

## University Sabbaticals and the Production of Pedagogic Space (0074)

### Paper

In a recent study of academics in a 'time-impooverished age' Barnett (2009 p16) advocates that 'empirical work on academic time... be accompanied by research that reaches out for the totality of spaces and forms of academic being-in-time'. The research which is the subject of this paper examines one area of the use of academic time, namely the practice of university sabbaticals. These provide an important space where research and scholarship are advanced. However there has been little empirical study of how they operate and in what ways they privilege research over teaching.' This UKCLE funded study examined the views of law academics on the tensions between teaching time and research time heightened by the award of a sabbatical. The research explored through responses to a written questionnaire and through follow-up qualitative interviews the views of a sample of law school academic staff on the potential for university sabbaticals to have an impact on teaching. The sample was drawn from law schools in England, Wales and Scotland and from both pre and post 1992 universities. Heads of the selected Law Schools were asked to forward a questionnaire to staff who had recently been awarded a sabbatical. Respondents were asked if they would be willing to give a face-to-face interview with the researchers ten accepted. Anonymity was assured.

The report (<http://www.ukcle.ac.uk/projects/past-projects/>) reveals considerable tension on the part of respondents torn by the pressures to excel in both teaching and research. One typical comment illustrates this:

*It is frustrating trying to juggle [teaching and research]. I feel I will never be excellent at either since it is impossible to be excellent at both. People like me are growing in numbers partly because of the PGCH we have an interest in teaching. We are the first generation to feel the pressure of trying to excel in both. The management of the School are coming around to the idea that they need to invest in both. (Lecturer, female, pre-1992 university).*

The research demonstrated that academics tried hard to overcome tension by devising practical mechanisms whereby sabbatical research could impact on their teaching. As the Conclusion pointed out 'For some respondents and interviewees it was vital to find concrete ways of disseminating both the process and outcomes of research, such as the use of blogs, webpages, seminars and discussion boards. They saw it as crucial that of the work of the academy.' It is argued in this paper however that the findings raise deeper questions about the allocation of academic time. The conceptual framework offered by Barnett goes some way to provide insight into how the compartmentalizing of academic endeavours, which is such a source of frustration, might be addressed.

There are arguably three different approaches to addressing these tensions, namely improving work load planning by senior management, improving individual time management, and, as Barnett proposes, reimagining the meaning of time. Each of these will be discussed in the paper and are briefly outlined here.

Barrett and Barrett's (2009) large scale research for the Leadership Foundation on the allocation of staff workloads in higher education refers only incidentally to sabbaticals in reviewing the allocation of workloads. They reported that in some cases staff were unhappy about the pressure of work and in particular the managerialist pressures which meant 'the loss of any space to think creatively and explore new areas or lines of enquiry'. They advocated a more equitable and transparent approach from departmental heads and also that 'staff should be encouraged to think about/ negotiate the balance of their own activities'. Similarly for Kearns and Gardiner (2007) argue that individual academic time management is the way to embrace the multiplicity of tasks facing lecturers. These include having a clear purpose in one's career, planning and prioritising, avoiding interruptions and distractions and being organized..

Barnett (2010) by contrast provides a theoretical framework for a more creative approach to academic time than either of these. As he puts it ( p83) 'The university's spaces are not given but have, after all, to be constructed....'. Barnett draws on Lefebvre (2005) who in a magisterial study provides a framework for comprehending space and time as a socially constructed totality. Lefebvre argued for an epistemology of place and time which emphasised the fluidity and interconnectedness of these concepts. It is arguable that academic time in particular exemplifies this. The legal scholar Collier (2002) has made in an examination of what he calls the 'private life of the law school.' He examines how academics manage the many and varied tasks they have to carry out. He refers (p21) to the 'indeterminacy' of their work patterns in that the apparent autonomy and freedom is deceptive because boundaries are limitless. Lefebvre shows how this boundlessness can be turned to creative effect. He advanced a dialectical triad of concepts, namely social practice, representations of space and representational spaces which correspond to the three realms of the lived conceived and perceived experience. For Lefebvre space and time were not fixed concepts but subject to change by human activity and argued for an understanding of how spaces inter-connect and space is produced.

The paper argues that there is evidence that staff would embrace the stance advocated by Lefebvre and Barnett. Doubtless there is a place for a more proactive management intervention in workload planning but managerialist imperatives have limited effect. They may not change the mental outlook of the academic. Similarly increased individual effort and self organization may not be effective since these are not sufficiently situated in the wider context of academic world. Barnett identifies the challenges to academic autonomy, noting (p79) 'In the university time and space are not given but are to a considerable degree created and imagined. So there is a poetics of time and space.' He is critical of the quantitative view of time. He comments, 'Academic pleas about insufficient time should not be accepted since, 'On this analysis, the phrase 'managing one's *time* 'has to be seen as an injunction to determine the *spaces* that one is going to inhabit' (p83).

1006 words

## References

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