New academic identities for a new profession?: Situating the teaching dimension of the academic role in a competitive enhancement context

Joëlle Fanghanel, City University, London

Paul Trowler, Lancaster University, UK

Abstract

This paper proposes that in a context where the roles assigned to academics are increasingly complex, where academic work is visibly managed and monitored with an emphasis on teaching quality and professionalized practices, better understandings of academic identities might emerge from a focus on the teaching dimension of the academic role. It seeks to capture this dimension through a theoretical framework that takes account of the context and realities in which academics operate.

It examines this complexity through a set of policy initiatives aimed at enhancing the teaching function in UK universities, and a brief report on a study of eighteen UK academics focusing on the nature of academic labour. It argues that the teaching dimension of the academic role cannot be usefully studied from outside of the context in which academics evolve and construct their apprehensions of teaching practice, and without paying attention to the degree of agency available to them in the context where they operate. It points to the negative impact of competing initiatives directed disjointedly at teaching and research.

A changed academic function in UK universities at the turn of the century

The 'teaching' function in European universities has remained largely unproblematized until relatively recently, although calls to modernize and professionalize university teaching go back a long way (Skelton, 2005, 129). In the UK over the past two decades the government's targets for increasing access to higher education, the inescapable anchoring into a 'mass' system of

higher education (Trow, 1989), and advances of technologies have triggered a series of initiatives aimed at dealing with issues related to teaching more students of increasingly diverse backgrounds, and increasingly diverse levels of skills and competence. Resulting questions about the nature of the academic role, the efficiency of 'delivery' methods and the role of technologies in facilitating the renewed agenda for HE teachers have generated an interest in teaching and learning as an object of science and a new emphasis on the teaching dimension of the academic role. The latter remains problematic in its articulation with the well-established and highly regarded research dimension.

In the UK (and to a large extent in the rest of the English-speaking world) this context has generated a strong agenda for teaching and learning aiming to
a) improve teaching performance for the benefit of students, and
b) situate teaching as a function able to compete for excellence with research.
We examine next the emergence of this agenda, which has generated a re-conceptualisation of teaching practices often couched in a discourse of excellence and innovation.

Following the integration of colleges and polytechnics into mainstream UK higher education in the early 1990s and the renewed widening participation ambitions deployed by the government of the time (with targets – now revised - of 50% of young people engaged in higher education by 2010), attention has become increasingly focused on the teaching function. The need for universities to attract more students, to ensure retention, and be 'efficient' has been strategically underpinned by gradual reductions since the 1980s in government subsidies for teaching through the general funding stream, and parallel incentives aimed at diversifying the profile of universities whilst enhancing the quality of the teaching provision. From the mid-90s onwards, with the creation of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in 1995, a robust quality agenda, and systems for monitoring and stream-lining practices were also established to provide structures for the control of teaching quality.

In the UK, the Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997) clearly outlined a competitive agenda for HE institutions, with a strong emphasis on quality and a resolute focus on the teaching function. Governments used a 'carrot and stick' strategy to ensure improvement of standards. We examine these strategies in the next section. Briefly, positive policy incentives were devised in order to enhance teaching and learning. Methods were developed aimed at controlling and regulating practices, seeking to remedy poor ineffective teaching practices which had hitherto remained unquestioned, resting as they did on the assumption that excellence in research automatically leads to excellence in teaching. Dearing stressed in fairly blunt terms the strategic importance of higher education for the economy, and outlined the significance of this link for the curriculum and for teaching practices.

These developments were clearly linked to global drivers, in particular to developments taking place in the EU to broaden access to higher education and to ensure comparability and quality across the European higher education sector, spearheaded by the Bologna process. Significant recent developments in Eastern Europe (Tomusk, 2003) also share aspects of the context examined here. In the UK, Dearing was the first official attempt at questioning the hitherto dominant focus on research in universities. Arguably this trigger came at a time when educational technologies were starting to impact on the curriculum and on the way academics went about teaching. This facilitated the adoption of technology to enhance teaching and in addition linked the notion of enhancement to that of innovation. However, two decades on, technological advancements have now also problematized the locus for teaching, the relation between teachers and students, and the working practices of academics (Robins and Webster, 2002).

Having outlined the context from which a focus on the teaching function emerged in the UK, we now examine enhancement mechanisms, and their theoretical underpinnings.

Improving and monitoring teaching practice

Roger Brown in his insightful work on quality assurance in the UK since integration of the public sector into mainstream higher education examines the role of the 'evaluative state' in regulating practices both in research (through the Research Assessment Exercise) and in teaching (through Teaching Quality Assessments and later institutional audits). Brown points to the limitations an approach based on outputs, performance management, and accountability (Brown, 2004, 12). To a large extent the quality agenda in HE – in the UK and increasing in the rest of Western Europe - has been driven by deficit understandings of teaching and learning (involving a 'train and monitor' model) and linear theories of change (concentrating on initiatives to incentivize rank and file faculty, and improve leadership). We examine first the strategies used to improve and professionalize practice.

These strategies have been operationalised mainly through educating HE teachers (in particular new lecturers) and establishing a strong quality assurance system based on control of teaching and learning quality and audits of quality assurance systems. A recent initiative by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) - a body concerned with enhancing teaching and learning, under the aegis of the funding councils - establishing 'professional standards' for teachers in higher education, is one of the latest attempts at harnessing professionalized practices.

HE Teacher Education

Professional development for new lecturers has become an established feature of higher education in the UK over the past decade or so, particularly since the creation of the Institute for Learning and Teaching in HE (later merged into the HEA) which accredits university teacher training programmes. The programmes involve acquiring basic knowledge about teaching, learning and assessment, quality frameworks, attention to the student experience (through reflection and evaluation of practice, and

effective feedback), and integration of research, scholarship and professional activities with teaching and learning (HEA Accreditation, 2006). The assumption behind these programmes is that acquaintance with pedagogical knowledge and research in the field will yield effective practice. Research carried out by one of the authors has shown that this was not necessarily the case, and that teaching practice is framed by a number of factors which might not accommodate the knowledge acquired by lecturers through these programmes (Fanghanel, 2004). This was also confirmed in an evaluation of these programmes carried out by the HEA (Prosser et al, 2006). Unless practice is envisaged in its entirety and complexity programmes of this type, while useful to an extent, cannot impact significantly on practice, particularly at the departmental level, where much of an academic's allegiance lies, and where scope for contestation and power is great (Trowler & Bamber, 2005; Trowler *et al.*, 2005; Trowler & Cooper, 2002). This type of initiative aimed at the micro-level of practice therefore has limited impact.

A strong quality assurance framework

Regulatory bodies have addressed the macro level of practice in a number of ways - in particular through the control and regulation of practice via institutional assessments. In the UK this function is performed by the QAA, which undertakes quinquennial institutional audits assessing institutional quality assurance mechanisms and structures, reviewing programmes and awards and evaluates institutional information about quality and standards. These audits have increased both the administrative burden for faculty and the financial burden for institutions. They have also encouraged people to focus on measurable outcomes, thus circumscribing practice to its reified status. Brown shows that this very costly approach was not a good vehicle for quality improvement – being likely to being used by institutions perfomatively rather than reflexively (Brown, 2004, 162). Brown also notes that higher education institutions only benefited marginally from any good outcome in the quality/institutional audits. Their grades (in the first round), and QAA summary reports might be in the public domain, but institutions were never

directly financially rewarded for their achievements in teaching quality. This is in sharp contrast to the financial rewards available through the Research Assessment Exercise for research work assessed as of high quality and high impact and esteem. This grading exercise has however generated a challenging climate for institutions competing for students' attention, and in some instances has given a leading edge to 'new' universities (i.e. institutions which acquired their degree awarding powers after 1992) in some of the enhancement initiatives examined in the next section.

Bringing teaching into the limelight

Turning now to the incentives that were set up to complement the forms of prescription and control described above, we note that direct rewards for teaching were many and widespread. Recognition initiatives addressed the Dearing agenda to 'redress the imbalance between teaching and research' in higher education (NCIHE, 1997, para 8.9). The most visible initiatives in the UK were directed at individuals in the form of specific distinctions through the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS), which in its first incarnation, borrowed features from the Canadian 3M Teaching Fellowship and the US Carnegie Scholars' schemes (Skelton, 2005, 144).

A number of initiatives were also directed at groups and teams whose performance in the teaching quality assessment had been deemed excellent. The Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning which underwent five iterations is a case in point. Directed at disciplinary groups, it sought to promote innovation and dissemination of good practice. A total of 164 projects were funded in the 10 years between 1995 and 2006. A recent formal evolution of these initiatives (CHEMS, 2005) has shown however that to a large extent these remained highly situated projects with very little impact outside of the group concerned, little or serendipitous linkage to National Teaching Fellows, and only limited impact even on the departments in which these initiatives were funded.

One of the newest and most significant initiatives in terms of the investment it represented – a total of £335 million over a period of 5 years was allocated to it in 2005 – is the Centres of Excellence for Teaching and Learning (CETLs). Their development was in part also a response to the perceived imbalance between teaching and research. It is early days and the CETLs' impact has not been fully evaluated yet. However, initial analysis by Gosling and Hannan (Gosling & Hannan, 2007) indicates that rather than excellence in a subject area, what was primarily rewarded in this initiative was the feasibility and business value of the project outlining how money would be spent. Further, Gosling and Hannan suggest that specific pedagogical approaches, including computer-based learning and employment-related skills, were favoured and this reflected a 'vocational/instrumental' view of higher education. While Gosling and Hannan claim that some of the CETLs have tried to integrate with other areas of their institutions, there is also anecdotal evidence that some of these centres are isolated from the rest of the institution.

A recent initiative linking teaching to research is worth mentioning at this stage. In its latest round of funding the English funding council set aside some monies for institutions to work on developing the links between research and teaching. This agenda has been broadly interpreted to include linking discipline-based research and teaching, learning how to do research, developing research-based curricula, and enhancing pedagogical research (Jenkins & Healy, 2005). Interestingly, in its attempt to 'redress the balance', Government sought to reverse the Mathew effect ('to him who hath shall be given'), and these monies were awarded in inversely proportional order to an institution's research income. It is far too early to say whether this initiative will have any effect in bringing research and teaching closer together.

Finally, following Dearing's call for institutions to consider rewards and promotions paths that took account of the new emphasis on teaching so as to remedy 'inadequate recognition of teaching excellence' (NCIHE, 1997, 14.6), many HE institutions in the UK have revised their promotion pathways to

include teaching and administration in their promotion criteria. Although Skelton has identified recognition of teaching as a crucial mechanism in developing cultures of teaching excellence (Skelton, 2005, 73), to date only very few distinguished careers have emerged through the teaching route (ibid. p 54).

Implicit theories underpinning enhancement initiatives

Having outlined the main strategies used in the UK to enhance the status and quality of teaching in a context of wider access and increased accountability and regulation, we examine the theories of change and of teaching and learning underpinning these initiatives. We argue that they are largely informed by linear rationalistic theories of change (Trowler et al, 05), and a transmissive view of teaching and learning.

Understanding change in academic organizations

Theories underpinning change initiatives are rarely explicit, fully formed or argued out. Often a diffusion model of change is in place, with small numbers of people acting as innovators, primary adopters or sources of 'contagion', bringing improved perspectives and approaches to teaching back to their departments, where it is assumed diffusion will take place. Often too there is a technical rationalist approach in place which searches for the 'right' ways for professionals to behave in different circumstances regardless of context. Such agentic theories of change are founded on a set of ontological assumptions summed up by the term 'methodological individualism' (MI). MI approaches the study of societies and organizations with the assumptions that individuals' thoughts and decisions are more significant than the structures they operate within. It is individuals' agency, their decisions and actions, which shape the institutions and social circumstances they operate within, rather than vice versa. MI rejects structural explanations for social phenomena, which see individual actions as determined by social structures around them, lending them regularity and predictability.

Much of the literature on teaching and learning borrows from cognitive science, and focuses on mental processes at play in the act of teaching and learning (Entwistle *et al.*, 2000; Hativa & Goodyear, 2002 for example) or on conceptions and intentions of teachers (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999). Some also focus on epistemological structures of the disciplines (Donald, 1995; Donald, 2002; Neumann *et al.*, 2002). These approaches to teaching and learning are psychologistic in nature and are also based on MI, seeing as they do the process of teaching and learning as occurring in something of a bubble, dissociated from its special, social, political and economic context.

From this MI perspective changing and improving teaching and learning involves better approaches to practice eventually being dispersed by individuals across organizations and systems. Such an approach to change, as well as to teaching and learning, appears to be endemic to formal educational policy making in the UK, as both Coffield (2002) and Guest (2001) argue in relation to vocational education and training policy, where a flood of short-term and disparate initiatives focused largely on the individual led to behaviour that is unlikely to tackle the underlying problem at an organizational level and leaves the cultural institutions that gave rise to the problem in the first place largely untouched. (Guest, 2001, p. 5).

While we can see methodological individualism and diffusion theories underpinning many higher education policies, those policies aimed at the macro level tend to be underpinned by more collectivist theories: for example, the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund with its emphasis on organizational teaching and learning strategies. Here the 'learning university' is conceptualised as a place in which strategies are clear, explicit and appropriate. Internal policies are congruent with overall strategies, so that practices are acquired and adopted to better suit the university's adaptation to its environment and the achievement of its goals. In this case, the theory of change is closer to the understanding of learning organizations as embodying residues of past learning in organizational routines (e.g. Levitt &

March, 1988). In this way, the learning organization is highly adaptive and very effective in achieving clear goals in a changing environment. More holistic and structuralist theories of change are also seen in change strategies which go beyond the level of the university to the discipline, such as those adopted by the Higher Education Academy's Subject Centres. Here the theory of change sees disciplinary epistemology and associated cultures as the key to enhancing teaching and learning practices and the student experience. Teaching and learning practices, the theory goes, are different in different disciplines largely because of the epistemological characteristics of those disciplines. Change strategies need to be holistic and oriented to the discipline as the significant level of analysis, approached through its manifestations in university departments, conferences and discipline-specific publications.

In practice we know that change is highly complex, that outcomes are usually quite different from original intentions, and that the trajectory of change differs from place to place even when there is a common policy framework in place. This is quite different from what should be expected from within a technical rational paradigm which assumes that given clear policies, sufficient resources, appropriate incentives and sanctions and clear milestones along the way then intentions will translate unproblematically into outcomes. An alternative theoretical framework, socio-cultural theory, assists in explaining why such hopes are so frequently dashed. We review this approach next.

A socio-cultural theory of practice

We argue that examining teaching and learning from a socio-cultural theoretical perspective provides a more realistic apprehension of the realities of practice, and of the factors that might obstruct enhancement initiatives. We focus in particular in the next section on one crucial element shaping the way academics conceptualise and approach their practice – academic labour. We show that this 'practice filter' has a strong bearing on how enhancement of teaching might (or might not) occur. First though a brief excursion into socio-cultural theory.

In this approach the *context* of practice (including teaching and learning) is highly significant. Social practice does not occur in a bubble between two people, or between one person and a group but in a social situation. In the study reported below the work of Engeström (Engeström, 1999; Engeström, 2001) on activity systems (AS) was used to circumscribe the structural context of practice; Lave & Wenger's approach to learning through legitimate participation into communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) was interrogated to problematize the way individuals and groups experience practice. Within this, individuals' scope for agency was examined and problematised using Giddens' structuration theory (Giddens, 1984).

In socio-cultural theory the seemingly naturally occurring 'inter-subjectivity' of people involved in common practice is problematised and interrogated, as is the assumption that social contexts are highly functional in terms of the achievement of explicit or implicit goals. In the study reported below this is done by applying more complex and hybrid understandings of change (as described in previous section) which move away from simple technical-rational models whilst also questioning Marxist-based conceptions of conflict-as-change inherent in some strands of theory (for example activity systems theory).

Structuration theory is a useful tool examining the relation between action and structure. In Giddens' perspective, structures are not seen as external entities, but rather as a virtual concept ('structural properties') that are produced and transformed through the agency of individuals towards them in the process of 'structuration'. This perspective acknowledges power issues and differences in people's ability to do things. Knowledgeable agentic actors become engines for the transformation of practice.

Applied to teaching, this socio-cultural theoretical framework sets the focus of analysis on teaching environments with specific attention to structures and

communities within them, and with regard to how individuals behave within those – their ability to respond. In this perspective, actions of individuals are related to activity at the macro or meso level of practice. The impact of colleagues, students, the curriculum, main drivers for higher education today are taken into account, as are individuals' responses to these structures and communities – e.g. their understandings of the discipline, of student learning, of the purpose of a higher education, and so on.

We now turn to an empirical study carried by one of us amongst 18 lecturers at seven different institutions encompassing fifteen different disciplines. In this study respondents were asked to talk in semi-structured interviews about themselves, their discipline, their institution, their departments, their approaches to teaching and their intentions in adopting this approach, their views on the aims of higher education and of their role as HE educators. We focus on how they perceived academic labour.

Empirical study

The study yielded findings which were organised through a conceptual framework identifying seven practice filters conditioning the way faculty approached, conceptualised and related to teaching and learning – the discipline, the department, the institution, pedagogical beliefs, academic labour, and external factors.

The nature of academic labour

We focus here on one of the practice filters identified above, the way academic labour is conceptualised and operationalised. We show how renditions of practice depicted here are framed by the 'redressing' mechanisms and regulations examined earlier. We also note what little agency academics have towards this structural filter.

One of the respondents in this study, Mary, a young Geography lecturer, thought that the regime of labour in her institution was driving academics into a state of exhaustion. She herself had been absent from work for several months due to stress, and was worried that this might happen again. She thought the university operated 'with a kind of superman/superwoman model' where the realities of academic work were not properly acknowledged. Stress in academic and academic-related employees was studied by Gail Kinman & Fiona Jones (Kinman & Jones, 2004), which tended to corroborate findings in this study, showing that 59% of staff worked outside of 'normal' working hours, with 21% claiming to regularly work more than 55 hours. One half of respondents felt that their workload was unmanageable, with a majority also thinking that too much emphasis was put on quality assurance, with less than one-quarter considering this had a positive effect on the student experience (p 2). The working conditions of academics however tend to be unspoken of, and the emotive dimension of their role understated. Faculty are expected to 'function' regardless of their context of practice.

Stress-related stories were present in many of the narratives in the study we are reporting on here. They were linked to feelings of inadequacy at doing the job properly. Terms such as 'crushing the life out of people', 'brutal regime', 'sacrificing', 'battling' were used to describe academic working conditions – such terms would usually rather be associated with physical than with intellectual labour, and do give a flavour of the hardships attached to success in academe. In this study, the academic profession was shown to be misunderstood by academics themselves when joining academia. A few 'new entrants' indicated for example that had expected more flexibility to focus on teaching or on research in ways befitting their own professional development, rather than institutional scorings in league tables. Two factors were recurrent in the discourse of respondents - the invisibility of academic labour, and the level of casualisation in the academic workforce. We focus on the first.

Invisible labour within limited resources

Policies on academic labour are operationalised at departmental level, and are subject in practice to negotiations generating a flux of collaborative and competitive relations with colleagues. A degree of arbitrariness was deemed to exist in terms of what 'counted' as teaching (which left much of the input of academics unaccounted for) and of how individuals were able to negotiate their time with the academic leader/HoD.

Many of the respondents' narratives pointed to the inadequacy of the systems in place to account for academic labour, despite or perhaps rather because of what Bleiklie et al have called the 'visualisation of labour' (Bleiklie *et al.*, 2000) which was examined in the first part of this paper. Academic labour as 'visualised' through accounts and audits of academic work, provides visible evidence of an institution's activity. Making this evidence available to managers and administrators and other stake-holders 'from a distance' through managerialist approaches deflects however from the realities of academic work. Measurements are the tip of the iceberg, and a large part of academic labour is in fact invisible. 'New' universities examined in this study used contracts to measure staff time (who were usually asked to have 500 hours 'contact time' a year). The inadequacy of such accountancy was stressed by several respondents who thought it misrepresented the actual input into preparation, support of learning, tutorial role, marking, providing feedback, and administrative work, a point also emphasised in McInnis study of Australian academics (McInnis, 2000). The emphasis on teaching hours also deflected from focusing on time spent on research which largely remained unaccounted for. There is tacit fuzziness about time spent on research, which is not subject to the same measurement in hours

In institutions where records were not kept in this way, departments that audited their workloads felt that their input wasn't really acknowledged by institutions who were in fact turning a blind eye to the actual number of working hours their faculty might engage in. Regardless of the institution type, seven of the academics in this study did their research at weekends or

when on sick-leave. Where faculty were not heavily engaged in teaching or in research, other duties took up much of their daytime (recruitment; placements; admissions; school links; and peripheral duties like induction, clearing, fairs, etc).

Even in institutions where time wasn't accounted for in terms of hours per year, staff felt that the true cost of teaching was not taken into account, as it didn't take into consideration the human dimension of tutoring or supporting students through sometimes harrowing times. In the following quote, Mary illustrates how complex and 'different' academic labour is in its relentless engagement with students, when she expressed her distress at supporting a student whose father had been murdered:

> If something like this happens, a student comes to see me, then I am not particularly functional for the rest of the day and similarly with writing, I am not a machine, in either my teaching or my writing, I almost feel that the current model of the academic is becoming more and more robotic, someone who won't be affected by anything and will continue to be ultra efficient, ultra-productive, and it will be the kind of people who are like that who will be promoted and sometimes I feel that it is one kind of person who won't allow themselves to be affected by certain things, who won't be the person who spends an hour with a student, or who … and that really worries me - the idea of the ideal academic who is becoming entrenched from higher education.

The majority of respondents in this study indicated that they felt they could not entirely fulfil their role as they would wish, two talked of depression, one of being away from work for a long time due to fatigue and depression, and many of stress related to certain aspects of their work and to their inability to 'do it properly'. This affected the way respondents approached teaching, having to focus on certain aspects of their role only or having to deal with inadequate facilities (no language lab to teach languages or computers) and budgetary cuts that forced department to part with technical staff and reduce

the amount of activities in the lab. In McInnis study, 56% of academics also indicated their work was a source of considerable stress (McInnis, 2000, 144). Non-recognition of the complexity of academic involvement was also emphasised by Pablo, lecturer in Chemistry, in this study:

> It causes a certain amount of depression. I have just come away from a period of illness, so I have been away from it for a while, but before that it was….. it was a bit….If there was one reason why you wanted to leave, it was that, to take early retirement or whatever.

Students' ignorance of the nature of academic work and the tendency to having been spoon-fed at school was perceived as adding to this pressure. Seven respondents also indicated that the true cost of innovative work was misunderstood and therefore undervalued. As a result of this invisibility, some academics chose to focus on research whilst still paying lip service to student support, others checked their input or were being brought into line by managers who reminded them that they needed to focus on research. Inequalities related to departmental and institutional specificities were identified – findings similar to McInnis (2000, 151). The gendered dimension of academic work (the disproportionate number of males in senior positions for example) was not analysed in this study, but is worth bearing in mind.

Research and teaching labour

As a result of having to compete for both research and teaching funding, institutions engage in what was sometimes perceived as agenda swapping, creating a zone of conflicts and also promoting a sense of insecurity amongst faculty. Respondents in this study felt their own focus was constantly oscillating between the two poles:

> We have had to go down to the teaching, we had subject review four years ago and then this year we have the institutional audit. So we have been done over twice in a very short period […]. So research has taken a back

> seat, but the research assessment exercise key date is 2007, so this is the year when we've got to build our research again.

The pressures felt by respondents to enhance existing research scores by publishing more added to contradictory messages they were getting about excelling at both teaching and research whilst perceiving that on the whole teaching was not valued by the institution. In places where research was not an option but a requirement the balance seemed easier to reach, but not for young lecturers, or for respondents who felt very little financial support was given to the department from the centre to support research. In research-intensive universities, pragmatic decisions to minimise risks were taken by respondents. Teaching was generally perceived as second-best even in 'teaching' universities, illustrating that there is still a long way to go before this function can compete on a par for excellence with research.

Summary

Workloads, invisibility of academic work, lack of resources, conflict with research, all affect teaching approaches in terms of methods, commitment and enthusiasm. A lack of understanding of the nature of innovation – which takes time and includes risk-taking - was also emphasised. Collective and individual coping strategies were devised to address these structural factors, but the filter of academic labour is highly structural in nature, and agents have very little room to manoeuvre. Tensions with research are exacerbated at this level – academics whose role is grounded in teaching, have very little scope for research; their interest in it is sometimes curbed, and vice-versa.

Conclusion

Our apprehension of academic identity informed as it is here by socio-cultural theory enabled us to identify the main obstacles to creating a more harmonious environment for evolving both the teaching and research dimensions of the academic role. Uncovering the complexity of the context of

practice through this focus on the teaching dimension of the academic role, we have shown that regulation of practice through audits, measurement of performance outputs, and rewards has had limited effect on enhancing practice for all. The disjointedness of the initiatives deployed, lack of cohesion between teaching and research activities for academic staff, and trivialisation of academic labour all contribute to a sense of disempowerment for academics who iterate between teaching, research, and quality agendas in environments which they perceive misrepresent the nature of their work, and control their practice in managerialist ways.

We have suggested that if enhancement initiatives were underpinned by more sophisticated theories of change allowing for reconstruction, adaptations and agentic responses, more realistic and more useful outcomes would ensue, based on contextually relevant reflexive approaches and not on mechanistic moves to jump through quality and regulation hoops. Less relentless competition between teaching and research also needs to be fostered, so that newcomers to academia find they can evolve a coherent identity within their domains of competence.

We have also established that the conditions in which academics work impact on their approaches to teaching and learning in ways that are generally unacknowledged (or only marginally acknowledged) in many studies on teaching and learning. We suggest that looking at teaching as something other than simply a commodity would enable an engagement with the realities of practice. This would better inform both theoretical knowledge about teaching and learning, and practical knowledge connecting with the environments in which academics operate, and with students' own expectations and needs. Whole-heartedly apprehending practice complexity and within it, the full socio-cultural dimension of teaching and learning might provide a more realistic basis for enhancing teaching and learning practices.

References

Bleiklie, I., Hostaker, R. & Vabo, A. (2000) *Policy and Practice in Higher Education: Reforming Norwegian Universities,* London & Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley.

Brown, R. (2004) *Quality Assurance in Higher Education: The UK Experience since 1992,* London: RoutledgeFalmer.

CHEMS (2005) Summative evaluation of the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (TQEF). *A Report to HEFCE.*

Coffield, F. (2002) Britain's continuing failure to train: the birth pangs of a new policy, *Journal of Education Policy*, 17 (4) [483 -495]

Donald, J. G. (1995) Disciplinary differences in knowledge validation. in HATIVA, N. & MARINCOVICH, M. (Eds.) *Disciplinary differences in teaching and learning: Implications for practice.* San Fransisco, Jossey-Bass [7 - 18].

Donald, J. G. (2002) *Learning to think: disciplinary perspectives,* San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass.

Engeström, Y. (1999) Activity theory and individual and social transformation. in ENGESTRÖM, Y., MIETTINEN, R. & PUNAMÄKI, R.-L. (Eds.) *Perspectives on activity theory.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press [19 - 52].

Engeström, Y. (2001) Expansive Learning at Work: toward an activity theoretical reconceptualization. *Journal of Education and Work,* 14 (1)**,** [133 - 156].

Entwistle, N., Skinner, D., Entwistle, D. & Orr, S. (2000) Conceptions and beliefs about 'good teaching': an integration of contrasting research areas. *Higher Education Research and Development,* 19 (1)**,** [5 - 26].

Fanghanel, J. (2004) Capturing dissonance in university teacher education environments. *Studies in Higher Education,* 29 (5)**,** [575 - 590].

Giddens, A. (1984) *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration,* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gosling, D. & Hannan, A. (2007) Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in England: recognising, celebrating and promoting excellence? in SKELTON, A. (Ed.) *International Perspectives on Teaching Excellence in Higher Education.* London, Routledge [forthcoming].

Guest, D. (2001) Motivation for workforce development: the role of national culture. London: Performance and Innovation Unit

Hativa, N. & Goodyear, P. (2002) Teacher Thinking, Beliefs and Knowledge in Higher Education. Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers.

HEA accreditation (2006) http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/regandaccr/AccreditationGuidelinesAug06.doc (accessed 21 November 2006)

Jenkins, A. & Healy, M. (2005) Institutional Strategies to Link Teaching and Research. York: The Higher Education Academy.

Kinman, G. & Jones, F. (2004) Working to the Limit. Report commissioned by the AUT.

Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Leontev, A. N. (1981) *Problems of the development of the mind,* Moscow: Progress Publishers.

Levitt, B. & March, J. G. (1988), Organisational Learning, *Annual Review of Sociology,* 14 [319 -340]

McInnis, C. (2000) Changing Academic Work Roles: the everyday realities challenging quality in teaching. *Quality in Higher Education,* 6 (2)**,** [143-152].

NCIHE (1997) Higher Education in the Learning Society. *Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education.* London: HSMO.

Neumann, R., Parry, S. & Becher, T. (2002) Teaching and Learning in their Disicplinary Contexts: a conceptual analysis. *Studies in Higher Education,* 27 (4)**,** [405 - 417].

Prosser, M., Rickinson, Bence V,, Hanbury, A., Kulej, M. Formative evaluation of accredited programmes. York: Higher Education Academy.

Prosser, M. & Trigwell, K. (1999) *Understanding Learning and Teaching,* Buckingham: SRHE & OUP.

Robins, K. & Webster, F. (Eds.) (2002) *The Virtual University?: Knowledge, Markets, and Management,* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Skelton, A. (2005) *Understanding Teaching Excellence in Higher Education: towards a critical approach,* Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Tomusk, V. (2003) The War of Institutions, Episode 1: the Rise, and the Rise of Private Higher Education in Eastern Europe. *Higher Education Policy,* 16 213 - 238].

Trow, M. (1989) The Robbins Trap: British attitudes and the limits of expansion. *Higher Education Quarterly,* 43 (1)**,** [55 - 75].

Trowler, P. & Bamber, R. (2005) Compulsory Higher Education Teacher Training: Joined-up policies, institutional architectures and enhancement cultures. *International Journal for Academic Development,* 10 (2)**,** [79 - 93].

Trowler, P. & Cooper, A. (2002) Teaching and Learning Regimes, implicit theories and recurrent practices in the enhancement of teaching and learning through educational development programmes. *Higher Education Research and Development,* 21 (3)**,** [221-240].

Trowler, P., Fanghanel, J. & Wareham, T. (2005) Freeing the Chi of Change:The Higher Education Academy and Enhancing Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. *Studies in Higher Education,* 30 (4)**,** [427-444].