

Approaches to developing pedagogic skills in the new Higher Education teacher

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Introduction

In this chapter I explore the issues and challenges around developing pedagogical skills in higher education teachers in the current UK Higher Education (HE) context. HE teachers come to teaching often primarily as highly qualified specialists within their own field rather than as teachers, a role they learn as they engage with it. HE institutions currently make increasing demands on academic staff, who have to negotiate a number of different discourses around quality, student entitlement, employability and competitiveness. Institutions also have an increasingly diverse student body, resulting from the widening participation agenda and also the drive to recruit more students from overseas, and they are developing more innovative ways of meeting student needs, including using advances in technology to provide blended or online courses. It is in this complex and demanding context that the new HE teacher begins to develop their identity as a teacher.

In order to explore the issues and challenges this raises, for HE teachers and those running professional development programmes, I consider what it means to develop an identity as a teacher within HE and what that identity might be. I discuss the purpose of education in HE, and what excellence in teaching and learning might consist of. Drawing on responses from colleagues and participants on one particular professional development programme I comment on the degree to which such programmes can help HE teachers deal with some of these challenges.

As this is a chapter reflecting my personal experience of working in this field, I first set out my own experience and background.

A personal perspective

My personal experience as an educator, the route I have taken into working with HE teachers, and particularly leading the IOE's Teaching and Learning in Higher Education programme, have greatly influenced my approach and perspective.

I have always been an educator in one form or another, starting initially with teaching English as a foreign language in a number of overseas and UK settings. I then became involved in working with English teachers in a teaching training college in Indonesia through a development organisation, and on my return trained teachers in the UK wanting to work overseas as teacher trainers for the same organisation. My first exposure to teaching in higher education was whilst studying for a PhD and then on completion I took on my first part-time academic post, teaching at Master's level. Currently, I teach on two Master's programmes with an education focus, one of which includes the HEA accredited Professional Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher and Professional Education. Alongside this academic post I work freelance with clinicians who have to educate other clinicians in the workplace. From very

early on in my career, therefore, I found myself educating other educators, in a range of settings. My main concern in all of these settings was to work out for myself what teaching and learning is, how learning is best achieved, and then how to help others go through the same thought process, so that they in turn can help their learners learn.

It is this thought process that I endeavour to apply to the IOE professional development programme. The context of this programme differs to some degree to others discussed in the literature (see Gosling, 2009). Firstly, the IOE is a specialist institution focusing on all aspects of education, mostly at postgraduate level, so the programme does not sit in a separate unit, seemingly unrelated to other departments. More importantly education is accepted as a field of study in its own right and the programme is located within a department that offers many post graduate professional development courses for educators. This means we are not likely to be restructured, abolished or otherwise have our relevance questioned any more than any other programme, and the programme is integrated into the work of the institution (see Blackmore, 2009). Secondly, participants on the programme are predominantly from other institutions. We are therefore not in the difficult position of promoting critical thinking around teaching and learning in HE that could be perceived as any more of a threat to our institution than any other programme. Institutional politics and other problems participants might want to air are ones we cannot address, so are less of a feature than might be the case elsewhere. Though I see these as great benefits there are some disadvantages. For example, we are not involved in the ongoing development of the participants once they complete the course, and have relatively little feedback on the impact on their institutions and students. The relationships I develop with the participants usually only last the duration of the course.

This experience has shaped my approach to working with HE teachers in a number of ways. Firstly, teaching on more than one Master's level programme working with educators means I do not see my role on the programme for HE teachers as being very different to my other teaching. Secondly, both the work in Indonesia and the short training courses with teachers wanting to work overseas taught me that I could not determine the course of development a teacher would take, and certainly could not have much control over the outcomes of my work with them. I concluded that the most I could do was provide the stimulus and space to maximise the chances that whoever I was working with engaged with relevant ideas, practised relevant skills and considered how to apply these ideas to their practice. I could also help them reflect on what they were aiming for so that they could continue their development themselves once the course was complete and I had no more involvement with their work. Thirdly, given that most of my work has been with professional adults who have been highly skilled in their own fields and were undertaking training or professional development that was often not formally assessed, I also learned that a collaborative approach was crucial, particularly if there was an element of compulsion in their attendance. Their expertise needed to be acknowledged and drawn upon, if I was to expect the same in return. They needed to be approached as colleagues and peers, and we needed to be involved in dialogue about teaching and learning and how it relates to our work, with us all recognising that what we take away from the

experience and how we would use it would be individual. As Senese (2002 : 51) put it, I needed 'to relinquish control to gain influence'.

Academic developer or HE teacher?

One of the main challenges discussed in the literature on academic development is around the credibility and role of those running professional development courses. In many institutions the units responsible for such courses are run by a range of people, not always with academic contracts and sometimes aligned with various other units in the institution that separate them from the main teaching departments (see Gosling, 2009). There are also various terms used to describe those running these courses, including 'academic developer'.

Although the issue of credibility relates to a number of factors, not least the academic credentials of those running courses, I want to propose that the term 'academic developer' itself is problematic, though it is a term that has become predominant. It seems to me to create a separation between the endeavour HE teachers are involved in and the running of professional development courses, as well as suggesting that one person can develop another. For me there is a danger here of the 'othering' Clegg (2009) refers to. There is an argument in support of seeing the roles as different, that those of us running such courses are not involved in teaching students ourselves (see Cilliers and Herman, 2010). It might well be true that many of us do not teach a subject such as Physics or History to undergraduates, but we are still involved in teaching our subject at post graduate level, as other HE teachers do with professionals on other Master's level courses. The difference is arguably more one of level and that we are working with fellow professionals, but that is also true of many HE teachers. Our participants on our courses are our peers, which requires that we recognise they have a different level of expertise and experience than undergraduates, but we are still charged with the running of a course that assists them in learning about our subject: teaching and learning within HE. The major difference is that teaching and learning is *both our process and content* (in contrast to those teaching Physics). But like other HE teachers we have our specialist subject, which has specific content we wish our learners to engage with (Pesata, 2011) and we are concerned with how best to teach so that learning takes place. Another argument around difference might be that we are teaching those who have to then teach others, so unlike with Physics for undergraduates, the learning directly affects a third party. But again this is no different from many of the vocational subjects taught in HE at undergraduate level, such as medicine, and other professional development courses at Master's level. It means, like those HE teachers, we have to be concerned about how the learning affects others not attending our course, and our subject content needs to reflect that reality.

The first challenge therefore, is to view ourselves as sharing the experience of other HE teachers, and recognise our own practice as concerned with the same questions and dilemmas that they face. We are all engaged in asking what the purpose is of what we do, how we know whether it works, what the key theories, principles and values are that underpin our practice (see Baume, 1996). As our process and content are the same we also need to practise what we preach, modelling an approach to education that other HE teachers can reflect on, critique, and decide whether and

how to apply to their own teaching practice. As Leibowitz et al (2010: 124) state, 'we need to become the change that we expect in others'. Personally I cannot see how we do that effectively if we do not consider that we are also primarily HE teachers ourselves. We share many of the challenges, which should provide us with insight and understanding of the journey we are asking new HE teachers to embark on.

A question of identity

Reflecting on my experience and my own development as an educator, I was struck by how much this process of development is one of identity transformation. With all the groups I have worked with, I have observed most participants try to incorporate into their existing identity a new sense of themselves related to their new role. For some this is a radical transformation and for others a smaller step.

Identity is connected to that which we value, what we commit to (Taylor in Henkel, 2000) and there is much debate in the literature around the notion of academic identity. There are those who suggest we have multiple identities in this post-modern world and that identity is not fixed (Henkel, 2000). This reflects the reality of academic life where we juggle research, teaching, administration, consultancy, management and have to respond to an almost constant need to deal with change. Whether or not one agrees that we have multiple identities or one identity that has many facets, the story we tell ourselves of our identity as academics needs to be coherent (Hanson, 2009). A fragmented identity or a feeling our multiple identities are in conflict is likely to contribute to a sense of being overwhelmed. Becoming a teacher in HE therefore requires a commitment to education and one's role as an educator and a reconciling of that commitment with the commitment to other roles. Although there is much one can do to help HE teachers develop some useful techniques and other 'tricks of the trade', without that commitment it is likely that long term and continuing improvement will be missing. There is evidence that those who do not engage with the opportunities for professional development in this way are more dissatisfied with their role as teachers (Postareff and Lindblom-Ylänne, 2011).

Most new academics start life primarily as experts in their discipline or a profession and anticipate continuing to develop understandings and expertise in that field in their work, particularly through research, though this varies according to contract and institution. Many academics therefore have a strong sense of disciplinary identity (Delanty, 2008, Pickering, 2006), more so than an identification with their institution, for example, though it might be a relatively new identity for some (see Wilcox, 2009). Unless they have already worked in education, it is likely that many academics do not start their careers with as strong a sense of their identity as teachers, though they may anticipate this being an important part of the job, and may have clear ideas from their own experience of learning of what good teaching within their discipline entails (Hockings et al, 2009). Developing a sense of identity as a teacher is therefore something that often starts on the job, particularly as there is no current requirement to train to teach prior to taking up an academic appointment.

No-one develops a clear sense of identity overnight and this transformative process is likely to be challenging. As Rogers (1969) points out, any learning that requires us to question our sense of self can feel threatening, and the process of change that

ensues can also be painful (see Donnelly, 2006). Obviously one cannot generalise, and how one experiences developing an identity as a teacher, depends a great deal on personal motivation, what existing value one places on the role, how one responds to change, and whether one feels there is support from colleagues and employer. When observing this process with those I have worked with, and reflecting on my own reactions to new roles, the greatest challenge seems to arise when the sense of expert self that already exists feels threatened, either because it itself is fragile (see Wilcox, 2009), or because it is so long established that it is a while since it has been questioned. For example, I would find experienced school teachers training to be teacher educators overseas feeling destabilised when asked to shift from teaching a particular subject to helping others to learn how to teach. Although their existing skills were transferable, if they had not previously had to articulate their tacit knowledge about the process of teaching and learning in order to communicate that to others, and were used to working with children and not professional adults, they often felt temporarily de-skilled. Once they had worked through this and constructed a new understanding of teaching and learning which incorporated their new skills, they realised they had enriched their sense of themselves as educators, and had lost neither their original expertise nor their original identity as school teachers. However, those who felt the most challenged, showed signs of discomfort and often resistance, and needed to be reassured and supported to persevere. Similarly, new HE teachers are faced with the challenge of 'becoming' teachers, whilst holding on to their sense of their identity and expertise within their discipline (not to mention the other aspects of academic identity they have to contend with) and those who are running professional development courses need to consider how to help them navigate their way through. Reflecting on our own development as HE teachers should provide us with insight into the process new HE teachers are embarking upon. Given that we also develop our identities through participation with others (Hockings et al, 2009) then professional development courses should provide a good space for that process to take place. In doing so, they also should therefore support teachers in developing a sense of membership of a community of practice as HE teachers, either within their own disciplines or departments, or more broadly within and across institutions.

The purpose of teaching in higher education

One of the key questions posed by Baume above, is around the purpose of what we do. There is a great deal written on the purpose of higher education and teaching's contribution, particularly in the context of the multiple discourses around higher education in the UK today. Barnett (2003:34) argues that higher education, and therefore academic life, is characterised by 'organisational complexity and ontological supercomplexity'. Holding on to a sense of what education, and therefore one's individual teaching contribution, is for in this supercomplex world is a challenge, particularly when only just embarking on the process of becoming a teacher.

Burgess (2008: 97) states that 'the core purpose of a university is to deliver high quality research and high quality teaching, with research directly informing teaching. It is, in turn, argued that the key task of academics is to communicate their subject and the results of their research activities to their students'. This may be the case for many, though not all HE teachers. It also still leaves open the question of what that

teaching is aiming to produce. One of the present concerns in the literature is the focus on higher education producing employable graduates. Although there are none who would argue it should produce unemployable graduates, and there are ways in which a focus on employability may have a positive impact (Knight and Yorke, 2003), there is concern that this leads to a more instrumental view of education, with less focus on more critical and reflective thinking. Miller (2008: 206) points out that 'more reflexive ideas may not necessarily get the trains to run on time, but they provide the kind of intellectual space that makes civilisation possible'. Others point to the need to preserve the public space in which to critique power in the face of a more pragmatic focus within higher education (Jameson et al, 2012). There is a concern here not to reduce learning to a concern about teaching people what to think, but to maintain a focus on developing thinking skills, so that graduates are able to engage with the world, and make a positive and critical contribution to society. This is particularly given that the world graduates will work in is more complex and more subject to rapid change (see Barnett and Napoli, 2008). Rather than responding by making education instrumental it is argued that we need to be focusing on helping students become themselves (Barnett, 2000, Blackie et al, 2010). If education is seen as a transformative experience, it is a process that involves risk and uncertainty (Mezirow 2000, Barnett, 2003). Blackie et al (2010) argue that teachers have to help students deal with vulnerability and uncertainty, and to do this have to explore their own vulnerability and uncertainty. New HE teachers therefore face a dual challenge, to learn how to facilitate this process of transformation in their students, whilst also undergoing such a transformation themselves. Those of us running professional development courses also need to identify for ourselves what the purpose of those courses are. For many who attend it is compulsory and for some the motivation is instrumental in that it provides a teaching qualification that assists with promotion, or moves to other universities. However, if we share the sense of purpose of education as outlined above then we are also in the business of helping HE teachers become themselves as teachers and moving beyond an instrumental view of their own learning and that of their students.

This understanding of the purpose of education implies also that all knowledge is 'partial and contingent; each discipline invites particular approaches and none is without contention' (Miller, 2008:108). Academics develop knowledge in their subject areas through their research, if they are not on teaching only contracts, which implies that the current state of knowledge in any discipline is going to be advanced during an academic's career. In a sense HE teachers and students are both involved in scholarship (Elton, 2008). If we see ourselves as teachers of a particular subject when running professional development courses we need to recognise also that our own subject area is constantly developing and that the teachers we work with are contributing to knowledge in that field. If we view our role as unconnected to a subject area and really only focusing on developing some behavioural changes in teachers then we are working with a narrower definition of education than many of the teachers we are working with.

What does good teaching in HE look like?

If this is the purpose of teaching, then what characterises good teaching? Both we and the HE teachers we are working with need to consider the answers to these questions and exploration of those questions needs to inform the ethos and content of professional development programmes.

A moral practice

One of the strands within the discussions on excellence in teaching in the literature takes an essentially ethical and moral perspective. If one sees education as more than just a technical and instrumental activity, and as something which contributes to the development of human potential or 'human flourishing' (Nussbaum cited in Kreber et al, 2010), then good teaching is about more than exhibiting a list of specific skills, and something that involves consideration of values (see HEA UK Professional Standards Framework, <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk>). Skelton (2009:109) argues that teaching counts as excellent when teachers and institutions are committed 'to the reflexive development of a value-laden and morally defensible practice'. He focuses on 6 areas of importance, arguing that teachers need to develop 'a personal philosophy of teaching', continually 'struggle to live out educational values in practice'; that teaching excellence is a 'moral category'; that there is a need for a diversity of cultures in institutions where 'pedagogical theories, values and practices can be shared' and there is a need for the necessary conditions to prevail to support this. And finally he argues that teaching is part of the whole and needs to be integrated with other the other areas of academic work (Skelton 2009: 109-110).

Fitzmaurice (2008: 342) also stresses the moral side of teaching by arguing that alongside Shulman's (1987) conceptions of teacher knowledge (e.g. pedagogical knowledge, content knowledge etc.) 'moral knowledge' is crucial. She discusses excellence in terms of 'a deep obligation to help students learn'; a 'desire to create a space for learning and encourage student voice'; caring for students and developing the whole person'; 'reflection on practice' and it is characterised by 'professional values and morality' (Fitzmaurice, 2008: 345).

Authenticity

Linked closely to the idea that education is to help learners become themselves, whether those learners are undergraduates or HE teachers on a professional development course, is the notion of authenticity. Authenticity in teaching and learning means being true to oneself and, importantly, allowing students to be authentic also. Kreber et al (2010) argue this requires care, sincerity, openness and honesty, values which very much speak to a moral perspective on teaching. HE teachers therefore need to recognise 'students as knowers, situating the learning in the students' experiences, and seeing learning as mutually constructing knowledge (Kreber et al, 2010: 386). Authenticity also involves a scholarly approach, where teaching and research are linked (Kinchin et al 2008). In essence what these writers are arguing for is an approach to teaching that has care for the student, linked to a commitment to the development of knowledge within a discipline and the sharing of that knowledge, at its heart. In fact Andresen (2000: 25) defines pedagogy as a 'form of intellectual caring for the other person'. Substitute 'new HE teachers' for 'students' in the above quotations and the parallels are obvious.

There is some dispute in the literature over how the love of the subject fits with this (see Rowland et al 1998 and Elton 2000). This love of one's subject would seem to me to be crucial, as it is hard to teach with any enthusiasm if it is absent. This love of the subject takes the form also of a commitment to its value, not just in an immediate sense for the students sitting in a class on a given day, but in relation to contributing to wider human flourishing and the development of society. This love is also a key motivation for carrying out research which provides a scholarly base for one's teaching. But there is a balance to be struck if teaching is primarily focusing on students' learning. Teachers need to make sure that they are not just teaching what they love, but teaching what students need, which includes students discovering aspects of the subject for themselves (Elton, 2000). As HE teachers and experts within particular disciplines, we have already undergone our own process of discovery, developing our own love for our subjects, becoming committed to the process of learning within our own fields, and have developed certain understandings. We are trying then to help our learners (whether undergraduates, or other HE teachers) undertake the same journey in relation to our subject. This requires recognising that they start in a different place in relation to the subject than the one we already inhabit, and also recognising that that journey is individual. Where they arrive will not necessarily be where we would predict or even where we would like. All HE teachers need to reflect on what the journey towards becoming a subject specialist entails and the ups and downs that are experienced on the way, if they are to help others undertake the same journey, whether this is towards becoming an engineer, a musician, a biologist or an HE teacher.

The heart of the matter

Within the discussion on the purpose of education above there is an implied concern with critical thinking and engagement with knowledge that is at the heart of any subject, rather than solely a focus on key skills which might be useful. HE teachers with a commitment to their subject are concerned that learners get to understand the principles and fundamentals of the subject alongside developing an ability to apply that learning to concrete situations. For professional development programmes where the subject is teaching and learning in HE this means a focus on theories of learning, principles on which teachers can base their practice, as well as development of specific skills. As Skelton (2009) argues, excellence in teaching in HE involves developing a philosophy of teaching and learning. How do HE teachers define learning, within the context in which they work. What do they think learning is? What does it look like? How does it happen? How does it happen within their particular discipline, with their students and in their institution? I can introduce a new HE teacher to a number of helpful strategies for making a presentation more interesting, or tips on how to run small group discussions, but without linking these back to ideas about learning they remain unconnected to the process that lies at the heart of what we are all grappling with and learning in our subject area remains surface rather than deep (Biggs 1999).

This is not to argue that there is only one answer to questions around what learning is, or that anyone working with other HE teachers should be unquestioningly promoting a particular view. If we consider knowledge in other subject areas to be constantly developing and uncertain then we have to view our own subject in a similar light if we are to understand what other HE teachers do. However, there is a body of knowledge consisting of findings from research and debates around theories on learning developed over decades, which constitute the existing understandings in our field. It is unlikely, for example, to find literature advocating a purely behaviourist approach to teaching and learning in HE, given the current emphasis on constructivist understandings of learning.

Here findings from research are important. Research into the journey of 'becoming' an HE teacher illustrates a trajectory away from a concern with transmitting the subject matter to a focus on student learning (see Trigwell et al, 2000, Prosser et al, 2005, Akerlind, 2007, Ginns et al, 2008, Light and Calkins, 2008). Professional development programmes therefore place great emphasis on encouraging this conceptual shift, and promoting a critically reflective approach to learning about teaching.

The other important point to emerge from research is the need to link teaching and learning processes to the discipline. The academic subject is central, and constantly developing. Not only do we as HE teachers teach others about the subject, we contribute to its development (Burgess, 2008). Canning (2007: 393) offers a view of pedagogy which emphasises the joint construction of knowledge, defining it as addressing 'the interaction between the teacher, the learner and the knowledge produced by the teacher and learner'. Given that academics have strong disciplinary identities, which are potentially challenged when developing an identity as a teacher, it is important that explorations with HE teachers on the nature of learning consider learning within disciplines (Akerlind, 2004, Neumann, 2001). Research into teachers' conceptions makes it clear that academics do link processes that relate their discipline to their teaching (Hockings et al, 2009, Neumann, 2001). It is likely that particular traditions and views of learning in some disciplines will sit more easily than others with ideas of learning within the HE teaching and learning literature and different traditions privilege different modes of teaching: lectures, tutorials, laboratory work, field trips (Neumann, 2001), and therefore the degree of challenge to their disciplinary identity will vary. Lueddeke (2003) speculates that a more behaviourist approach might be more usual traditionally within hard subjects in comparison to a more constructivist within soft. There may be some truth in this, but either way we need to explore with teachers their starting points, and the influence of the traditions they are working within. Explorations of definitions of learning therefore need to start with an acknowledgement of their existing conceptions (Hockings et al, 2009). After all if good teaching focuses on student learning then good teaching of HE teachers focuses on their learning processes also. It also means considering the traditions behind current teaching about teaching and learning in HE and being aware of how well those approaches map to other disciplines, both well established, traditional disciplines, as well as new and emerging ones. This concern with linking teaching and learning to disciplines is something also reflected in the HEA UK Professional

Standards Framework (<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk>), which informs the content of many professional development courses.

In the first part of this chapter I have argued that those of us running professional development programmes need to see ourselves also as HE teachers, in order to be able to work effectively with those on our courses. I have raised a number of points around the shared purpose of education that we are engaged with and ideally what we are all aiming for. The difficulty comes in putting this into practice in the HE world we currently inhabit. There are a number of challenges we and other HE teachers face which give rise to various tensions, that we in particular, working with other teachers, need to bear in mind and try and address in the work we do.

Challenges

In the second part of this chapter, therefore, I want to explore these challenges, drawing on the literature and the comments from colleagues and participants on our IOE programme and similar ones. I also refer to other studies on the impact of such professional development courses.

Application

One of the biggest challenges is to do with the process of learning itself, particularly when learning about something and applying it simultaneously. Here the analogy of riding a bike might be useful. We can watch someone do it and see that we have to steer and turn pedals. Conceptually it seems not particularly complicated to grasp. However, until we try it the realities of coordinating arms and legs, whilst balancing and then looking where one is going, let alone learning to let go with one hand to signal, are not obvious. Most people fall off a few times, and it requires perseverance despite feeling ill-equipped and embarrassed, not to mention bruised, to keep trying. Whereas a teacher might conceptually grasp and agree with the idea of focusing on student learning, how this works in reality can only be experienced by trial and error. What does it really feel like to respond during class to unexpected student questions? How does one plan a lecture, yet allow flexibility for interaction and student engagement without losing all sense of control over proceedings? Whereas a bike does not answer back and there are no consequences for anyone else of one's failed attempts to master riding (assuming we do not run into anyone), the consequences for learners are real when teachers are trying to learn on the job. Students can and do respond in class, or on evaluation forms, and teachers soon get reputations as to whether they are any good at their job. Time and continued experimentation are needed for teachers to master their approach to teaching, and yet this time and space is not readily available in the throes of everyday academic life. Learning on the job has the advantage of opportunities for application, but it also has its own set of demands. One cannot tell learners that one is still working out what learning is and therefore it might take a while before the teaching offers them exactly what they need. The consequences of unsuccessful teaching strategies for students' progress through a course are potentially immediate.

Competing priorities

One of the main challenges raised by all those I had feedback from, was time and workload; the “inexhaustible list of demands placed on contemporary academics” (Brew, 2010: 105) . Those on teaching only contracts have a heavy teaching load with little time to work out how the institution works, what policies and procedures are in place, and they may have many students to deal with (see Gale, 2011). These HE teachers also have the challenge of teaching without also researching their subject area, which raises questions as to how they remain scholarly in their approach. With academic posts where research is prioritised, there is the opposite problem of research and teaching competing for attention rather than complementing one another, as Cunningham has discussed elsewhere in this volume. Taking time to reflect and develop teaching when it is not rewarded is difficult (Light and Calkins, 2008), and one of the perceived benefits of a professional development course is that provides such time and space. However, this is not sufficient if there is to be ongoing development. HE teachers on our course have to find time outside our classes to read, reflect and write about their practice, and often have to use their own personal time to do so, given the demands of their job.

Student responses

Just as those of us running professional development courses might find our participants unfamiliar with our teaching strategies, or requesting more straight lecturing and less group work, other HE teachers experimenting and trying to move towards a more learner focused approach to teaching have to deal with student responses to those changes.

Students’ approaches to learning vary hugely as a result of personal experience, particularly with increasingly diverse student populations, more international students, more students coming through the widening participation agenda. There is no guarantee either that the current emphasis on testing in the earlier parts of the UK education system, and the focus on employability and immediate applicability of anything that is learned in HE, will mean students will value critical thinking and /or feel able to accept uncertainty and make themselves vulnerable. With the advent of higher tuition fees and students being seen as ‘customers’ then their views on learning and their experiences have high currency (see Watson 2009). There is potentially real tension for the teacher who wants to challenge students to move into that uncomfortable territory of transformation, if their immediate desires around learning run counter to that approach. The research does show, however, that perseverance pays off in that students tend to be more interested in meaning and understanding if their teachers are also (Prosser and Trigwell, 1999). Where the institution stands on approaches to teaching and learning is also crucial in supporting or hindering teachers’ attempts to persuade students to face the challenge of transformation. Being authentic within institutions which maybe have different priorities or values can create tension (Carnell, 2007, Hockings et al, 2009, Brew, 2010).

Massification

There has been huge expansion of HE within the UK, making it more accessible to a greater number of people from a range of different backgrounds. Financial considerations also mean courses expand and the student teacher ratio increases. Some teachers on our programme either have to lecture to very large groups who they do not then meet in smaller groups, or they teach different groups of students each time. Even in my own context the number of participants on our professional development courses has grown considerably. It is arguably well nigh impossible to help learners 'become' when we do not have sufficient contact with each individual to even remember names. Developing a sense of rapport and care under those conditions is very difficult.

Technology

There has also been a rapid increase in the use of technology in HE teaching in all courses, whether face to face, mixed mode or fully distance. Undergraduate students are often more technologically literate than many teaching in HE and have expectations around minimum standards in the use of technology to support their learning. Use of ICT within teaching is now a key part of our subject area on professional development courses. Like other HE teachers we need to use technology well to support our learners, but also provide opportunities for them to learn how to use it effectively in their own teaching. For a new HE teacher working out how to focus on their learners, adapt their approaches to teaching in face to face environments, there is then the additional learning around how to apply those principles to the use of technology, particularly where it is used not just to convey information but is the main platform for learning (see Kidd, 2010, Unwin, 2007, Laudrillard, 2002). Teachers are likely to use technology in teaching in line with their understandings of what good teaching is (Lofstrom and Nevgi, 2008). Putting into practice new understandings of teaching around more learner focused approaches, when also trying to master new technology and particular platforms or packages, is an added complication. Teachers may also feel that where they do not meet their students in person, the challenges of care, communication, helping them deal with uncertainty and feeling vulnerable in their learning are increased (Hanson, 2009).

How do professional development programmes help?

The challenges above are some of the main ones facing HE teachers in this era of constant change. An important question, particularly given the pressure on HE teachers, is whether professional development programmes can address some of these challenges and whether they are worth the time HE teachers invest in them. It is probably true to say that these programmes cannot address some of the challenges outlined above, but the very real benefits reported in the literature and by those I spoke to when preparing this chapter, seem to be considerable.

One of the first benefits is that participants and those running the courses have to take time to reflect on teaching and learning. The course requirements mean that there is dedicated class time on the subject, but also participants have to set aside their own personal time, to read, reflect and write about their practice. This might exacerbate workload, but it does mean that opportunities for reflection are more likely to be taken up than without the structure of such a programme.

Given the difficulties of learning on the job, though I have argued for professional development courses to aim for deep thinking around theories of learning, engaging with research on teaching and learning, there still has to be room for exploration of skills and their application, in the context of those theoretical debates. Teachers need a safe space to try things out, to get feedback from peers, in contexts where unsuccessful strategies provide food for reflection and learning, rather than being potentially detrimental to student learning outcomes, particularly if they lack the confidence to try new approaches with their own students. Programmes which provide opportunities for HE teachers to teach and observe each other can address some of the dilemmas around taking risks with teaching approaches and worrying about consequences for students. This is something participants have mentioned as being particularly valuable on our programme. As Butcher and Stoncel (2012) argue such courses can contribute to teachers feeling braver, more confident in their identities as teachers. This is partly as a result of simply realising that others face similar challenges (see Postareff and Lindblom-Ylänne, 2011). Participants also report feeling a greater sense of belonging to a community of HE teachers as a result, especially where they do not feel part of such a community of practice within their own institutions.

Another benefit reported by those on our programme is the interdisciplinary conversation that ensues around what is possible within particular teaching contexts (see Butcher and Stoncel, 2012). Participants have commented that they need both discipline specific readings and discussions around teaching, but also the perspective of those who work in a very different way in different subject areas, different institutions and with different types of students. This can be hard to achieve during a course, but to deal with issues of teaching and learning unconnected to disciplines leaves participants wondering how the theory relates to their specific contexts.

Professional development courses also have to master technology, whether it is providing digitised readings and information about the programme, or good design of online learning if aspects of the programme are delivered in that way. Programmes that are advanced and innovative in their own use of technology are also more likely to be able to support HE teachers struggling with that aspect of their work, as they provide opportunities for HE teachers to understand the experience of technology from a learner perspective, as well as explicitly explore how pedagogical principles can be applied to the use of ICT for teaching.

Research into the impact of professional development programmes also makes clear that teachers go through various stages in their development and that this takes time. Whilst many studies show teachers making a shift in their approaches and understandings of teaching and learning and consistent evidence that at least teachers do not regress, the shifts teachers make are generally not revolutionary, over the duration of the course (see Cilliers and Herman, 2010, Light and Calkins, 2008). Programmes can and do help teachers develop their approaches to teaching, if they are motivated to change. But professional development programmes need to consider how HE teachers view their development as teachers (see Akerlind, 2007), whether they are signing up for transformation or a confidence boost and learning some tips and strategies to cope. The responses from participants on our programme

show a range of expectations of such a programme, varying from the purely instrumental to a deep desire to transform. Research also shows that if HE teachers are compelled to attend and do not have a sense of the need to transform then they are more likely to view such courses as not particularly helpful and are less likely to make a great conceptual shift (see Cilliers and Herman, 2010 and Akerlind, 2007).

However, the courses on their own are unlikely to be sufficient to ensure ongoing development. One of the challenges we face at the IOE is that we do not work with HE teachers within their own institutions, so mentoring during and after attendance on the course is not guaranteed, unless their institutions provide it. This is something participants have commented on as an important part of their support, particularly if they are in departments with traditional ways of working that are not open to critique by more junior members of staff, where there is little support for attendance on the programme. Those HE teachers who work in teams of people interested in developing their teaching are more likely to flourish and continue their development, rather than just focus on survival (Gale, 2011).

Final thoughts

This chapter reflects my personal thoughts on the work of helping HE teachers develop as teachers. For me, the key elements are identifying with those I am working with, by seeing my own work as that of a fellow HE teacher, and reflecting on what I have learned over the years about the process of becoming a teacher. It is this identification and reflection that allows those of us running professional development courses to assist newer teachers with the journey towards becoming teachers themselves, as we have identified what that journey involves. Although there are some challenges related to the current context of HE in the UK that our work cannot fully rise to, we can provide new HE teachers with space to explore, experiment, reflect and share, thereby assisting them in making the conceptual shift in their views and practice of teaching which has at its heart a concern for their students' learning.

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