject is taught and may link theory and practice, or education and employability
- *Research-teaching nexus:* refers to the ways in which teaching and research may be able to inform each other. Perceptions of this relationship vary tremendously among academics, depending in part on whether research is seen as a product or as a process and the relative importance of teaching and research to their professional identity

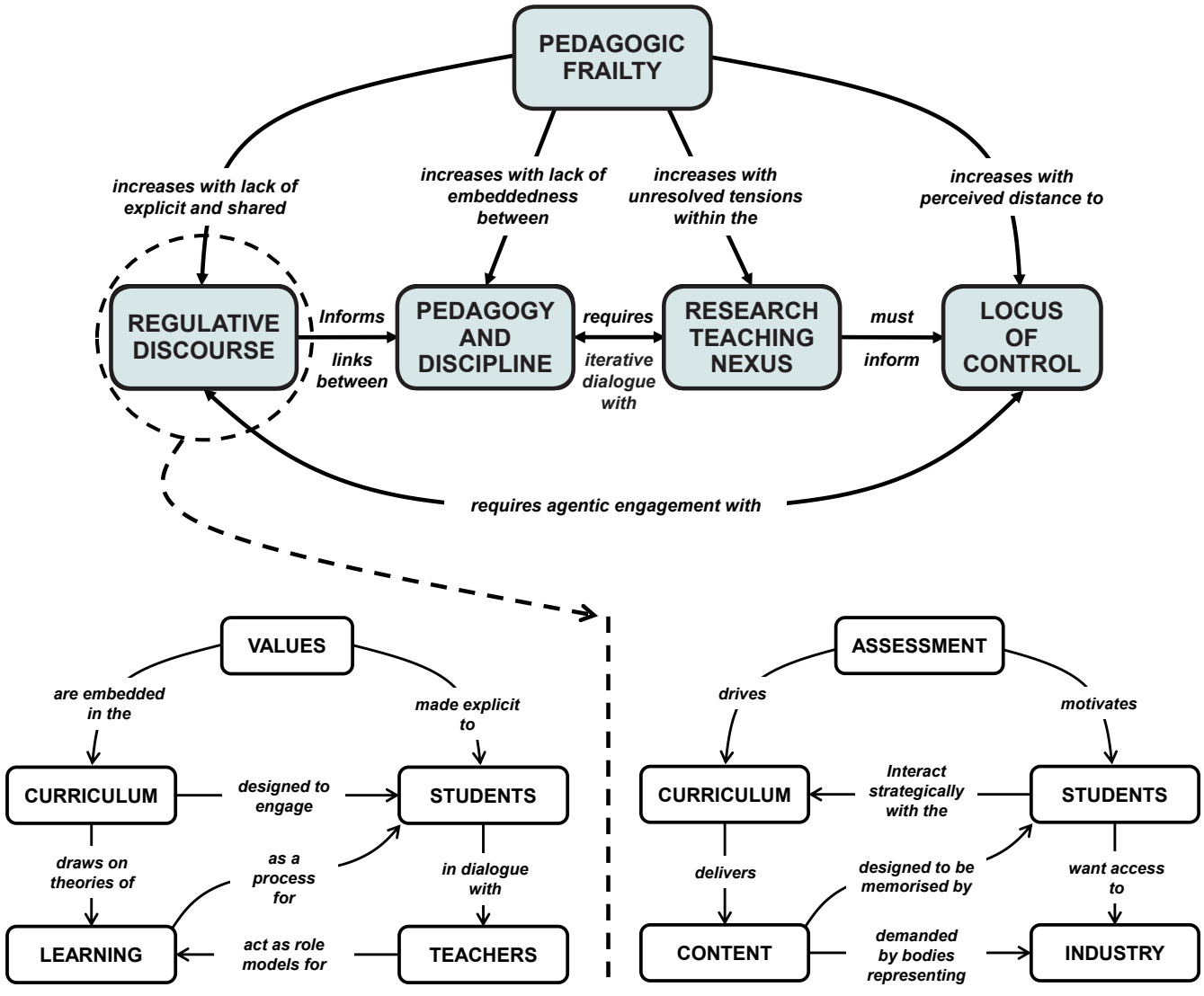

Figure 1 The overall pedagogic frailty model (above) with (inset below) two academics' contrasting views of the regulative discourse dimension (after Kinchin 2015; 2016). The maps of regulative discourse show that views can be held by colleagues that are very different to each other and may be in opposition

- *Locus of control:* refers to the point where rules and regulations about teaching are formulated and implemented. This can be concentrated within a centralised management team, or more distributed among the experts that compose the academic community. In addition, external professional bodies may also regulate teaching practices, and can create tensions within institutional policies.

The concept of pedagogic frailty 'came into view' as part of a wider exploration of a knowledge structures perspective on teaching and learning at university, facilitated by the application of concept mapping (Kinchin, 2016). The initial visualisation of the pedagogic frailty model was therefore dependent upon the use of concept maps, and it was essential that the concept maps that guided the evolution of this model were of the highest possible quality in order to yield rich and informative data. Within the current work on pedagogic frailty (e.g. Kinchin *et al.,* 2016; Kinchin and Francis, 2017) those who have been interviewed are subject experts but novice concept mappers. The point of this work was not to develop the interviewees' concept-mapping skills, but to produce concise, explanatory concept maps that would represent their perceptions of the dimensions within the frailty model. If the interviewees are left to produce maps on their own, experience has shown that they are likely to produce extensive maps (to include everything that might be of interest) and use simple linking phrases to join the concepts together. However, by employing map-mediated interviews where the interviewer is an experienced concept mapper, the process is able to guide the interviewee to produce better quality concept maps (often smaller, but with highly explanatory linking phrases). It has to be remembered that the map has the function of highlighting connections and prompting dialogue. The map is the artefact that colleagues will use as a prompt or a frame to develop their own professional narrative about their teaching. As the participant may be constructing his/her narrative over a period of months after the initial interview, it is crucial that the map is clear and concise with high explanatory power, and is not cluttered by a lot of unnecessary material that may obscure the main ideas.

Concept maps of each dimension reveal the underlying beliefs of academics that might be obscured by the widespread use of accepted terms such as 'teaching excellence' or 'research-led teaching'. Where these terms have contested meanings they may mask differences in understanding. Such differences may lead to pedagogic frailty, especially where they are buried under false assumptions about agreed meanings. The act of mapping not only makes these views available for discussion, but also facilitates personal reflection – allowing individuals to examine and reflect upon their own beliefs and assumptions.

It might be assumed that smaller concept maps take less time to construct than larger maps. This has not been found to be the case. During the map-mediated interviews used to chart the elements of pedagogic frailty, the interviews that have been undertaken to produce these sets of maps have typically each taken about two hours. During the interview the interviewee is often able to identify the concepts they want to include within the map relatively quickly, but then it takes time to arrange and link the concepts in a way that satisfies the interviewee. Some time to reflect on and revise these maps then allows the interviewee to refine the terms used in order to maximise the map's explanatory power.

The intended use of the concept map is to enable dialogue about teaching so that academics might be able to purposefully reflect on their practice. This is within a shared framework that also allows them to engage in dialogue with colleagues from other disciplines. The defining attributes of the model, as explored by individual academics, can be considered on various levels:

- *The content of each dimension:* Which concepts they include in their maps and which, if any, is seen as the dominant concept. And importantly, which concepts are omitted
- *The structure of each dimension:* If concept maps are strongly linear they tend to be indicative of routine expertise, whereas highly integrated networks are more likely to indicate a level of adaptive expertise, and more likely to connect with the content of the other dimensions (as is the case with the regulative discourse example in Figure 1)
- *The consistency across dimensions* (*i.e.* whether there is internal conflict within an individual profile – where propositions within one dimension seem to contradict or be in conflict with propositions in other dimensions)
- *The level of language that is used:* Particularly in the linking phrases included in a map. Instances where the same linking phrase is used repeatedly are often indications that the participant has not previously thought deeply about their teaching.

Even when an individual academic possesses a profile that exhibits appropriate content, integrated structure, strong consistency and explanatory language, the important aspect is how that profile fits within the network of other personal profiles within their professional context. If everyone else in the department holds a conflicting sense of the teaching discourse, the research-teaching nexus and the level of regulation, then there is potential for frailty. This may indicate the need to find a balance between 'agency' (where an individual has a strong self-identity and the ability to direct their own professional activity) and 'frailty' (where that individual's views – or the dominant view in the department – conflict with other views in the institution, including peers from other disciplines or centralised management).

The mapping of academic perceptions of the dimensions of frailty is not intended to trace the outcomes against a pre-determined fixed route with which to judge colleagues. There is no intention to label individuals as 'frail'. Indeed, it has been made explicit in the supporting literature that this is not appropriate and that the unit of analysis of frailty lies in the links between academics or groups of academics. Frailty, where it exists, is therefore a quality of the system and not of the individual. But in order to map the system, we need to uncover the beliefs of the individuals that make up the network of views across the institution. The point is to explore the landscape of academia. The concept maps of the dimensions of frailty are open and connectable in all of their dimensions. Elements are detachable, reversible, and susceptible to constant modification. Indeed, it will be seen that the development of academic reflections upon frailty and resilience will map a path that is personal, entangled, non-linear and iterative as the academic explores the multiple landscapes of their personal and professional experience and brings them into relation with each other.

The dynamic relationship between resilience and frailty is one that needs to be managed carefully within an institution (Figure

2) and requires appropriate processes of system maintenance that support the alignment of professional values across academic staff, academic developers and academic managers (Kinchin and Winstone, 2017). Frailty and resilience are therefore two sides of the same coin and need to be considered together.

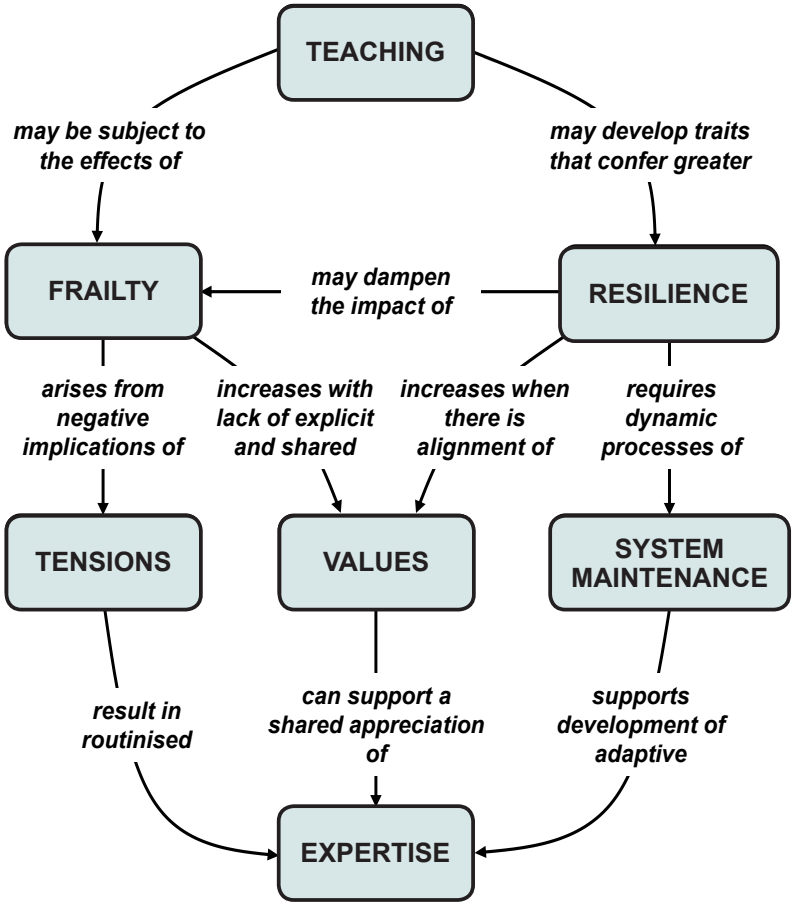

Figure 2 The relationship between frailty and resilience (after Kinchin and Winstone, 2017)

It is important to note that pedagogic frailty is not something that can be 'cracked' once by an institution and then ignored. The environment in which academics function is dynamic. Elements of higher education are constantly evolving and so the academic (and the institution) has to parallel this evolution within their own professional development. In addition, it is clear that higher education is a global industry and many academics are likely to move across international borders in the course of their careers. The movement of academics and the continuous change experienced by universities means that pedagogic frailty is likely to be a recurring theme within an individual's career. Frailty is therefore not something to be overcome as much as something to be managed over time (Kinchin and Winstone, 2017).

The mapping process reveals an enormous diversity of views about the discourse of teaching, the role of research and the value of regulation. This diversity is often masked by the use of commonplace terms such as *'teaching excellence'* and *'research-led teaching'*. It seems this can be misleading as their use suggests a uniformity of purpose and understanding across the higher education sector that is not justified. Probing beneath these terms to see how ideas interact and how concepts are interconnected reveals an array of understandings that may be conflicting and contradictory. The result is that academic authors are using the same terms to mean different things.

We have been exploring the application of the pedagogic frailty model within our CPD provision at Surrey. So far we have found that academics are able to engage positively with the concept of frailty and with the process of mapping their ideas. Each participant brings something different and personal to the model and this offers a way to open a discussion about teaching, often using concepts from their own disciplinary background to provide a familiar language to support that exploration.

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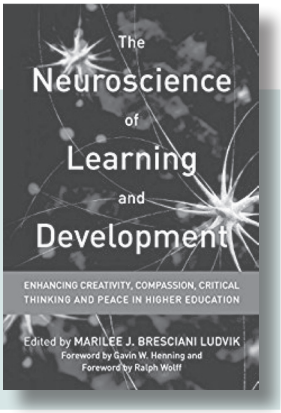
Book Review

The Neuroscience of Learning and Development: Enhancing Creativity, Compassion, Critical Thinking, and Peace in Higher Education

Edited by Marilee J. Bresciani Ludvik

Stylus Publishing, 2016



There is a quote (there always is) from Bob who says:

> *'Gonna change my way of thinking,*
> *Make myself a different set of rules*
> *Gonna put my good foot forward,*
> *And stop being influenced by fools.'*

It could not be more apt for this book. Indeed, one of the reviews on Amazon says, 'This book forced me to reconsider everything I knew about college student learning'. The reference to college gives a clue to the publication location, and UK readers might take a little time to adjust to some of the language, but persevere – there is a point where you might consider how to prevent the influence of fools.

The book begins with a couple of chapters that deal with neuroscience, brain structure and function which are included to set the scene and subsequent referencing in discussion. The writer of one of these chapters notes that 'Certain brain areas involved in learning and development exhibit a marked ability to respond to experience' (p. 54). However, the real 'work' starts in the chapter entitled 'Strategies that intentionally change the brain'. It is worth reiterating this book's hypothesis in full here. The authors posit (p. 73) that staff in HE can use known strategies to functionally change portions of the brain in order to foster students' abilities to…become aware of…(i) how and to what students pay attention (attention regulation), (ii) how students regulate their emotions (emotion regulation), and (iii) how students use their cognitive processes for inquiry (cognitive regulation). If you only want the 'essence' of this book you only need read chapters 3 and 10, but you will probably want to read rather more.

Pause for a moment here. This book's authors are claiming that, for students who took part in a study into a programme of integrative inquiry (INIQ) (including (p. 242) reading assignments, online mini-lectures, reflective questions, interactions with nature, mindfulness methodology assignments, creative expression assignments and journal assignments), the results of pre-post surveys for a range of tests, alongside self-reporting, show improvements in attention, emotion and cognitive regulation. Specifically, improved critical thinking (or at the very least disposition towards this), reduced stress, flexibility of thought, improved relationships, increased resilience, improved focus and improved wellbeing (see p.257 for a summary). Can any teacher, or teacher of teachers, not be interested in these claims? If this was a fizzy drink, the Americans would be shipping tanker loads of the stuff.

> *'Our intention is to return to a higher education design where the student engages fully in the content of what she is studying; monitors her own attention regulation and emotional regulation; and engages in cognitive regulation to discern how to prioritize what information has been gathered, how to use it, and what she needs to do next to expand on the learning.'* (p. 260)

Marcia Baxter Magolda might refer to this student as 'self-authoring'.

Pause again. Do you not dream of such students? What would teaching be like? If students undertook INIQ and all that it entails, would they not be developing as students – as people? I have forgotten the author of this quote and I am sure I am not quite reporting it accurately (apologies) but the gist is there – 'if we develop students then employability/employment takes care of itself'.

There is a challenge in this book contained within the final chapter's separate considerations for teachers, administrators and managers, but they all start with 'what beliefs do you need to suspend in order to consider adopting some of the practices in this book?' Well? Challenge the 'influence of fools'.

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Wellbeing and the scholarship of teaching and learning: The case for a virtuous intersection for the educator

Jenny Lawrence, Independent consultant

Introduction

The case for the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) as a conduit to stronger, better and more efficient HE provision is widely recognised in our staff and educational development community. The Higher Education Academy's extensive work on 'Defining and Supporting SoTL: a sector wide study' (Fanghanel *et al.,* 2016) outlines SoTL's current state of play within the UK HE sector. This work

recognises that definitions of SoTL have evolved as interest and investment in pedagogic practice, and so in SoTL, have progressed. Here I use the working definition of SoTL offered by Fanghanel *et al*. and I understand SoTL to be a 'research-led form of professional development, (which) has the potential to inform policy and practice at institutional level' (Fanghanel *et al*., 2016, p. 3). The facility for SoTL to enhance institution-wide teaching, learning and assessment practice is outlined in the project's survey of educational development practitioners and interviews with academic development leaders. However, the voice of the educator engaged in SoTL is missing from this important work. The focus on academic development leaders misses a crucial virtue of SoTL that, I think, responds to the evident institutional and individual resistance to it. This virtue is not, so far as I know, covered in SoTL literature but has never been more pertinent in these challenging times.

I suggest we drive forward investment in SoTL based on the personal testimony of educators – I have found this testimony provides evidence that SoTL has a profoundly important positive impact for the educator and wider learning community. In essence, SoTL imparts:

> *'a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.'* (World Health Organisation, 2014)

In this article I propose this case.

Why SoTL? The wellbeing-based case

The wellbeing-based case, like the professional, policy and pragmatic issues outlined by Schulman (2001), garners reward beyond the immediate enhanced competencies of the educators engaged in SoTL. It has the potential to impact positively and actively to build the learning community. Learning community is understood here as learners, educators, institutional staff, stakeholders, partners and local residents. This is in sympathy to bell hooks' definition of a learning community (2003) as everyone related or in close proximity to and invested in an HE provider. I then suggest we add the *'personal'* to Schulman's three Ps.

Challenges to the educators' wellbeing

The changing face of HE provision is well evidenced (see for example Clarke, 2014; Locke, 2014). The impact this has on the role of academic staff is not to be underestimated. Higher teaching loads (UCU, 2016), more complex and demanding administrative responsibilities (UCU, 2016), the need to keep up to date with strategic sector-wide developments as government takes a lead in shaping UK Higher Education to better serve the economy (Locke, 2014) (this very idea is in itself a challenge to many a liberal-minded academic), and up to date with an ever-faster evolving canon of disciplinary knowledge – these are all taking their toll on academic staff.

The changing shape of HE has seen academic roles aggregated, to the detriment of those who undertake these academic-related or 'para-academic' posts (Locke, 2014). Locke expresses concern for these para-academic staff, noting that career progression, recognition of and respect for their expertise are not comparable to their disciplinary-expert peers. These issues are also the case for HE educators teaching in the college-based settings. One would hope the new focus on teaching excellence through the TEF would support the cause of those on teaching-only contracts. Unfortunately not: TEF is a cause for concern across the sector (Hunt, 2017). For the purposes of clarity, and in a bid to create unity and recognition of parity, I refer to para-academic and academic staff teaching at any of the possible HE providers as 'educators' throughout.

The new tensions inherent to educators' roles in HE may account for the increase in feelings of stress evidenced in the University and College Union biannual academic staff stress reports (UCU, 2014). The survey documents that 79% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'I find my job stressful'. This is an increase from 72% in 2012. More alarmingly, the report states 'there was a considerable increase in the proportion of members from HE that reported experiencing unacceptable levels of stress "always" or "often": 39% in 2012 and 48% in 2014' (UCU, 2014). The UCU 2016 staff stress survey figures were unavailable at the time of writing.

The pressure to keep abreast of a fast-shifting sector may account for the academic, related and teaching staff who responded to the 2016 UCU workload survey that they work, on average, 50.09 hours a week, that's just shy of two days a week beyond contracted hours (UCU, 2016). It seems this excessive workload is distributed fairly evenly across the various forms of educator contract/role. More than a quarter (28%) of this cohort said their workloads were unmanageable all or most of the time. Two-thirds (65.5%) stated that their workload was unmanageable at least half of the time.

Inter-relationship of educator and learner wellbeing

If one is not convinced of the case to address the wellbeing of educators given the challenges outlined, then think for a moment of the inter-relationship of learner and educator wellbeing. Carter and Evans suggest a 'fundamental link between staff wellbeing and student satisfaction: engaged, committed staff will be those whose enthusiasm for their subject and their job shines through and rubs off on students' (Carter and Evans, 2013).

The Universities UK Mental Wellbeing in HE Working Group also makes a connection between staff and student wellbeing (MWBHE, 2015). 80% of the 90 institutions that responded to the MWBHE 2008 wellbeing survey said academic staff have a pastoral role. We must acknowledge the pressures experienced by learners to understand how challenging this may be for our educators, and how important their pastoral role is to the student experience.

Learners are not immune to the detrimental effects of changes to HE. To give only one example: increases in tuition fees are leading more students to seek counselling (Gani, 2016). This and the everyday pressures of contemporary life are compromising student wellbeing (Killin, 2016; Krause, 2016), to the point that student disclosure of a mental health condition has tripled in the last eight years (Equality Challenge Unit, 2015, pp. 76-77). Of course, we may argue that the recent development of an enlightened discourse on mental health empowers individuals to give voice to their struggle. However, the case remains: learners are experiencing mental ill-health.

Educators are more likely to be the first point of contact for a student under duress who may be looking for an extension to an assignment deadline but who tumbles into distress (Garbutt *et al.,* 2005). It is not only sensitive topics that can trigger learner distress and which need to be carefully managed in a learning situation (Lawrence, 2014). Educators must have the inner strength to respond to distress sensibly – for their own and their learners' sake. This includes signposting to professional support services as much as offering tissues and implementing practicalities, such as granting extensions. They must then continue with the rest of their busy working day.

I do not here suggest educators overstep their professional role: there are (and should be) professional support services at almost all HE providers. Indeed the increase in the number of 'mental health advisors' in role at HEPs reflects the worrying expansion of the support needs of our students.

I am suggesting the depleted academic may not have the emotional or intellectual energy to respond effectively to a student expressing distress, or have the time to reflect on a student's changing behaviour, a clear warning sign of mental ill-health. I am also concerned with the educator's wellbeing when faced with student distress. It is entirely humane and appropriate to be moved by the pain of our learners (hooks, 2003). How can we support the educator feeling this pain to go on and function professionally? Of course there is a wider discussion to be had here about emotion in the work place, and the dire need to properly train educators in mental health awareness or mental health first aid and reporting processes. I will save this for another day.

Building wellbeing in organisations and communities

Considering this rather bleak picture of wellbeing in HE, it is time to make the move from managing stress to building resilience and wellbeing on university campuses. Based on empirical evidence, I suggest that supporting educators' engagement in SoTL is central to nurturing wellbeing and is at the very core of a thriving HE learning community. We must note here that we cannot of course guarantee educators' wellbeing through SoTL, but we can create a context where they are given every opportunity to realise the virtues that are conducive to it.

An evidence-based model for building wellbeing in organisations and communities

As part of the 'Mental Capital and Wellbeing' agenda, the Government commissioned the New Economic Foundation to establish an evidence-based model for building wellbeing. The resulting '5 ways to wellbeing' offers five actions that, working in concert (and a full complement is not necessary), are understood to lead to a state of wellbeing. They have been used successfully by public sector organisations to effect change in the service of individual wellbeing (Aked and Thompson, 2011), and are referred to by Haughton and Anderson's recent research for the Higher Education Academy exploring the embedding of mental wellbeing in the HE curriculum (to be published in 2017).

I used this research and the 5-ways model to devise for the HEA the 'Maximising student success: embedding mental wellbeing in the curriculum tool kit'. I launched the toolkit at an HEA workshop in December 2016 (it will be made available on the HEA website in due course). Educator engagement with the toolkit at the workshop and their consequent feedback shows an appetite for addressing wellbeing in pedagogic practice (Hanesworth, 2016). We must note here that this work (the HEA research and toolkit) focuses on the wellbeing of learners. What of our overstretched and stressed out educators?

Building educators' wellbeing

Using the voice of the educator as a foundation for understanding the impact and value of SoTL, and empirical data outlining that the outcome of SoTL-led educational developments, evidences just how effectively SoTL enables educators' ability to cope with the demands of the contemporary HE sector, supports their attending to their teaching responsibilities 'productively and fruitfully', and supports educators' meaningful contribution and feelings of belonging to their learning community. It is these educators' impassioned enthusiasm for SoTL that is the foundation for the case presented here.

SoTL in the service of wellbeing

Here I offer a brief insight into how SoTL serves educator wellbeing drawing on 'Wellbeing and the scholarship of teaching and learning: evidence of a virtuous intersection for the educator', written with my colleague Tim Herrick and to be published in the coming year. We use the five ways to wellbeing as they have been nuanced to the HE context in the HEA research and in my complementary toolkit:

- *Connect* to the learning process, curriculum content and learning community. Educators built a supportive community of practice that traversed the para-academic and disciplinary divides often found in HEPs and discussed in Fanghanel *et al*. (2016). For the para-academic, the respect of their academic peers gave them confidence in their sense of belonging to the academic world. This community of practice also opened up opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaboration and pedagogic innovation, to the benefit of learners.

- *Be active* including physical activity. Here I include active learning and the exercising of social and political agency. Educators engaged in SoTL are more likely to contribute to the shaping of their working environment through serving on committees or taking on teaching and learning leadership roles. They work to ensure SoTL is made available to colleagues, and engagement with educational development activity is supported at a strategic level.

- *Take notice* of the learning community, the curriculum content and the personal response to both. The inherently reflective nature of SoTL instils in educators the practice of careful consideration of their own and their learners' experience in the classroom. This inspired changes to pedagogic practice leading to positive results, which were a source of personal satisfaction and feelings of self-realisation.

- *Give* to the immediate learning or wider community. In deference to hooks (2003), I understand this generosity as educators' service to learners through effective pedagogy. We found that pedagogic competence born

from SoTL gave rise to positive student feedback, which was a source of great personal satisfaction.

- *Keep learning* through the entire student lifecycle (as Haughton and Anderson suggest in their HEA research exploring embedding wellbeing in the curriculum) and, as we suggest, professional lifecycle and beyond. SoTL instilled a respect for and desire to engage in research-based educational development and pedagogic practice.

Conclusion

In exploring the challenges facing the HE learning community and understanding the inter-relationship between learner success and educator wellbeing, I believe the case for addressing educators' wellbeing is robust. Evidence tells us that SoTL enables staff to engage in the qualities that make up wellbeing. Further to this, in the same way as I suggest in the 'Maximising' success toolkit that wellbeing can be used as a model for curriculum development, could we, as educational developers, use the model to shape our staff development work?

If we were not convinced before of the importance of the 'research-led form of professional development' (Fanghanel *et al.,* 2016) that is SoTL, then I will let the words of an educator close the case:

> *'From a very personal point of view…[SoTL]...has re-energised and re-motivated me after a very difficult few years in teaching, and I would like to say thank you for the opportunity to study, think, read, find a sense of direction and really take pleasure in my work again.'*

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Getting someone in: The role of blended professionals in HE writing development

Trevor Day and **David Swinburne,** Royal Literary Fund

Writing lies at the heart of academic practice as both process and product. In most disciplines, written assignments and/or exams are still the primary forms of assessment. Students' achievement in both is influenced by factors assessed as part of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). Writing also remains the chief vehicle for communicating research findings and engaging with sectors outside academia. Reporting on these activities is required in grant applications and is assessed by the Research Excellence Framework (REF) as a basis for allocating government funding. And for graduate employers, writing ability and other communication skills remain at or near the top of their list of concerns, often above numeracy and ICT skills (Kaplan, 2014; CBI, 2015).

If writing is so central to academic success for many students, who is responsible for nurturing its development? In most HEIs this role is of course distributed. Academic

teaching staff are on the front line and in a well-designed curriculum the development of writing abilities is scaffolded across the years of an undergraduate course, so that assignments gradually prepare students for large final-year projects, which may culminate in a dissertation or a large report (Day *et al.,* 2010). Writing is not distinct from other aspects of academic endeavour – for example, it goes hand in hand with critical thinking. It should be possible to develop various writing-related graduate attributes at the same time as meeting the academic requirements of courses (Day, 2011). For many of us, 'writing shapes the discipline as much as writing is shaped by the discipline: it is through writing that we think deeply, test ideas, self-reflect, and open up our ideas to the scrutiny of others' (Day, 2015).

Others who help nurture students' writing development include staff from a university's academic writing centre, learning development centre, English language centre, or their equivalents, as well as students being peer mentors for writing (Ganobcsik-Williams, 2006). At its best, a sizeable proportion of this provision adopts a 'writing in the disciplines' approach, with writing development fine-tuned to disciplinary context (Deane and O'Neill, 2011). Writing development goes far beyond the technical (effective grammar, spelling, punctuation and appropriate writing style). It encompasses subtleties of structure, argumentation, narrative and register. Professional writers, pre-eminently adaptable in writing for different audiences and purposes, can play a special role, working closely with universities to develop such qualities.

'Blended professionals' working in the 'Third Space' are defined by Whitchurch (2009: 407) as 'individuals with identities drawn from both professional and academic domains'. Professional writers as blended professionals work with HEIs in many ways. Novelists, playwrights and poets energise creative writing courses, while journalists, biographers and science writers inform non-fiction courses. Scriptwriters contribute to both. The focus of this article, however, is on the contribution of professional writers to universities' wider learning, teaching and research agenda.

The Royal Literary Fund

The Royal Literary Fund (RLF), a charity, has had a significant impact on the HE sector as a source of writing professionals. RLF Writing Fellows are professional writers with a noteworthy publication record, who provide one-to-one writing tutorials for students, free to the host university. This work is funded by the endowments left to the RLF by leading writers such as A. A. Milne and Somerset Maugham. Writing Fellows come from the broadest range of backgrounds: novelists, playwrights, poets, scriptwriters, journalists and a cornucopia of non-fiction writers. Typically, RLF Fellows work one-to-one with several students each day, in sessions of up to an hour, offering in-depth guidance that complements in-house provision. Since the scheme's inception in 1999, more than 300 writers have held Fellowship posts at some 120 different UK HEIs. Testament to the scheme's success is that many leading universities (Bristol, Cambridge, LSE, Manchester and Queen Mary, University of London, among them) have hosted RLF Writing Fellows for many years.

RLF Writing Fellows can only reach a proportion of students, so the RLF has been exploring ways to extend its reach to benefit more HE students and also staff. Since 2013, Writing Fellows with appropriate experience and aptitude have been selected and trained as Consultant Fellows (CFs) to facilitate group activities in universities. They undergo a one-year programme, drawing on principles of the Higher Education Academy's approach to training, and its Professional Standards Framework, but with a specific focus on writing development. Training includes designing and facilitating workshops for students, with clear learning outcomes for specific writing problems. To be accredited by the Royal Literary Fund, trainee Consultant Fellows must be observed by mentors, and by each other, with developmental feedback gathered systematically from participants and observers. Trainees then engage in work experience at one or more of 30 universities, during which additional feedback is compiled from student participants, observers and the university client, and after which trainees must demonstrate their commitment to reflective practice by keeping learning logs and other records. Finally, writing a critical reflective account integrates trainees' knowledge of learning and teaching frameworks with their ongoing practice.

Only when all these stages are successfully completed is the writer added to the RLF CF register. To stay on the register, Consultant Fellows must document ongoing practice and undertake continuing professional development. Fellows meet as a community, at regional meetings, on training days and through online forums, so that individual consultants can benefit from the experience of others and are kept up-to-date with the latest writing, learning and teaching practices.

The Consultant Fellows' scheme promotes high standards of professional and ethical practice while encouraging CFs to operate as independent practitioners. Many CFs have higher degrees and far-reaching teaching or training experience. Currently, 33 CFs are working across 33 HEIs, offering client-paid interventions ranging from workshops of one-day, half-day or less, through to 2-day to 4-day writing retreats and on-campus interventions called immersives. Run over several days, immersives combine group work with intensive one-to-one support. CFs work at all levels: with undergraduates, postgraduates and staff.

Examples

Julian Evans started out as a publishing editor before becoming a biographer, journalist and travel writer. He worked as an RLF Writing Fellow working in the Department of Health and Social Sciences at the University of the West of England (UWE), before returning as a Consultant Fellow in 2014 to run four-hour 'Improving your dissertation' workshops for final year undergraduates and give one-to-one tutorials. Explained Julian, 'Of course, students don't just study their discipline, they study the writing that goes along with it. The two are inseparable. My job is to help them become more capable and more

> 'Of course, students don't just study their discipline, they study the writing that goes along with it. The two are inseparable.

confident in their writing. I want them to enjoy their writing, to be more in control, to not be afraid.'

Julian's contribution at UWE is reviewed each year by course co-ordinators and the Associate Dean (Partnerships) in the Faculty of Health and Applied Sciences. Since 2014, his involvement has grown. He has written and presented a UWE video 'Make your writing flow' for undergraduates and now offers presentations and workshops for first, second and final years, and Master's students. In the first year, one-hour sessions concern the nuts and bolts of writing at degree level: thinking critically, and writing clearly and concisely. In the second year, one-hour sessions build on this. In the final year, he runs the dissertation-writing workshops, focusing on structure and the direction and flow of argument, and how to manage the writing process. To Julian, 'It is entirely natural that a writer teaches students about writing, just as a psychologist teaches students about psychology'. The department clearly sees Julian's close involvement – offering 10 full days of intervention across the year – as a cost-effective and fruitful collaboration.

Anne Wilson began working as an RLF Fellow at Brunel University alongside a career in journalism and writing radio, tv and film scripts for corporate clients. With her commercial acumen, she has found a valuable niche in working with university staff keen to write more compelling journal articles and more enticing grant applications. Anne explains, 'Academics value my ability to understand complex technical and scientific ideas, pick the cherries, and help them tell their story in plain English. I help them analyse the target audience, find the hook, and frame the story so it gets attention. Sometimes, I see myself as a midwife, helping them give birth to their story and present it to the world beyond their discipline.' As an RLF Writing Fellow, Anne worked one-to-one with students and staff. Now, as a Consultant Fellow, she runs university-funded workshops on writing grant proposals and high-quality academic articles.

Anne's special interest in working with staff and students from non-traditional backgrounds drew her to the Occupational Therapy Department at Brunel, designing a bespoke workshop on 'Creative approaches to support students' writing'. This led to a collaboration with Senior Lecturer Gail Eva, and their successful application for Teach Brunel funding to investigate the kinds of staff feedback that best help students improve their academic writing. Working from the ground up, Anne and Gail are running separate focus groups with students and staff before a consensus event for both, during which recommendations for best practice will emerge. Written guidance for occupational therapy staff will then be shared as an exemplar with the rest of the university.

For Anna Barker, journalist and novelist, her work as a Consultant Fellow evolved from being an RLF Writing Fellow at Teesside University, to providing writing workshops for students and staff there, to a collaboration to develop an essay-writing app. 'Many of the first and second year undergraduates I saw as a Writing Fellow were struggling with how to structure their essays,' says Anna. 'This was particularly the case for students from non-traditional academic backgrounds doing practice-based degrees in health and social sciences. I wanted to offer them an easy-to-follow guide. I tested out the concept in one-to-ones and in workshops, and then Teesside and the RLF worked with me in developing the guide as an app for mobiles, tablets and laptops. Called ALEX, it takes the student through the components of an essay and through the process of writing one, *i.e.* generating ideas and gathering information, thinking critically, organising material, writing up paragraphs, and revising. ALEX involves colour-coding sources of information and themes, so everything is easy to find and the bulk of structural decisions are made before students begin writing. Undergraduates at Teesside have been involved at all stages of testing and shaping the app's concept and content.' The emphasis on visuals and colour for planning and organising makes ALEX particularly accessible for students with dyslexia.

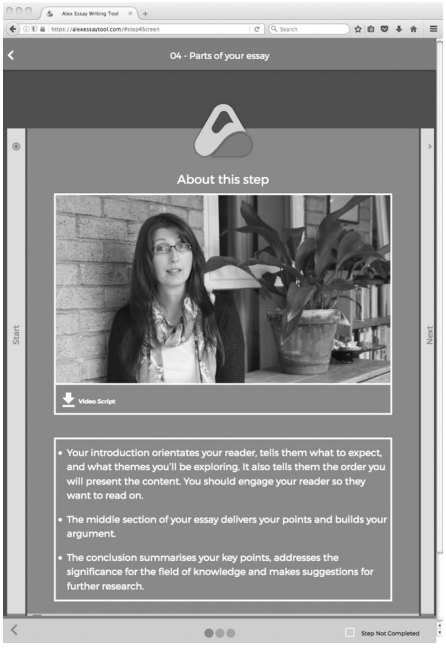

Figure 1 The ALEX app takes students through the essay-writing process, one step at a time, with video guidance accompanying text

Like Julian, for Anna her work has grown to embed writing support across year groups, but in this case, working with arts and humanities doctoral students. Along with two CF colleagues, Marina Benjamin and Tina Pepler, Anna offers a suite of interventions for the Midlands3Cities Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP): three one-day workshops for first years, immersives for second years, and a five-day writing retreat for third years. The DTP Manager, Susanna Ison, commented, 'The level of intervention and support offered by Anna, Marina and Tina has transformed the students' approach to writing. The workshops opened students' eyes to their potential as writers for both academia and outside, ensuring that the PhD, as well as standing as a coherent piece of research, can have impact with a wider audience.'

As for the wider RLF Consultant Fellows' programme, its dedicated website began as a shop window for explaining what CFs do, and how they can help staff and students solve their writing problems. The site now hosts blogs – *What's Happening?* and *Top Tips* – with insights and practical tips for helping university students and staff enhance their reading and writing practices.

Research and development

Alongside the 'hands on' approach to writing development, the RLF has been committed to understanding the wider context of UK writing development, and examining the effectiveness of interventions. The RLF-commissioned *Report on the Teaching of Academic Writing in UK Higher Education* (Ganobcsik-Williams, 2004) revealed a snapshot of the state of writing-

related learning development. The RLF's influential report *Writing Matters* (Davies *et al.,* 2006), informed by its work in the sector, investigated the challenges of writing at university and recommended ways to support students. Sally Baker's 2015 doctoral research, partly supported by the RLF, examined the reading and writing practices of students entering university. The RLF is currently working with the Centre for Academic Writing at Coventry University to develop an online directory of writing support across the sector.

The RLF also commissions innovative research to bolster the quality of its Consultant Fellows' programme by exploring the effectiveness of its CF training and subsequent interventions. For the 2014-15 cohort, Professor Gerry Czerniawski of the University of East London interviewed trainees before and after their training, to investigate the challenges for professional writers on their journey to becoming writing development facilitators. As one trainee put it, 'writing is largely a very private activity and training is very public'. Given that trainees were selected for their ability to work as successful writing tutors, developing them as reflective practitioners within a strong, supportive community of practice helped smooth the transition into their new role. Another trainee got to the heart of the identity issue, '…you are a CF *because* you are a writer'. There is tension between the role of a professional writer and that of a writing facilitator, but as the experience of Consultant Fellows over the last four years has demonstrated, many CFs have found the two identities can be synergistic, each complementing the other.

Empowering students and staff to write more effectively can have formidable impact on key HE concerns; for example, student retention and research funding. According to Treaster (2017), at the University of Arizona there is correspondence between the grade achieved in Freshman composition and the likelihood of completing a first degree: for this with A grade (72% complete their degree); a B grade (61%); and for C (41%). The implication is clear: increase writing competence and you increase the likelihood of a student staying on a degree course. In Australia, Paliadelis *et al.* (2015) attribute a department's doubling in academic paper output to an Au$18,000 investment in writing retreats and writing support. Following the interventions, successful grant applications resulted in Au$300,000 of external funding, much of which the authors imply would not have happened otherwise. Nevertheless, there is a scarcity of high-quality research in the UK on the cost effectiveness of writing development interventions, and which ones are most transformative for participants (Kornhaber *et al.,* 2016).

Feedback forms, filled with glowing comments at the end of a workshop or writing retreat, reveal little about the longer-term impact of an intervention. Have the participants' writing behaviour, confidence, skill or productivity actually shifted? To investigate this, one of us (TD) is collaborating with Erik Borg of Coventry University, and other HE colleagues, to compare these parameters before and several months after an intensive writing development intervention. In the future, it is hoped to accompany such investigation with analysis of changes in samples of participants' text (Borg and Deane, 2011). In the case of research staff, their before and after publication output can be compared. Of course, many factors affect an individual's writing trajectory within a university. The RLF-sponsored research, both qualitative and quantitative, is shifting its focus to self-efficacy and self-regulation (Zimmerman, 2008; Prat-Sala and Redford, 2010) and on participants taking greater control over their writing and publishing lives, something about which professional writers have insight won from long practice.

Other writing professionals

The Royal Literary Fund, through its various initiatives, has the greatest reach of writers' organisations in higher education. However, its work complements that of other organisations involved in writing development. The National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE), for example, supports all those who teach, study or research creative writing in schools, colleges or higher education. It provides continuing professional development for writers working in education, publishes a magazine, *Writing in Education,* and organises an annual conference and regional events.

Several HE-focused, writing-development companies have been established by former publishing industry or university staff. Cofactor, SciConnect and ThinkWrite focus on working with postgraduates and staff, and especially in enhancing science communication. Each has its niche in enriching the teaching, learning and research landscapes of higher education.

Final word

Given the uncertainty in HE created by Brexit, and the shift in universities' focus with TEF and the revised REF, the professional writers most likely to be successful in working with universities are those who embed themselves within the planning and working practices of their clients: those who co-construct provision with their HE colleagues.

Professional writers bring insight and inspiration to the writing experience of students and staff. They tend to be creative problem-solvers. They are explainers *par excellence,* revealing connections and patterns to develop structure and argument for different intentions and audiences. Writers gather, research and interrogate large volumes of material – in various media and from disparate sources – and integrate them into compelling narratives. All these qualities are invaluable in helping to inform and inspire students and staff in their writing practices. Above all, it is the living, breathing experience of writers in their day-to-day working lives, and their joy in wordcraft, that can help others develop confidence, power and precision in their writing – an activity that remains at the heart of the endeavour we call higher education.

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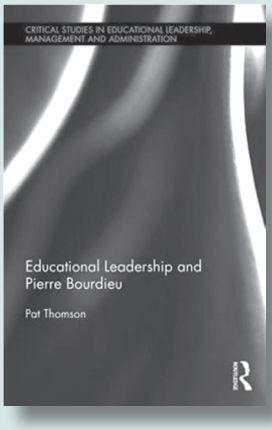
Book Review

Educational Leadership and Pierre Bourdieu

by Pat Thompson

Routledge, 2016

ISBN 0415603552



The towering figure of Pierre Bourdieu looms large in this thought-provoking and highly relevant book. Bourdieu (1930-2002) was a French sociologist, anthropologist, philosopher and public intellectual who wrote extensively about education, and the ways in which it produces and reproduces inequality. He saw society as comprising multiple interlocking and overlapping spaces, referred to as 'fields', that are simultaneously social, cultural and material, which are populated by inequitable positions. Other important concepts for Bourdieu were the notion of 'capitals', and 'social capital' and that of 'habitus' which frames and shapes human behaviour and often operates below the level of consciousness. This will resonate with those of us who work in UK higher education, recognising this in the reputational value of Russell Group Institutions compared to former polytechnics, along with the feelings of 'other-ness' and 'out-of-place-ness' expressed by working-class and BME students. One wonders what Bourdieu would make of university league tables, the Teaching Excellence Framework and Graduate Attributes.

I found this to be a well-structured and coherent book aimed at those who are interested in educational leadership and prepared to view it through an alternative lens. It reminded me of the contribution sociology can make to our understanding and interpretation of higher education policy and practice.

The reader is invited into the field of educational leadership, management and administration (ELMA) to consider whether taking a Bourdieusian approach might further our understanding of where we are, how we got here and where we might go next. For those interested in developments in policy and practice in education over time this makes for a fascinating yet sobering read as we marvel at the rapidity of change as reflected in the shift towards governance (and away from local government) within the UK schooling systems. Well-chosen examples and case studies from mainly the UK but also Australia are assiduously used to illustrate how ELMA is now viewed as a distinctive area of knowledge.

Prior to forging an illustrious academic career, Thompson was a Head Teacher and this is apparent in her writing as she moves effortlessly back and forth across the theory-practice nexus. Conversant with seminal and significant relevant literature, she uses this to good effect to offer historical, social and political context to support a compelling commentary on the 'capitals' and dispositions that educational professionals in leadership are now seen to need to 'play the game'.

Thompson does a good job of introducing Bourdieu and key aspects of his social theory in Chapter 1, rendering accessible what can sometimes appear complex without over-simplifying or failing to address some of the criticisms that have been levelled against him. In Chapter 3 she offers a succinct account of the ways in which Bourdieu is often used and misused by educational scholars, which is a 'must-read' for undergraduates studying his work for the first time. In doing so she shines a somewhat unflattering light on the 'scholarly game' which requires academics to advance their

own positions in the field by finding gaps in the work of others.

Chapters 4 and 5 explore the recent phenomenon of headteachers seeking autonomy through trends in creating Academies, and consider what leaders need to know and how the doxa of the modern manager is interchangeable with the need to demonstrate effectiveness and continuous improvement. Simultaneously fascinating and horrifying was the account of the National College for School Leadership whose training appeared to focus exclusively on 'what works' through the mechanisms of audit and measurement rather than focusing on creating a vision, transformatory practice and teacher's professional development needs.

For those wanting to find out more about Bourdieu there is a selected bibliography at the end. The final chapter is a reminder that our educational systems remain unjust and must do more to make a meaningful difference to the lives of all children and young people. Thompson encourages us to raise critical questions and to create an alternative model for educational leadership inspired by Bourdieusian ideas. These require us to ask:

- What kind of game is leadership? What leader practices are being promoted?
- What are people in the position of a leader said to believe?
- What leader practices are valued – *i.e.* how did individuals get to be university vice-chancellors?
- What practices are said to be leading? How do they manage the various logics of practice across the various fields?
- What capitals and dispositions did they acquire in the long apprenticeship of becoming a leader?

When I read an educational book, I hope for three things – new learning, a reframing of my own 'field' and 'capital', and to be inspired – with Pat Thompson's book I got all three.

Carole Davis is Head of Educational Development at Queen Mary University of London.

Institutional benefits of participating in funded projects – Roehampton's role in the Erasmus Plus Project E+ INCLUSION

Bridget Middlemas, University of Roehampton

Introduction

The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit at Roehampton has been involved in a number of international collaborative projects, with EU countries as well as countries further afield such as Lebanon, Armenia and Ukraine. Being a small central unit in the university has been of considerable advantage in such projects, as one of the key skills for success is the experience of being able to communicate effectively with stakeholders at different levels of the institutional hierarchy (personal, programme level and institutional), in order to build strong working relationships with those from very different backgrounds or academic traditions (Baskerville, 2013; Willis and Strivens, 2015). Historically, international collaborations necessitated the outward mobility of those involved, but our own research indicates that 'virtual internationalisation' activities can also provide excellent scaffolding for pedagogic projects (Middlemas and Peat, 2015), and bring new knowledge and skills to small teams in a dynamic and engaging way.

International collaboration can be a messy, confusing business as different stakeholders from diverse backgrounds attempt to work together, often remotely and asynchronously (Middlemas *et al.,* 2016). Adams *et al.* (2007) note that effective collaborations can sometimes lead to faculty participation in cutting-edge networks and innovations. Yet Willis and Strivens (2015) note that the role of academic developers in international contexts still continues to be under-reported.

Many projects involve partners working on distinct work packages, with set tasks to be completed. However, sometimes the collaboration is more organic as relationships and understandings develop over a longer time period. One example of this is Roehampton's five-year involvement with the FLAIR Scheme in India, through which we host early career academics for 5-6 weeks every year (Middlemas *et al.,* 2016).

Background

One of our current projects is the Erasmus+ INCLUSION project (http://www.yafa.am/en/?p=6066), which relates very closely to one of the main TEF themes of 'choice, teaching excellence, social mobility and transparency' (Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016, p. 19). In particular, we have developed a focus on the recognition of 'institutions that do the most to welcome students from a range of backgrounds and support their retention and progression' (Johnson, 2015).

E+ INCLUSION involves 3 EU universities: the University of Graz, Austria; the Colleges of Leuven and Limberg, Belgium; and the University of Roehampton. There are four partner universities – Yerevan State Academy of Fine Arts (lead partner), the American University of Armenia, the University of Travnic (Bosnia and Herzegovina/BiH), and the University of Tuzla (BiH). Government

representatives from the Ministry of Education and Science from Armenia and BiH are also fully involved; as well as several NGOs representing disabled students/under-represented groups of students.

The overall objective of the project is to enhance the implementation of the Social Dimension at selected universities in Armenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (see *The Social Dimension in the EHEA:* http://tinyurl.com/ycoocvea). More specifically, the project aims at fostering access to/widening participation in and completion of higher education for students from vulnerable/under-represented groups through:

1) *The development of institutional support mechanisms* to expand opportunities for students from vulnerable/under-represented groups at HEI level (development and implementation of strategies at the level of PCUs)
2) *The provision of capacity-building activities for responsible HEI staff,* to enable them to provide adequate support to students from vulnerable/under-represented groups
3) *The development of resources for inclusive teaching and learning*
4) *Awareness raising and capacity building of high school teachers* to highlight transition planning issues.

The three year project will run until October 2019.

Roehampton's role in relation to E+ INCLUSION

Roehampton has responsibility for Workpackage 2, 'The review of roles, functions and ongoing initiatives at partner universities in Armenia and BiH in promoting access to, participation in and completion of HE for students from vulnerable and under-represented groups'.

This role involves us in working closely with the 4 partner universities, as well as Ministry colleagues, EU and NGO contacts. During Workpackage 1 'Capacity Building', we worked with academics at the University of Graz to undertake a comprehensive literature review of good practice/current initiatives in the area of inclusive and accessible approaches to learning and teaching, which informed our work on Workpackage 2. Project funding enabled us to employ a student intern (a recent Roehampton graduate) to help us with the literature review, and design an online benchmarking tool that was shared with 50 faculty/administrators and 180 students at our partner institutions. This benchmarking tool is now being used to inform Workpackage 2, and has provided us with a clear idea of priorities in the Project's priorities for 2017-2019. The benchmarking tool directly relates to our own institutional priorities around the enhancement of the learning environment, and is already being used as the basis for CPD workshops for Roehampton staff on 'Inclusive and Accessible Approaches to Learning and Teaching'.

We used an interactive World Café approach (World Café, 2017) with staff and students to reflect on the data from the literature review and the staff/student surveys, so that we could design a new tool, 'Benchmarking Inclusion in Higher Education'. The benchmarking tool enables groups of staff/students to reflect on current institutional ways of working, with a view to highlighting:

1) Appropriate measures to promote equal opportunities for access, participation and completion
2) Appropriate measures to widen access to and sustain participation in higher education
3) Recommendations for a study environment that enhances the quality of the student experience through the:
   a) Provision of academic services (e.g. guidance and tutoring, retention measures (modification of curricula, flexibility of delivery, tracking academic success *etc.*) and the learning environment (well-functioning libraries, lecture halls and seminar rooms, good internet access)
   b) Provision of support services (e.g. counselling, targeted support for students with disabilities, provision of healthcare, provision of transportation, student facilities *etc.*)
4) Student participation in the governance and organisation of higher education
5) The development of quality systems to ensure that excellent learning and teaching standards are maintained (e.g. through student and peer evaluations of courses, programmes and institutions).

The current focus: The development of institutional strategies for delivering inclusive and accessible approaches to learning and teaching in higher education

Roehampton is offering expertise to the E+ INCLUSION project in three key areas. Firstly, in the field of learning and teaching in diverse educational contexts. Secondly, in the design and delivery of staff development programmes and conference events. Thirdly, we have expertise in the area of managing systemic changes for newly developed policy and strategy initiatives.

In particular, our focus is on:

- Inclusive and accessible approaches to learning and teaching in higher education
- Retention and progression issues for vulnerable/disadvantaged learners
- Highlighting the need for promoting and maintaining professional standards for university teaching
- Making the most of learning technologies to support learning and teaching
- The importance of student voice in the university context.

These topic areas all relate very closely to our staff development and strategic initiatives role at Roehampton, and resources from E+ INCLUSION are already being used on our one-year programme for new academic staff, as well as our SEDA award, 'Supporting Learning'. Although projects such as E+ INCLUSION can be time-consuming and challenging for a small team, we would also argue that they provide a rich source of inspiration and new ideas for our work as staff developers, and offer us a real chance to stand back from our day-to-day practice and critically review the way that we work with colleagues in our own institution.

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World Café approach (2017) (http://www.theworldcafe.com/).

Please email me if you would like a copy of our 'Benchmarking Inclusion in Higher Education' tool (B.middlemas@roehampton.ac.uk).

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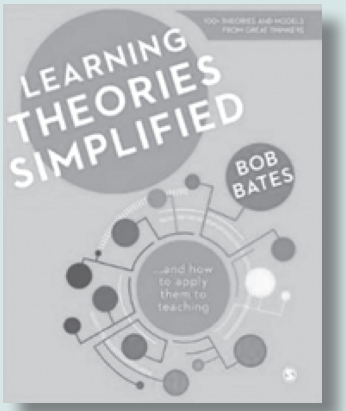
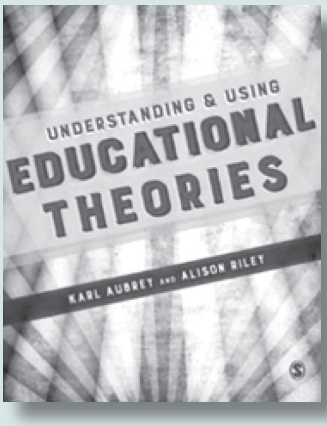
Book Reviews

Learning Theories Simplified: ...and how to apply them to teaching

by Bob Bates

Sage Publications Ltd, 2015





Understanding and Using Educational Theories

by Karl Aubrey and Alison Riley

Sage Publications Ltd, 2015

In November 2015, Sage published two books about learning or education theories within four days of each other. This publishing coincidence provides for a kind of 'compare and contrast' review, so I read them both together during the clammy commuting days of summer.

Firstly, Bates absolutely belts through 103 theories in 292, pages whilst Aubrey and Riley take a more leisurely pace with 14 theories in 206 pages. This gives a respective theory/page ratio of 1:2.83 (actually Bates uses a double-page spread per theory) and 1:14.71, which begs the question of which theories were included and which were left out. Both books are written with teachers and student teachers as the target audience, and teaching in HE is rarely specifically mentioned within the texts.

By way of an overview comparison, while Bates obviously covers many more theories in less depth, he does not allocate space to Urie Bronfenbrenner, Guy Claxton or Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, who are all given chapters by Aubrey and Riley. This – perhaps superficial – comparison led me to consider what inclusion criteria might be applied here, and similarly what theories academic developers might include as 'must haves' within postgraduate certificates in learning and teaching. For example, neither book mentions Roger Schank (learning by doing) or Mayer and Moreno, or, or, or…Of course where learning theory or education theory 'ends' is obviously contingent, contextual and contestable, and Bates includes theories like Doran's SMART objectives which might not strictly be 'education'.

Bates groups his selected theories into three parts – classical learning theories, contemporary thinking on T&L, and planning, delivering and assessing learning (within which there are sections). In the 'classical' part the sections are: education philosophy, behaviouralism, cognitivism, humanism and neurolism (this last one Bates devised himself). Within each section, there are specific theories (between three and eight). There is a list of each part/section's theories in the left hand margin of each page that provides a neat signposting, to the reader, of what has been covered and what is coming next.

Given the space limitations imposed by the ration of one theory per two pages, and the format of general outline, 'how to use it', 'in the classroom' and 'for more on "xxx"', it is surprisingly effective. Whilst the book is targeted at school or FE teachers, there is much here to interest and inform teachers who are new to HE. I am less sure that it is learning theories simplified – more learning theories made concise.

For example, and to illustrate the level of the advice, in the two pages about Valerie Shute ('using feedback to enhance learning') we find the following:

> *'Make the distinction between short-term outputs and long-term outcomes by explaining the differences between how well a learner is performing on a particular task and what needs to be done to achieve their learning goals.'* (p. 263)

Conversely, Aubrey and Riley structure their review of 14 theories into 'introduction', 'the person', 'the theory', 'links to other theorists', 'critique', 'application' and 'summary'. This works very well and the theory application is especially useful, with the links to other theorists particularly interesting. An example: the Benjamin Bloom chapter contains the suggestion to use the taxonomy of verbs in the stem of in-class questions in order to provide appropriate challenge.

Arguably, this is obvious, but for a new teacher the text that follows is useful:

> *'During this process what is important is how the teacher responds to the answers…feedback to answers needs to be corrective for the future but also encouraging in its nature.'* (p. 83)

Within all the chapters, there is much of practical use within the application sections. A further example from the Guy Claxton learning power chapter:

> *'Schools and teachers (HE lecturers too) need to challenge themselves to embrace and sustain a culture of epistemic apprenticeship. Teachers [need] to notice and nurture the learning habits of their students and give encouragement when needed.'* (p. 193)

I have one specific issue with the latter book, which is that within the chapter outcomes the demand verb is often 'understand', which itself is difficult to understand!

With both books, there is a danger of 'ticking' off the theory, in an 'I knew that one' kind of way, but equally there is reward in finding some unknown gems. In trying to choose to recommend between the two it is, I think, down to preference and purpose. Bates is definitely a library purchase whilst Aubery and Riley is more a PGCLTHE course text. Both books, in their own ways, provide an education and a decent start in 'theory'.

Peter Gossman is Principal Lecturer in Academic CPD at Manchester Metropolitan University.

SEDA News

Courses

We are currently taking bookings for the following courses:

- **Supporting and Leading Educational Change** (Professional Qualification Course), 23 October 2017 – 16 February 2018
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Forthcoming conferences

22nd Annual SEDA Conference:
Developing Teaching Excellence: Supporting and Developing the Work of Groups and Teams
16-17 November 2017, The St David's Hotel, Cardiff

Booking now open at:
https://www.seda.ac.uk/events/book-event/467

SEDA Spring Teaching Learning and Assessment Conference 2018:
Understanding and Improving the Student Experience: Making a Real Difference in the New Age of Metrics
10-11 May 2018, Doubletree Hotel by Hilton, Leeds

Call for contributions now open at: https://www.seda.ac.uk/events/info/468/call-for-contributions

The International Consortium for Educational Development (ICED) will hold its next conference from 5-8 June 2018 in Atlanta, Georgia, USA.
For further details, including how to submit a proposal, see: https://www.iced2018.com/

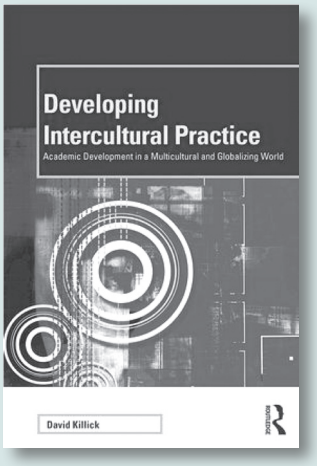
Educational Developments Committee

We would like to thank **Dr Sue Wilkinson** for her time on the Editorial Committee. Sue is moving from Cardiff Metropolitan University to head eAssessment at the International Baccalaureate.

New publication in the SEDA Series

Developing Intercultural Practice: academic development in a multicultural and globalizing world

by David Killick



The internationalisation of higher education has become a significant site of change, driven by, and contributing to, globalisation. So much so that global higher education has the potential to increase collaboration or conflict across the borders of human diversity. As educators seek to better understand and develop the ways in which our universities provide appropriate learning, *Developing Intercultural Practice* brings perspectives from international education communities together to provide clear guidance on the effective enhancement of these dimensions of academic practice.

Exploring the emergence of the post-national university and situating academic development as critical practice, *Developing Intercultural Practice* considers how globally distributed, multicultural students and faculty, at home, overseas, and online, can develop reciprocal and collaborative learning.

Dr David Killick is Head of Academic Staff Development at Leeds Beckett University.

The publication can be ordered in hard copy online at: https://www.routledge.com/Developing-Intercultural-Practice-Academic-Development-in-a-Multicultural/Killick/p/book/9781138289895, or as an eBook from Amazon or the Apple iBook Store.