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# Disciplining Innovations

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Now that it seems the tertiary sector will remain in a state of constant and open-ended reform, the risk is that institutional confrontation will become entrenched unproductively. An ever more elaborate and refined assessment of teaching practice—from top-down institutional monitoring of teaching planning and materials to peer review of teaching—stands opposed to an ever more dogmatic but largely theoretical resistance to managerialism. There are risks on both sides of this divide: the evaluation of what goes on in the classroom does support the new validation of teaching as legitimate academic work on par with the most macho research, thus valuing the democratisation of knowledge that teaching represents, encouraging the directing of academics' precious time towards teaching and supporting academics who for different reasons don't have the luxury of cultivating protracted research projects.

However, bullying demands made by governments that academic teaching primarily serve national economic priorities or partisan social agendas risks undermining academic freedom and disabling critical thought. The risk here is that

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societies will end by seeing innovative or critical thought—the lifeblood of change—as an indulgence. This impulse measures academia by standards fundamentally alien to it, implying that all intellectual work not readily understood by the lay mind or, for that matter, any open-ended speculation of any kind, is simply elite self-indulgence. Reductive and quantifiable measures come to be seen as objectivity itself, on the assumption that all outcomes can be assessed by fixed and common standards and indeed that education is a matter of knowable outcomes achievable within the span of an undergraduate degree. The temptation is for teachers to respond by parroting a government sanctioned academic Newspeak they don't believe in, thus giving their time over to conforming to a fake or shell pedagogy behind which they hope to continue inducting students into certain esoteric styles of analytical knowledge or critical reading. At an institutional level, course programs become standardised for the sake of standardisation alone, and academic discourses of educational value become quickly reactive, even reactionary: both traditional humanism and anti-humanist critique see their relative missions as threatened by the call for them to be judged, measured or even represented.

Given that it rarely proposes or tries to enact alternative models of curriculum design and pedagogy, blanket resistance to teaching assessment can thus look indistinguishable from traditional conservative obscurantism, in which elite academics saw themselves as above accountability. Similarly, always dismissing processes of academic accountability as neoliberalist homogenises institutional practices in a way that obscures how they are nuanced and the complex negotiations that produce them. These negotiations unfold within institutions, between institutions and between the academic sector and various levels of government. To lump these together as the simple application of a homogeneous ideology is to effectively absent yourself from these negotiations in the name of a critique that thus becomes ineffective by repudiating a broad social scrutiny of education that for all its, at times, questionable methodologies, reductive testing and blunt populism is not going to simply go away. Arm's length generalisations about administrative processes end by becoming a substitute for the proper critical analysis of the historical-political-institutional function and multi-layered contradictory nature of the situation in which academic work finds itself. This simply licenses those who want to see academics as mystifying their situation in order to evade accountability.

Furthermore, by resisting the development of sector wide discussions of teaching accountability, academics give up on the self-reflexivity that is definitive of critical academic work in the humanities. Intellectuals dedicated to cultural critique fail to exercise that critique on their core business: academic teaching in a specific institutional context. We forget critique in the name of critique.

On a larger political scale this seems another example of the separation of critique from action. The anathematisation of power in recent cultural criticism risks de-legitimising the transformation of critique into positive institutional change, let alone leadership (who on the left now could claim that they seek political or any kind of leadership?). This program-less critique ends ironically by collaborating with the longstanding conservative attack on the left as too incompetent or dangerous to be entrusted with power. Critique then becomes at best a substitute for developing a rich discourse of pedagogy or at worst a hollow expression of frustration and resentment.

The problem in short is the thinness of our discussions of the purpose of our teaching. The challenge is to develop a pedagogy that preserves the rigour of critical cultural literacies while presenting a coherent understanding of teaching as a positive social function. Every academic has an intuitive or general understanding of the purpose of their teaching though on the whole they remain overly governed by highly valued types of intellectual content, the theories and ideas that must be taught because of their perceived historical and political urgency. This remains a highly conservative model of pedagogy in two ways: first, like all conservatisms, it thrives by being unarticulated and, second, it remains a pedagogy of discipleship, of the induction into an esoteric consensus. In short, it risks falling back into the same kind of secretive normativity that critical academic work sought to go beyond.

The result is, on the one hand, a pedagogy developed on the run without separating itself from traditional styles of academic unaccountability, and, on the other, politically determined, marketable and populist measures of academic performance. The challenge for academics is to take control of the pedagogical debate by resisting the temptations of either sneering withdrawal into purely academic priorities on the grounds that the drive to accountability is simply a managerial tool (which it is and is not) or of cynically parroting what we think the hierarchy want to hear so they will go away and leave us alone to do what we think

we should be left alone to do. The best way to encounter changes in the management of teaching is not to withdraw from debate by way of dismissive generalisations, but to develop discourses of pedagogy that transform critique that is properly aware of its assumptions, situation and ramifications into a positive engagement with institutional practices.

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One space in which there are possibilities for rethinking teaching we might call the 'proximal zone' of educational development. This zone complicates the simplistic binary of monolithic neoliberal management and resistant academics locked in combat. According to Lee and colleagues, by the second decade of the twenty-first century, 'the moment has come' for educational developers.[1] As Robbins and Webster point out, progressive educationalists have lobbied for change in university pedagogies for decades, but the nineties and the noughties saw the institution of national and institutional awards and fellowships for excellence in learning and teaching, the establishment of funds for research in pedagogy, growth in the number and size of educational development centres and, in the UK, establishment of centres of teaching excellence.[2] These developments have paralleled and intersected with an increasing emphasis by universities on management of the quality of teaching, with new audit arrangements for assessing 'teaching excellence'.

These policy initiatives and funding opportunities have created something of a new landscape for cultural studies scholars. Markers of recognition, and even prestige, associated with teaching and the scholarship of teaching have offered opportunities, however constrained and conditional. For disciplines in the humanities with more tenuous access to large scale research funding than our colleagues in the physical and medical sciences, access to small sums through learning and teaching funds have at least appeared to offer the resource that many of us most crave: time. Anecdotally, it appears that the lure of 'learning and teaching' as a route to funding, promotion and publication has been particularly strong for academic women, who may be clustered in teaching-intensive disciplines and positions, spend more time on teaching-related tasks such as pastoral care and student welfare and be less likely to apply for large external grants.[3] If reflexivity about institutions, discourses and practices is one of the primal instincts of cultural

studies academics, the new domain of 'learning and teaching' seems to offer the chance to garner some human capital from those activities that many of us would have been doing anyway.

Ventures into the terrain of teaching innovation have not been simply pragmatic, however. It is a truism to say that cultural studies is invested in social change and social justice. Stuart Hall argues 'there is something *at stake* in cultural studies'.[4] Far from being merely the agents of managerialism, genealogies of educational development demonstrate that it too has been marked by such investments. David Boud describes one motive for changing teaching practice as a 'moral imperative' to promote student welfare and to support struggling staff in difficult times. Lee, Manathunga and Kandlbinder's cultural history of educational development in Australia suggest that this kind of moral imperative can be traced back to the 1960s and '70s and student activism around university teaching. This political moment is something of a hidden history of learning and teaching in the academy. The different institutional forces' shaping of academic development in more recent times has concealed this more activist history: academic development 'has become harnessed to the conservative policy imperatives of accountability and quality … These neo-liberal policy imperatives are more likely to be positioned as diametrically opposed to student and staff unions.'[5] The meanings of educational innovation in contemporary universities, then, are profoundly contradictory.

Academics in cultural studies who have engaged with pedagogical innovations are, perhaps, taking up the role of tacticians coping with both the limitations of the universities of the past (the privileging of research, the elitism of the institution) and the circumstances of the new (diminished funding per student, massification and some diversification of the student body). But they are also recruited into corporate strategies which at times converge with the concerns of cultural studies and at other times diverge sharply. A 'values schizophrenia', then, often confront both educational developers and those academics who have dealings with them.[6] Gosling comments:

> Involvement in strategic planning and implementation of national and institutional policies means that it is more difficult for [educational development centres] to retain critical autonomy and adopt the role of 'provocateurs' … Being closely allied with the central administration also

> means that the [educational development centres] can lose credibility with academics.[7]

A frequent move in recent times in universities has been to devolve the funding and leadership of educational change.[8] Educational innovation has become embedded in the disciplines. Such moves reveal the legacy of participatory approaches to education within contemporary 'learning and teaching' orthodoxies, and illustrate the purchase of the anti-hierarchical and collectivist notion of 'communities of practice' in these understandings. They can also be seen as a response to academics' mistrust of centralised 'development', an attempt to circumvent readings of learning and teaching initiatives as managerialist, and a strategy to draw on the resource of fidelity to one's own discipline and collegiality within it. We could, with some justice, view such moves as further intensification of academics' self-government. Yet, if the 'responsibilisation' of academic staff for the governance of their discipline and the university more broadly chimes with neoliberal management strategies, it also pre-dates it and exceeds it.

In the light of this embedding, David Boud calls for research mapping out what discipline-based development of learning and teaching might look like. His initial sally suggests that a key feature should be the sense that teaching initiatives, grounded in particular local circumstances, are seen as 'how we do it around here', rather than a response to wider institutional imperatives. Importantly, he proposes that local initiatives can draw on situated, tacit disciplinary understandings as well as a more reflexive awareness of research and the scholarship of adult education. This acknowledgement that shared understandings, sometimes opaque from afar, are not always and only a problem, offers a position distinct from a commonly held fantasy of teaching practices as amenable to absolute transparency, translatability and accountability. Cultural studies' deeply felt understanding of the non-commensurability of languages and experiences offers a critical distance from such fantasies. At the same time, cultural studies at its best does not rest comfortably in isolation, but strives towards an ethical engagement with others, requiring us to use our disciplinary understandings to move beyond what we already know. The articles in this issue make this move into contested terrain where a reconsideration of familiar if unarticulated practices meets new educational realities—these encounters, we hope, have the capacity to surprise.

## —NOTES

[1] Alison Lee, Catherine Manathunga and Peter Kandlbinder, 'Shaping a Culture: Oral Histories of Academic Development in Australian Universities', *Higher Education Research and Development*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2010, p. 308.

[2] Kevin Robins and Frank Webster, *The Times of the Technoculture*, Routledge, London, 1999.

[3] Jayne Keogh and Barbara Garrick, 'On the Need to Investigate the Situation of Casual Academic Work in New Times' *HERDSA News*, vol. 25, no. 3, December 2005; Linda Krefting, 'Intertwined Discourses of Merit and Gender: Evidence from Academic Employment in the USA', *Gender, Work and Organisation*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2003 pp. 261–78; Belinda Probert, '"I Just Couldn't Fit It In": Gender and Unequal Outcomes in Academic Careers', *Gender, Work & Organization*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2005, pp. 50–72; Joann K. Bowman and Sean Ulm, 'Grants, Gender and Glass Ceilings? An Analysis of ARC-funded Archaeology Projects', *Australian Archaeology*, no. 68, 2009, pp. 31–6; Australian Research Council, 'Discovery Projects: Selection Report for Funding Commencing in 2011', Australian Research Council website, http://www.arc.gov.au/ncgp/dp/DP11_selrpt.htm, accessed 21 April 2011.

[4] Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies', in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Paula Treichler (eds), *Cultural Studies*, Routledge, New York and London, 1992, p. 277.

[5] Lee, Manathunga and Kandlbinder, p. 316.

[6] David Gosling, 'Educational Development in the UK: A Complex and Contradictory Reality', *International Journal of Academic Development*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2009, p. 11.

[7] Gosling, p. 11.

[8] Gosling; David Boud, 'Situating Academic Development in Professional Work: Using Peer Learning', *International Journal of Academic Development*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1999, pp. 3–10.