

Serial number [0038](#)

Title [Changing Learning: Learning To Change?](#)

Session [CHEER Symposium, SRHE Conference 2017: Affect in Academia: Policy Shadows and Perplexing Subjectivities \(Morley\)](#)

Author [Dr. Rebecca Webb](#)

Changing Learning: Learning To Change?

In this paper, I ask what it means ‘to learn’ as a post-graduate student on an international programme of teacher education in one university in the UK. What does learning imply of the learner (Webb and Crossouard, 2015), and of the power of learning to change (Bingham, Biesta and Rancière, 2010)? Drawing on interview data, I find a ‘complication’ in the model of straightforward transference of learning, both from the teacher to the student and from one country space to another in order to emancipate the learner. The data suggest a discourse of power and politics (Biesta, 2010) as *always* shaping an ‘excess’ of learning, with implications for higher education curricular and pedagogic rationalities, especially in terms of prescriptions of ‘what *will be* learned’.

I unpick the implications of the questions I raise concerning learning, the learner and change with reference to my own Higher Education experiences, and, in particular, convening the first year of a Post-graduate Diploma in International Teacher Education. I draw on the philosophical work of Rancière (1991) and methodological and pedagogic research of Biesta (2010, 2015), especially, to frame my thinking. I do this through my engagement with qualitative semi-structured interview data gathered in concert with six of my students. These data were generated whilst reflexively engaging with a multi-media resource the

students and I had developed so that we might record experiences of 'learning' throughout the programme whilst also discussing questions of learning, the learner and change.

The students in this study were 'expert teachers'¹ from a state in Central Asia studying as part of a scholarship programme designed to develop their professional, pedagogic, academic and English language competencies. It was envisaged that, following on from the course, the students would transfer and apply their learning to their home school settings in their own country, building a network within their schools and their immediate environs, and contributing to a wide educational 'change' agenda within their nation state more generally (Fimyar, 2008).

My full paper gives a brief description of the intentions of the diploma and discusses the group of students around whom the data are based. In it, I critically consider the premise of the questions I pose.. I do this within the context of the wider theoretical logics of enquiry which fall primarily within what might loosely be considered the 'postmodern' where normative ideas of the 'irreducible value' (Biesta, 1998; 3) of modern ideas of learning and the learner are not automatically assumed and foreclosed. In so doing, I draw especially upon Foucault's theory of knowledge/power. (1980).

I set out the methodological premises on which the data for the study were selected in order to interrogate data that particularly 'glowed' (MacLure, 2013), 'plugging in' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) theoretical resources to illuminate that which I claim. A reading of these data,

¹ A tacit phrase often used in teacher education contexts to denote a teacher with unusual experience, skill and determination to excel as a professional teacher educator.

replete with sensibilities of politics and power, have some significant implications for higher education curricular and pedagogic rationalities. In common with Biesta (2010, 2015), I identify inter-related threads of ideas of learning, which assert an ethic, sustained upon three inter-related contingencies, the first two of which are broadly foundational and modern, informed by ideas of 'qualification' and 'socialisation' (Biesta, 2015: 77). My data suggest the student's engagement with learning as explication (Rancière 1991).

Consequently, where the students refer to themselves as 'learners' they focus upon what it is that they now understand/can do/are reflecting upon that they did not know before the intervention of the teacher as 'Master Explicator' (Rancière, 1991) as part of the programme.

However, the third idea that emerges from the data is concerned with subjectification (Biesta, 2015: 77). This is 'post-foundational' and signals its discursive presumptions beyond the modern; conceiving both learning and the learner as never wholly dependent upon the idea of the teacher as mere 'Master Explicator'. Rather, it suggests student's engagements with learning are uncertain, contingent and affect laden (Hey and Leathwood, 2009). One student in particular talked about the 'special pain' of her experience as one that 'I don't want to go away'. It also suggest a teacher who is never just an explicator. Rather she requires attention: to make demands of learners in ways that never *only* ever value the pre-determined paths of student learning.

The question of learning, the learner and change is therefore both empirical and philosophical and captured within the data. It is concerned with the learning that students

experience in order to re-imagine their own 'emancipatory' space as learners. It reveals an important higher education ethic of valuing international postgraduate students within programme validation that allows for the capturing of the unexpected, the contingent and the unknowable.

References

- Biesta, G.J., 1998. Pedagogy without humanism: Foucault and the subject of education. *Interchange*, 29(1), pp.1-16.
- Biesta, J. 2010. *Good Education in an Age of Measurement: Ethics, Politics, Democracy*. Boulder, Co: Paradigm Publishers
- Biesta, G., 2015. What is education for? On good education, teacher judgement, and educational professionalism. *European Journal of Education*, 50 (1), pp.75-87
- Bingham, C., Biesta, G., and Rancière, J., 2010. *Jacques Rancière: education, truth, emancipation*. Bloomsbury Publishing
- Foucault, M., 1980. *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*. Pantheon.
- Fimyar, O., 2008. Educational policy-making in post-communist Ukraine as an example of emerging governmentality: Discourse analysis of curriculum choice and assessment policy documents (1999–2003). *Journal of Education Policy*, 23(6), pp.571-594
- Hey, V. and Leathwood, C., 2009. Passionate attachments: Higher education, policy, knowledge, emotion and social justice. *Higher Education Policy*, 22(1), pp.101-118.
- Jackson, A.Y. and Mazzei, L.A., 2011. *Thinking with theory in qualitative research: Viewing data across multiple perspectives*. Routledge
- MacLure, M., 2013. The wonder of data. *Cultural Studies, Critical Methodologies*, 13(4), pp.228-232.
- Rancière, J., 1991. *The ignorant schoolmaster: Five lessons in intellectual emancipation*. Stanford University Press.
- Webb and Crossouard, 2015, pp. 169-179, Learners, Politics and Education, in D. Scott and E. Hargreaves (eds). *The SAGE Handbook of Learning*, London, Sage

