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Moving Targets: the elusiveness of student voice in higher education. (0020)

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### ***Introduction***

In higher education today teachers are met with demands of inclusion and differentiated pedagogies as the numbers of students admitted to the universities are increasing on a global scale. It is a challenging task at the same time to teach large numbers of students *and* maintain the energy and focus in the endeavour to help the individual student finding her own voice. This leads to questions concerning how such voices might ‘come into presence’? How can potential voices be actualised, and tacit voices become audible? What kind of interaction needs to occur to foreground fluid and elusive voices? And is it even realistic to attempt to register inexactness and precarity in pedagogical spaces that are increasingly inscribed with ideas of exactness and non-precarity? In a highly standardised environment, such efforts are likely to be undermined by other pressures.

Part of the answer we hope to develop centres around a particular way of thinking about building up resistance to labelling students. There is of course very considerable attention given to labelling in the higher education literature on assessment, admissions, equality of opportunity and diversity. **In** trying to handle the complexity of student voice, the vast differences of personal approaches to higher education learning and teaching are often reduced to “types” of students and teachers, and generalised problems and problem solving with regard to e.g. challenges in supervision and counselling (Wisker 2005; Eley & Murray 2009; Anderson, Mayor & Mitchell 1992)

We seek to adopt a slightly different angle, from the perspective of the Canadian philosopher Ian Hacking (2006; 1995)), and the American philosopher Alphonso Lingis (2007; 1998), who both point to the paradox of voice as a knot between a stable pool of identity and an elastic and transforming self which disturbs the waters.

### ***Kinds of people: moving targets***

The title of the presentation is taken from a phrase in Hacking’s 2006 British Academy Lecture, *Kinds of People: Moving Targets*. Hacking examines how people who are classified according to different categories react to and interact with what is known about them. One of the kinds of people Hacking identifies is interactive kinds. Interactive kinds involve a ‘looping effect’ between the classifications and the classified: people are affected by how they are categorised, and, in turn, people affect how they are categorised:

‘We think of these kinds of people as given, as definite classes defined by definite properties...But...they are moving targets because our investigations interact with the targets themselves, and change them...That is the looping effect. Sometimes our sciences create kinds of people that in a certain sense did not exist before. That is making up people’ (Hacking, 2006:1).

The fluid multivocality that Hacking indicates, where the identity of a student comprises many different voices, can connect with the idea of the student as being a moving target. As we have pointed out in our own work (Anonymised 2008; Anonymised 2006; Anonymised 2012; Anonymised 2011) student voice cannot be fully grasped from one privileged perspective. Each attempt at hitting the target with a label, and hearing her voice, is complicated by the unpredictable mobility of the target itself. This poses a dilemma for the higher education practitioner seeking to listen to shifting student voices.

### ***Restraint***

We suggest that the quality of restraint in listeners paradoxically offers potential for hitting the moving student target, making what is absent in voice present, and what is tacit, audible. One aspect of restraint is the withholding of labels, refraining from ‘making up people’ through categories and taxonomies. Restraint also opens up possibilities for seeing what is revealed through these absences. This understanding of restraint should not, however, be seen as a fear of language and a holding back from contact with students as found in Levinas, where language is potentially violent and a “betrayal” of the otherness of the other person (Levinas 2003: 44; Levinas 2000: 7). On the contrary we find inspiration in one of Levinas’s pupils, Alphonso Lingis, who understands language not as pedagogical paralysis but as a catalyst of the voice of the other person, and a way to bringing the otherness of the individual to the fore (Lingis 2007).

In order to engage at the level of practice with the notion of voice in Hacking and Lingis, we propose that a particular interpretation of the personal tutoring space offers the possibility for a heavily inscribed pedagogical space to become reinscribed differently as a place where an indeterminate and ambivalent student voice might be heard. This calls for a new vocabulary which manages to move into the grey zones and conceptual fog which cloak the elusiveness of student voice in higher education today. In the presentation we develop a framework for a pedagogy of restraint, in which restraint should be understood as a pedagogical imperative to balance the double challenge and necessity of giving labels *and* holding back in each true pedagogical act.

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