

Negotiating boundaries and borders: transformative pedagogies on a PGCertHE. (0088)

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What should we learn on our PGCertHEs? How do PGCertHE programme staff make these decisions and how do they decide the learning outcomes for those academics who complete them? Schulman (2005) argues that professional practice must be skilled, theoretically grounded and ethical. However, this is not enough to equip them to deal with the inherent and unavoidable uncertainty in how best to help students learn. This paper will explore some of the tensions between transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997) and learning as consumption (Land, 2016). The paper will then offer an evaluation of learning through the position statements of lecturers, both before and after, completing a PgCertHE in a post 1992 English university. These position statements revealed a widespread view that the course had been 'transformative' and the interdisciplinary learning 'inspirational'. This paper concludes with a discussion of ways in which a PGCertHE programme can negotiate boundaries and borders between disciplines as the basis for developing creative and inclusive pedagogies and enhanced academic practice.

Aiming for transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997) in the PgCertHE, hopes to empower PgCert participants to become confident and autonomous in their academic practice. Through transformative learning, they are then able to explore transforming their own students' learning; enabling their own students to be curious, independent and self-sufficient. Creativity, emotional intelligence, complex problem solving, coordinating with others, negotiation and cognitive flexibility are the learning outcomes that are needed for graduate careers (World Economic Forum 2016). Transformative learning in higher education would support graduates to develop these complex attributes. However, transformative learning can be troublesome, chaotic and messy (Land, 2016).

Participants immersed in this type of learning do not necessarily enjoy it and find the experience both challenging and uncomfortable. Alternatively, a consumerist offer of learning may be reassuring for new staff and for their

students. This type of learning can feel safe and structured. PgCert participants are made aware of the institutional strategy and policy. PgCert students learn about the protocols and practices within the institution which help them negotiate their way through the day to day machinations of academic life. This type of learning works as a year-long induction into institutional practices. Their own students are also offered a predictable university experience that can be self-evaluated as comfortable and satisfactory. But do we need to stop and think? Is this what is really needed? Barnett (2004) argues that it would be irrational and self-defeating to assume that we can prepare a new generation of students to cope with uncertainty by establishing a new kind of certainty in the curriculum.

The Teaching Excellence Framework increases pressure on universities to focus on employment and graduate outcomes (BIS, 2015). Even if universities focus on these employment outcomes, rather than educational outcomes, transformative learning would support this. Yet as stated earlier, this kind of course would not be reflected favourably in National Student Survey results. Institutions are constrained by these metrics.

Four years ago, PgCert staff in a post 1992 university developed a programme to aim for a transformative learning experience. Participants work on a range of assignments that lead into a Teaching and Learning Conference. They work within multi-disciplinary learning sets and develop both individual and peer projects. Participants write an individual academic paper, design a group conference poster, present a group Pecha Kucha and deliver a group conference workshop. They design their own assessment criterion for peer evaluations and critique each others' work. They also regularly reflect on others' teaching through observations both inside and outside their own disciplines. Feedback throughout the course in the lead up to the conference reflects their anxiety and displacement; after four years PgCert staff are recognising this instability as the chaos of transformative learning. At the conference and in their subsequent presentations, feedback changes for the positive and the students see the worth of their year. They recognise the value of learning set activities whereby through sharing, negotiating and learning outside of their familiar epistemologies, boundaries and structures brings experimentation and new creative thinking. The staff see that they are now taking risks and making their teaching more inclusive, innovative and engaging. Along with learning outcomes, they speak of supporting their students to be employable graduates with new additions to their curricula through experiential learning, simulation games, role plays, problem-based learning, input from externals/employers, new assessments and reflective e-portfolios.

Position statements from lecturers at the beginning of the year asked for 'tool kits' for: classroom management, designing a lecture: teaching a lecture; engaging a big group and marking an essay. Their expectations focused on their own teaching, rather than students' learning. They hoped the PgCert course would cover everything they needed to 'know'. The position statements at the end of the course have been very different. Participants now view teaching and learning in a more nuanced way. The statements reflect seeing learning with new eyes. The more consumerist view points of learning have been left behind and PgCert students are keen for their students to be curious and independent; to take charge of their own learning. They want their students' experience of learning to be transformative.

Kleiman talks of the constant 'gravitational pull' of higher education systems to certainty and agreement, to stasis (2011;62.6). Students want to feel comfortable. They do not want to enter chaos. Kleiman identifies a point on 'the complexity continuum' between stasis and chaos where creative insights are more likely to happen. Working on the edge of chaos, finds the optimum zone of working, 'the zone of optimal operation'. It lies between stasis, with its certainty of systems fixed structures and linear predictability; and chaos, where new things happen (ibid). At this point, the system does not fall back into predictability nor does it fall into disorder. It is at the point where creativity and insight are more likely to be experienced. This PGCertHE programme challenges students to move into chaos and away from their safe epistemologies and comfortable ways of working. It invites them to negotiate the boundaries and borders between disciplines as the basis for developing creative and inclusive pedagogies and enhancing their own academic practice.

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