The art of freedom in HE teacher development

Christine Jarvis

University of Huddersfield, VCO

Queensgate, Huddersfield, HD1 3DH, UK.

c.a.jarvis@hud.ac.uk

Abstract:

This paper considers the benefits of framing the education of Higher Education teachers as an art, and of facilitating a creative and artistic approach to teaching in Higher Education. It recognises the difficulties this poses in an international context in which Higher Education is increasingly presented as a commodity which must be standardised to provide guaranteed outcomes for students and governments. It presents the findings from a study of two cohorts of academic staff at a UK University who followed an arts-informed development programme and suggests that they and their students benefitted from the freedom to improvise and experiment. The study suggests that teachers appreciate the structure and discipline offered by the arts, as well as the opportunity to work with methods and materials outside their normal comfort zones.

> Keywords: teaching as an art; HE teacher education; teaching in HE

Introduction

> …it's about communication and art is, art is, in some form about communication – and transformation. There's some kind of transformation happens in this space between you and the student. (Inspire module participant)

Defining teaching in Higher Education (HE) as an art or a science is more than a philosophical issue. It is political – related to money and status. Approaches to teaching and to teacher education are shaped by the rewards and sanctions, financial and reputational, associated with teaching quality assessments. In my country these include the National Student Survey and the newly developed Teaching Excellence Framework (DfE 2016) but varying forms of league tables and inspections operate internationally, too. There is a tension between giving academics the space and resources to develop as critical creative teachers and the needs that institutions often have to ensure a threshold standard of performance from all staff in order to maintain positions in league tables and pass quality assessments, both of which are associated with prestige and often, at least indirectly, with income. This can make it difficult to find spaces to give academics the chance to embrace a degree of creative uncertainty. This paper explores the idea of teaching and particularly, HE teacher education, as art and considers the potential contribution this can make in the context of a global

1

environment which includes rewards, sanctions and systems of measurement that encourage conformity. It illustrates this through the discussion of the experience of two cohorts of academic staff participating in a module on Teaching in HE in a UK university between 2014 and 2016. The module conceived of teaching and teacher education as art and set out to promote improvisation and to accept uncertainty of outcome and an element of risk. The module design was also inspired by adult education literature that discusses the use of arts-based approaches to the education of professionals (Jarvis and Gouthro 2015; Kinsella 2007; Loads 2010; McGregor 2012).

Teaching in HE and Teaching HE Teachers – Certainty and Risk

HE teacher education

The tension between HE institutions' need for consistent performance and outputs, and the desire many academics have for freedom and creativity in teaching is reflected in teacher education for the sector. The teacher education/development community uses words such as 'dynamic' and 'creativity' (HEA 2011), which are suggestive of artistic and fluid approaches, but needs to prove its effectiveness in measurable ways to justify the investment of resources, particularly academic staff time. This drives it towards a scientific discourse focused on predictable outcomes. In the UK, the dominant approach to HE teacher education is that endorsed by the Higher Education Academy (HEA), whereby teachers are accredited using the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) (HEA 2011). To achieve accreditation, teachers must meet benchmarked standards in one of two ways. Teachers either complete an accredited course, through which they put together assessments that prove they meet standards, or submit a portfolio of evidence mapped against the standards, with a reflective commentary. This emphasis on consistency and standards is not surprising. Governments and institutions are responsible for public money and increasingly position students as customers, paying for a high quality service that must demonstrate consistently good results (BIS 2015, 2016). Approaches to teaching and teacher education that take a technical and scientific approach to the achievement of measurable outcomes provide some re-assurance to governments and tax payers about value for money. It also provides those staff who would prefer to focus on non-teaching elements of their work with a minimal basis for compliance with teaching requirements. If, however, we want staff to feel that teaching is an exciting, surprising and endlessly stimulating activity, then we also have to find ways to provide development that gives colleagues the opportunity to explore teaching less constrained by set standards and pre-determined criteria.

The art of teaching in HE

The conceptualisation of teacher education as an art contrasts with a standards-based framework by taking a holistic and improvisational approach in order to generate new insights and practices. Elliot Eisner's (2002, 2008) work focuses on teaching and curriculum in schools but has broader applicability with respect to education as an

2

artistic endeavour. He stresses that 'education can learn from the arts that open-ended tasks permit the exercise of imagination' (2008, 9) and goes on to argue that this is an important attribute for all disciplines, not just for teaching art, because it is the source of all new understanding and invention. Hall and Thomson (2017), in their discussion of artists working in schools, contrast the artists' approach with the 'signature' and 'default' pedagogies that characterise UK teaching, which expect that sessions always begin with an 'outline of a curriculum objective' (110) connected to specific student targets, combined with methods for assessing whether that objective has been achieved. This approach is also normalised in HE and in adult and further education. The UK's Quality Code for Higher Education (QAA, n.d.) which forms the basis on which institutions self-assess and develop their quality systems, has a default assumption that curricula will be built round specific learning outcomes, although its Teaching and Learning Code acknowledges that there may be some unintended (positive) outcomes, too. Hall and Thomson's (2017) research highlights how artists working in schools had the freedom to develop pedagogies that appeared to liberate and challenge students to achieve more than they and their teachers had thought possible. They identify nineteen practices that supported this, including using provocative material that was open to interpretation, making an occasion of the teaching experience (a sense that something special was happening), relating learning to students' own stories and experiences, accepting different forms of talk and discourse, including narrative, and setting open-ended challenges. In his discussion of the poetics of teaching, teacher educator David Hansen also focuses on freedom and open-endedness. He argues that:

> A poetics of teaching can help counter narrow, still prevalent views that
> cast teaching as merely an engineering problem of how to transfer a preset
> body of knowledge and skills efficiently to students. (Hansen 2004, 121)

He stresses the 'delight' that teachers and students can experience when teaching is considered holistically, as a form of poetics, and emphasises the value of 'a terrain of freedom: the space and time ... to consider and to respond, in their own unscripted ways, to questions of meaning, purpose, and understanding' (137).

Mandy Lupton (2013) champions the conceptualisation of teaching as art. She argues, based on her experience of HE teacher education, that the performativity associated with teaching has led to it becoming conceptualised as a craft. In this context she aligns craft with 'consistency, efficiency and standardisation' (5), although she acknowledges that 'craft' skills underpin much successful art. She argues that teaching, like art, is 'inherently risky' (164) and that risk is essential if teaching is to be transformative. Robyn Gibson, too, argues that creative teaching involves a 'willingness to take risks' (2010, 609), and that faculty need time for creative thinking and the opportunity to make mistakes. The Inspire module sought to offer HE teachers the kinds of provocation and challenge, opportunity to tailor make teaching to student interests, and freedom and space to take risks that the educators discussed in this paragraph describe.

3

Educating professionals for uncertainty

The embracing of risk and uncertainty outlined by the advocates of arts-based learning in the preceding section seems particularly relevant for HE professionals in the current climate. The role of the professional is changing. As Barnett (2008) explains, academics experience multiple, sometimes contradictory discourses about their profession and the expectations associated with it. The authority professionals often enjoyed in previous eras is challenged by conflicting demands, by the death of deference and, in the public sector in particular, the imposition of ever-changing standards and requirements. Arts-based education has potential to enable teachers to cope with and even benefit from such uncertainties, by combining rigorous self-discipline and attention to detail with an openness to multiple interpretation, to improvisation and to imagining and accepting alternatives to established practice.

The Inspire module assumed that HE teachers have to be able to do more than teach to specific outcomes – that the process of enabling the complex human beings they teach to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding can be far more transformative than this. It is useful for teachers to know how to plan to achieve specific outcomes, but as Peter Jarvis indicates, attempting to determine student learning too precisely can be reductive:

> I maintain that any approach to teaching that designates how a learner will
> behave as a result of undergoing the teaching and learning process
> undermines the dignity of the learner ... By contrast Eisner (1969) regarded
> expressive objectives as evocative rather than prescriptive and that is much
> closer to the general philosophy of the education of adults that is advocated
> here. (Jarvis 2010, 231)

Hoggan, Simpson, and Stuckey (2009) reinforce the importance of open-mindedness, when they discuss the role of the arts in stimulating multiple ways of knowing, arguing that 'a certain degree of imagination and creativity is needed in order to learn' (19). One central principle in the Inspire module design was that participants worked on a piece of experimental teaching – experimental not in the scientific sense but in so far as it was accepted that outcomes were unpredictable.

Kinsella (2007), drawing on the work of Greene (1995) and Evans, Greaves, and Pickering (1997), also works with the arts to support professionals to see that there are many different ways of looking at their roles – the arts are used not to determine what is learned but to open up the possibility of myriad kinds of learning. She uses fictions with nurses to engender reflective practice that changes the way they understand their professional roles. They became more responsive to diversity amongst their patients and more aware of injustice in healthcare patients. Her work shows how what Hall and Thomson (2017) call 'provocative' approaches to teaching, can work for the education of professionals in HE too, in that the fictions operated as 'provocations' stimulating critical reflection. In the Inspire module, the module team

4

introduced masterclasses, book clubs and resources that we thought would stimulate colleagues to think about themselves and their teaching differently.

Science is often accorded more status than art. The uncertainty associated with the creative approach we were taking had the potential to feel threatening to colleagues, too. The mixed reactions that Burge, Godinho, Knottenbelt, and Loads (2016) reported to their arts-based approach to establishing HE teachers' professional development needs, suggest that the risks and uncertainties associated with the arts can be threatening, and that its playful and imaginative elements, whilst enjoyable, have low status in the eyes of some academics. The Inspire module attempted to overcome concerns about status, by drawing on established practice in adult education, which seeks to break down boundaries between teachers and learners, validate learners' interests, perceptions and experiences, and model vulnerability and openness to learning in teachers. Our expertise therefore came from the rich range of resources and ideas we were able to share with the group (who also brought ideas and resources of their own) rather than from right answers and templates for success. This was underpinned by extensive resources demonstrating the academic credentials supporting arts-based approaches and by recognising that risk taking requires support. Personal and group support was available throughout. The module team stressed that the experimental teaching could not damage staff's own position or their students' learning.

The Inspire module

This initiative took place in a university in the UK, and has so far graduated two cohorts – 15 in year one and 20 in year two – each spending one year taking a 20 credit masters level module. Participants were teachers from all subject areas – arts, humanities, social sciences, science and engineering, and professional subjects. They had varying levels of seniority and included lecturers, professors, senior managers and staff for whom teaching made up only part of their role, such as librarians and technical staff. Their ages ranged from late twenties to sixty plus and the mix of gender and ethnicity reflected the institution's staffing profile, being predominantly white, with slightly more women than men.

The module design sought to satisfy institutional needs as well as meeting participants' intrinsic desires to be more creative teachers. Participants already had accreditation as Fellows of the UK's HEA. The module gave these experienced educators the freedom and support to explore freeing up their teaching. It balanced their intrinsic interests in creative teaching with the credentialism that shapes career development by offering a PgCert (HE) for successfully completing the module and claiming 40 credits APL for their existing HEA accreditation. This met institutional targets with respect to demonstrating enhanced levels of teaching qualification amongst staff.

The Inspire module design encouraged HE teachers to be improvisational and experimental, learning from the arts that 'surprise is not to be seen as an intruder in the process of inquiry but as part of the rewards one reaps when working artistically'

5

(Eisner 2008, 8). It had similarities to the studio-based approach to teaching IT professionals discussed by Snyder, Heckman, and Scialdone (2009), who encouraged their trainees to be experimental in developing solutions to technical challenges and to review the work of fellow students doing the same. I was also mindful of Helen Sword's (2007) approach, when she conceptualises creativity in teaching as the 'production of new knowledge' (540) – a poetic, artistic vision of teaching is one in which teachers put aside formulaic responses and consider how they can produce 'fresh perspectives on the world' (539). Inspire participants were asked to design a small piece of experimental teaching and to present, at the end of the module, a conference paper which outlined its conceptualisation and implementation and offered a critical discussion of the experiment. This enabled participants to be imaginative, take risks and to improvise, without having to guarantee a pre-determined outcome. The focus on designing a small piece of learning meant that participants knew student learning could not be seriously damaged if some elements of the teaching were not effective. Assessment was based on their discussion and analysis of the experiment – on what they had learned about teaching and learning, not on whether or not the experiment succeeded with respect to a predetermined agenda.

The use of a conference paper, which had to be fit for presentation at an external conference, as the central assessment task, served a pragmatic purpose as well as a creative one. It aligned well with the institutional drive to link teaching and research more closely, and provided a stepping stone for those who needed it towards the institutional requirement that all staff engage in publishing.

The module tried to establish the conditions for adult learning outlined by Peter Jarvis (2010) who explains that adult learners need to bring their own experiences to learning and operate most effectively when they do not feel that their self is under threat. All participants brought valuable insights, experiences and skills to share and we foregrounded the idea of developing as a supportive and developmental community of discovery (Coffield and Williamson 2011). I was also mindful of the tradition within adult education of seeking to minimise the power relations between teacher and learner, whilst acknowledging that this is never entirely possible (Freire 1972; hooks 1989). A degree of power sharing was evident in the relationships between the module team and the participants and the fluid nature of the roles adopted. Many of those involved in running the module – as mentors, conference organisers, module and course leader were also participants – submitting work for assessment by colleagues. In the first iteration of the module each participant had a subject mentor, who was a member of their own subject team and a teaching and learning mentor, with demonstrable expertise in pedagogy. The teaching and learning mentors in particular tended to be participants in the module at the same time and to work with me to plan sessions. We tried to model a critical approach to our own teaching by stressing that we (everyone taking or teaching the module) were all engaged in an experiment; that the module itself was a piece of experimental teaching and we would openly discuss its progress.

We used face to face sessions, a Yammer social networking site and the Inspire Conference itself to establish spaces where critical dialogue could take place. We also provided substantial mentor support as well as establishing trust and space for

dialogue so that challenges encountered, particularly any that seemed to deconstruct comfortable beliefs about learning, could be shared in a supportive way. Stimulus and provocation – opportunities to challenge our existing practice by showing different ways of operating – were built into the programme through masterclasses which formed the basis for three of the four face to face sessions we had prior to the conference itself. These were led by people external to the University who showed passion and innovation in their teaching and were participative workshops, not lectures. Presenters were selected through consultation with the module team, drawing on their experiences at conferences and events, through scrutiny of National Teaching Fellow biographies, and by considering the expertise of those who had won other awards for their teaching. We looked for individuals with unusual ideas and an interactive style. Eisner argues that the kind of creative surprise engendered by arts-based learning can result in new insights that promote significant learning and suggests that 'educators should create the conditions to make it happen' (2008, 8). This is what the masterclasses aimed to achieve.

The module VLE site included resources offering a selection of creative approaches to teaching, with a particular emphasis on arts-based approaches. I wanted the masterclasses and the resources, as well as the process of engaging in the experiment itself, to have the potential to be what Mezirow calls a 'disorienting dilemma' (2000, 22), an experience that prompts some review of our preceptions. Group sessions included time to discuss progress and deal with practicalities, but also offered opportunities for creative reflection, such as the use of visual metaphors for teaching. The module included 16 hours of face to face sessions, the one day conference with keynote speaker, mentoring support, the Yammer social network, and the VLE materials.

Methodology

The case-study incorporated a participative action research approach, based on a simple cycle of action (the design and teaching of the module), critical reflection (data collection and analysis) and revision (changes to the module and the module team). This enabled me to gather data for the case study, whilst making changes to existing provision. Action research has limitations, but as Askham (2009) demonstrates, can be useful for looking in depth at the effectiveness of HE courses for adults, by offering opportunities to understand the feelings and behaviours of students interacting with the educational process. I collected data over two years. This included participant observation notes and personal reflections, records of meetings, interviews with the course leader for the PgCert (HE), with individual members of each cohort, with mentors on the module, discussions with the module team in year two, and focus groups for module participants. Some participants who were happy in principle to participate in focus groups were not available on the dates set, and altogether I collected data through interviews and/or focus groups from 20 of the 34 who had engaged over the two years. The focus groups and interviews were semi-structured. Focus groups took place over informal lunches at which participants were asked to outline their experiences of the module. I was mindful of my position as the tutor, and aware that my colleagues would not wish to offend me. I tried to overcome this by

7

indicating that rather than wanting confirmation that the module had been a success I had an intellectual curiosity to discover how it had been perceived by others, what might have served their needs better and how the underpinning concepts worked out in practice. I kept the pace relaxed to allow everyone time to reflect and have their say, and felt that we developed a 'conversational style' (Krueger and Casey 2014) conducive to meaningful discussion. The prevailing ethos of the module, which was that we were involved in a collective piece of exploration and experimentation, helped colleagues to feel reasonably comfortable about exploring the effectiveness of the approach. Later in the focus groups I asked about how specific aspects of course delivery had worked – the mentoring, the on-line and VLE support and the masterclasses – and enquired about individuals' views on the nature of teaching as an art or science.

The focus groups and interviews were transcribed. I read these and undertook a thematic analysis. As Braun and Clarke (2006) indicate, the term thematic analysis is used to describe a wide range of approaches to qualitative research analysis. In this instance I took a broadly constructionist analysis. I was close enough to the data to be able to generate codes manually through repeated reading and to make decisions about grouping these into themes for presenting the outcomes from the research. I had three guiding principles in selecting/creating the themes. First I tried to ensure that they reflected the participants' responses as a whole; I paid attention to the strength and frequency with which a particular perspective was held. Secondly, I created space for minority perspectives and differences/disagreements, whilst indicating that these were not the majority view. Finally, as far as possible, I sought to remain open to the data, rather than operating according to a predetermined coding schema. I knew that my reading of the data would be coloured by my interest in ideas about the artistic nature of teaching. The final interpretation and analysis is inevitably a construct. I was re-assured, however, that my approach did involve a degree of openness, by the surprises I encountered in participants' replies, which drew my attention to factors that were not at the forefront of my mind in setting up the module.

I agreed to anonymise the participants' names in any publications, but stressed in the consent forms and face to face explanations that with a small cohort it was always possible that individuals might be identified by those who knew them. The more I worked with extracts from transcriptions, the more it seemed to me that it would not be possible to preserve anonymity through pseudonyms and in the end I decided to use a composite approach to presenting the findings to protect anonymity. The quotations below are organised by theme, therefore, and do not represent the perspectives of single individuals. As I shaped the data into themes, it seemed to me that they reflected different aspects of artistic practice, and the titles of the themes reflect this.

Space to create

The overwhelming majority of participants endorsed the value of having time and space to create teaching that reflected their values and interests. They often used the word 'space' to indicate a temporal space – some time to be creative – and personal

space – freedom to experiment and personalise their teaching.

> We can do something that really speaks to us and our ideas and values
> about how we would like to be teaching, or an idea we'd like to, to try out.
> … And I think that's *incredibly* useful and positive and … and valuable and
> kind of exhilarating. It's a really valuable space, that I'm now gonna try to
> really purposely, *consciously,* more consciously I think, carve out in all of
> my teaching practice from now on – it's just so precious to have the space
> where you think about how you operate as a teacher. I've found the
> encouragement to reflect and, particularly, to experiment, with teaching
> methods to be an inspiring and engaging process. It was very refreshing
> the whole idea, to build the, the whole module around, round experimental
> teaching because that is about you and about you *progressing* and about
> you improving.

The artistic nature of this process was embedded in the language they used. They talked about using space, creating space, and in the example above, 'carving' out space for themselves. Participants spoke about feeling 'privileged' to have the opportunity to work out what and how they wanted to teach, and expressed a sense of the rarity of finding opportunities to be creative. Given that academic autonomy is much vaunted, and academics probably have more freedom than many other workers, the intensity with which some participants spoke about this was striking. Some colleagues framed this by reference to constraints that usually limited their freedom in teaching:

> It's *really* great in this era of, kind of, y'know, targets and success and
> 'students must achieve a certain level'[1] and all of that to carve out space
> outside of all the paradigms of stages and assessments particularly.

Teachers who were able to be artists, makers of pieces of teaching that reflected a personal vision, seemed to find that exhilarating. Sometimes their vision failed, but that also seemed to be important to them:

> It's lovely to be given the opportunity to 'do' an experiment knowing that if it
> doesn't work it *really* doesn't matter – even if you end up saying in the

---

[1] Level here refers to the UK's qualifications framework which requires that all content, learning outcomes and assessments consistently reflect the level of study (e.g. first year undergraduate, honours level, masters level) and can sometimes have an impact on the diversity of curriculum content.

paper somewhere 'this bit didn't *work* so well', without any pressure that there'll be, a, a kind of comeback, a negative report.

Although participants primarily used the term 'space' metaphorically, some indicated that they would have liked to, 'go somewhere else. Somewhere. Go… somewhere else'. They were struck by the account given by one masterclass leader who described an outdoor activity. In some educational sectors, initiatives such as Forest Schools (Knight 2016) recognise the impact that working outdoors can have on communication, creativity and imagination. One participant built his experimental teaching around this concept. His students participated in a 'silent excursion into the UK's Peak District as a starting point to consider the relationship between embodied and ecological pedagogies' to examine the extent to which 'pedagogies of embodied practice' could support a deeper understanding of environmental issues (Spatz 2016, 2).

I was not expecting this request for outdoor learning, but felt the strong emotion behind it, and am convinced that outdoor time would help to free colleagues' ways of thinking. I shall build this into the next programme.

Working in a different medium

The module offered teachers a blank canvas on which they could design their own experimental teaching, but the masterclasses and the group sessions, which were intended to provoke consideration of new ways of working, were compulsory. I wanted to expose colleagues to the art of teaching as it has been enacted by other teachers – on the grounds that art should show us the world in different ways and challenge our preconceptions. All the classes appealed to some students, and some classes appealed to all students. In general, they had the impact intended, and colleagues took ideas from the sessions which have permanently changed the way they work:

> The way in which it was set up in that, erm, there were a number of different workshop days which came from different perspectives, some of which you might not have thought of as being specific to your discipline … I really *loved* that model. It was just joyful, it was just really joyful to be able to do something like that in the midst of a really, really busy and demanding work schedule. I mean the things we've seen in the workshops, I, have had a direct impact already on what I'm doing, grabbing all these ideas that're floating around, er, in, during the … if, if anything, I would have *more* of these, er, y'know, seminars.

Participants appreciated being able to meet face to face with external experts with a passion for teaching, rather than just reading their books or articles:

It's really when the students behind these teachers, these facilitators kind of come alive, that's particularly useful, because that's, that's what it's about – it's just giving these, these enlivening experiences.

I had concerns that colleagues with substantial workloads would find it frustrating to come to compulsory sessions that might not be about teaching their discipline, but the general consensus was that the compulsion was essential:

It's often the one, like the gaming one, I, I, if I, I probably wouldn't have signed up for a gaming workshop, because it just doesn't seem relevant to the kind of work I'm doing, but that's what I did for my experimental teaching. So I think it's, you can often have preconceptions about things, that are just, 'not what my area does' or 'my colleagues will never buy into this'. If you hear even one that is useful to you that can be something quite transformational. Y'know, part of my learning was you go to something or do something that is outside your comfort zone, but learning is uncomfortable sometimes isn't it? … picking and choosing, maybe we would just choose what we would feel safe with, no, not what stretches us a little bit. It's about looking at the same thing but through different angles.

Some colleagues thought that the requirement to consider approaches that might not seem relevant was valuable, but knew it would be difficult to change the perceptions of colleagues in home departments:

People are very set in their ways. Erm, it's a … it's a wider problem, though it's … people teach the way they were taught and that's the only way of teaching that they have any interest in.

One participant indicated they would have preferred an optional approach, which chimed with the principle of giving people freedom to learn:

It sometimes was quite challenging – if they were in areas that were, sort of, like, outside, erm, outside my zone. … I really like the idea of having almost like pick and mix and match, because again, I think it's about, erm, about people being able to determine, not just *what* they learn but *how* they learn.

This seems to be an inevitable tension. Based on the data so far, the most effective approach would seem to be to require participation in stimulus sessions such

11

as the masterclasses, whilst maintaining an entirely free and open approach to the experimental teaching each participant created.

It was also interesting to observe the ease with which participants discussed pedagogy across disciplines more generally. Engineers, humanities teachers, scientists and social scientists seemed equally open to creative approaches to teaching. The strongest evidence of interdisciplinary fertilisation was provided by three teachers of drama, who brought something special to the second iteration of the module by introducing an element of physicality and the environment into their experiment. They helped the rest of us understand how we can learn through the body and the spaces around us.

Discipline and freedom

Not everyone wanted to be free from boundaries and some created quite tight frameworks for themselves. Artistic practice is highly disciplined, and some participants found it challenging to provide this discipline for themselves. A minority wanted to meet more regularly, and most regretted the fact this was not possible. As noted above, there was a significant group that wanted more compulsory sessions:

> I'd like some set of regular meetings, even for half an hour each week. I am
> a very target driven person and I need the deadlines.

> More readings would be great … And particularly if it's educational
> literature, or educational theory and up it goes and then you can read it,
> you can participate in discussions…

A subtheme relating to freedom and discipline was an appreciation for trusting the teacher/artist to do what s/he felt was right. Some well intentioned and commonly adopted practices designed to promote fairness in assessment for students, avoid litigation, or ensure engagement through attendance monitoring were more loosely applied in the context of an internally focused module. I was taken aback by the sense of relief expressed about operating in this context, and no-one abused any of the privileges:

> I like the fact that people trusted me as a colleague. To be able to say, 'I'm
> sorry, I'm in hospital' and I didn't have to produce unending health
> certificates. I kind of want to be able to do that with students on CPD
> courses who are really busy professionals. … I want to start out with our
> student body of having a baseline of: 'We trust you and we respect you'.
> The notion of being a *professional* that is carrying on learning was really
> key to that module. [Commenting on its applicability to working with other
> professionals] ... we get pretty bound up, I think, in developing and

delivering modules along quite traditional lines without kind of looking at 'What is it that people have already got? How do we enhance those, rather than didactic teaching'.

Participants who spoke most about trust worked with part-time professional students, and were reflecting the difficulties institutions face in balancing the drive towards flexibility and learner-centred teaching, with a national climate in which institutions are measured in terms of timely completions and drop out, all of which lead them to try to constrain learning within strict time frames and metrics.

We also ran optional 'book club' meetings at which we discussed a set reading. These were less well attended but positively received, and some of those who had not been said they wished they had been compulsory. These perceptions however, about wanting more seminars and masterclasses and making book clubs compulsory, were offered by participants with hindsight, and the challenge is in balancing what appear to be the undoubted benefits of the stimulation of the sessions with the need to offer something relevant and manageable to prospective participants.

Tools for the job

Maybe my head was in the clouds. I had not anticipated just how integral some practical factors were to the success of the module, but of course you cannot make something beautiful without the right materials and equipment. The action research approach I took led to substantial revisions to the organisation of the module for its second year. I worked initially with the idea of having a different mentor for each student, from their own discipline, but this led to patchy support and difficulties with communication – the following year we concentrated on building a strong core module team, which also took on the mentoring role. Those who became core team members in year two had shown strong interest and commitment to the module previously, came from different disciplines and were recognised leaders of teaching and learning – perhaps because they were NTFs, or University Teaching Fellows, or led our PgCert (HE).

I'd relied on the fact that I was teaching teachers, and assumed that with a guide and a brief induction, they would navigate the course documentation and learning resources on the VLE, but they reverted to student mode and could not find or did not read things. In year two, therefore, the team drip fed information about what was on the VLE. The online discussion platform 'Yammer' was barely used during the first year in spite of a stirring introduction to it by a colleague, so the new team and I agreed to take responsibility month by month for posting and prompting, which led to a much better use (though still inconsistent) for the second cohort. I'd assumed colleagues would be bored by the prospect of going through a framework for teaching observation assessment line by line, but the observation worried them, so they needed to do that to feel safe.

13

The audience

I have focused in this article on the teachers and the teachers' perceptions, but the real recipients of these pieces of artistry were participants' students. The conference papers discuss the impact that the experimental teaching sessions had. Some were more successful than others, but most provided students, too, with the opportunity to be more creative and imaginative. These were small scale experiments in which colleagues developed one or more teaching sessions. The small scale of the experiment meant that it was not realistic to try to measure impact on student outcomes, as most of the teaching that students experienced remained the same. Staff reported impact on engagement and motivation in the experimental sessions, and in some instances there were breakthroughs in understanding of difficult concepts and shifts in tutor/student relationships. One delegate, a design teacher, took her entire class outside the institution and worked in a local café, using a 'speed dating' approach to pitching to clients, and transformed their attitude to their work and their relationship with her (Sykes 2015). Another, inspired by the masterclass on game-based learning led by Alex Mosely, designed a board game to teach Bourdieu (Reynolds 2015) which has since been adopted by many other teachers. Her paper describing this has had over 3,000 downloads. An engineering teacher introduced Socratic dialogue into his work with undergraduate engineers and technologists (Mavromihales 2015). A teacher of dance decided to explore how her students might learn to write more effectively by linking their work on contact improvisation to phenomenological writing (Elliott 2016). All these experiments could have taken place without the framework of this module, but it gave the teachers permission to be creative and validated their imaginative work through a whole institution conference and the award of a teaching qualification, and provided them with the support of an academic community of like-minded individuals.

Conclusion: too important and not important enough

Teaching in HE seems racked with paradox. Within the UK it appears to be both too important and not important enough to ignore; so important we must spend a great deal of time regulating it, but not important enough to risk wasting resources by offering developmental opportunities which don't guarantee outcomes. HE teachers have their teaching constrained by many regulations, both national (QAA, n.d.) and institutional, which determine how students must be taught and assessed, and which often focus on consistency. The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has recently made it even more difficult to innovate, as academics cannot make substantial changes to the curriculum without the permission of all students engaged on a course. All these matters reflect the value placed on teaching, but are primarily technocratic rather than creative. They see good teaching as something that must be fixed and proven. A more fluid and creative approach to teacher development would be superficially at least more wasteful. It would not certify that teachers have met standards. It is also possible that the current standard-based approach to defining teaching excellence suits some teachers, who are more reluctant to invest time in teaching creatively, perhaps because they value teaching less highly than research. A voluntary module, such as the Inspire module will not change their practice – they don't participate. Over time, though, a

14

==reconfiguration of teaching as something more creative, through initiatives such as this, might change their perception of its value and the satisfaction it can bring to the teacher.==

There is some alignment, nonetheless, between the interests of institutions and governments and those of creative HE teachers and their students. Teachers want to have exciting, transformative engagements with students, and institutions that compete globally for students want to be able to demonstrate that students will be inspired and engaged. There is also a convergence of sorts between the passion for social justice that often drives enthusiastic academics (Furlong and Cartmel 2009; Harman 2017) and corporate institutional aims shaped by the need to demonstrate high levels of success and satisfaction for all students regardless of background and circumstance in order to secure recruitment and income (HEFCE 2015). Designing educational and training programmes to support and inspire teachers to provide the kind of exciting learning the sector agrees it wishes to see is far from straightforward, however, and the systems, expectations and processes that emerge reveal some of the tensions masked by the rhetoric of commitment to good teaching and social mobility. Resourcing a risky, open-ended approach to teaching development may mean that some resources are wasted, as teachers improvise and experiment with uncertainty and develop teaching that reflects students' interests and passions, rather than processes designed to secure the best measurable outcomes in terms of jobs, degree classification and retention figures. ==In order to have a more significant impact, the approach to teaching that informs the Inspire module would need to be embedded institutionally through a wider and more systematic process of curriculum review and redesign, giving teams the opportunity and the resources to reconfigure courses and modules in creative ways and that requires a bigger commitment from institutions.==

HE teachers will be able to do their jobs better and excite and engage more students if they are trained in more open-ended, fluid and creative ways. There must be a serious place for such work in HE teacher development, even if this means investing more resources so that there is time and space for risk and exploration, as well as for meeting threshold standards.

Acknowledgements

References

Askham, Phil. 2009. "Context and Identity: Exploring Adult Learners' Experiences of Higher Education." *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 32 (1): 85–87. DOI: 10.1080.03098770701781481.

Barnett, Ronald. 2008. "Critical Professionalism in an Age of Supercomplexity." In *Exploring Professionalism* edited by Bryan Cunningham, 190–209. London: Institute for Education.

15

BIS (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills). 2015. *Fulfilling Our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice (Green Paper).* London: BIS.

BIS (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills). 2016. *Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice (White Paper).* London: BIS.

Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. 2006. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2): 77–101.

Burge, Amy, Maria Grade Godinho, Miesbeth Knottenbelt, and Daphne Loads. 2016. "'…But we are academics!': A Reflection on Using Arts-Based Research Activities with University Colleagues." *Teaching in Higher Education* 21 (6): 730–737.

Coffield, Frank, and Bill Williamson. 2011. *From Exam Factories to Communities of Discovery: The Democratic Route.* London: Institute of Education.

DfE (Department for Education). 2016. *Teaching Excellence Framework: Year Two Specification.* London: DfE.

Eisner, Elliot W. 1969. *Teaching Art to the Young: A Curriculum Development Project in Art Education.* Stanford: Stanford University.

Eisner, Elliot W. 2002. *The Arts and the Creation of Mind.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Eisner, Elliot W. 2008. "What Education Can Learn From the Arts." Lowenfeld Lecture presented at the NAEA National Convention, New Orleans, March 27. http://www.arteducators.org/news/what-education-can-learn-from-the-arts.

Elliott, Hilary. 2016. "The Point of Contact." Paper presented at the University of Huddersfield Inspire Conference, Huddersfield, June 21.

Evans, Martyn, David Greaves, and Neil Pickering. 1997. "Medicine, the Arts and Imagination." *Journal of Medical Ethics* 23 (3): 254.

Freire, Paulo. 1972. *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Furlong, Andy, and Fred Cartmel. 2009. *Higher Education and Social Justice.* Maidenhead: SRHE & Open University Press.

Gibson, Robyn. 2010. "The 'art' of creative teaching: implications for higher education." *Teaching in Higher Education* 15 (5): 607–613.

Greene, Maxine. 1995. *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts and Social Change.* San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Hall, Christine, and Pat Thomson. 2017. "Creativity in Teaching: What Can Teachers Learn from Artists?" *Research Papers in Education* 3 (1): 106–120.

16

Hansen, David. 2004. "A Poetics of Teaching." *Educational Theory* 54 (2): 119–144.

Harman, Kerry. 2017. "Democracy, Emancipation and Widening Participation in the UK: Changing the Distribution of the Sensible." *Studies in the Education of Adults* 49 (1): 92–109.

HEA (Higher Education Academy). 2011. *The UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education.* York: HEA. https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/downloads/uk_professional_standar ds_framework.pdf

HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England). 2015. *Causes of Differences in Student Outcomes.* London: HEFCE.

Hoggan, Chad, Soni Simpson, and Heather Stuckey, eds. 2009. *Creative Expression in Transformative Learning.* Malabar: Krieger Publishing Company.

hooks, bell. 1989. *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black.* London: Sheba.

Jarvis, Christine, and Patricia Gouthro. 2015. "The Role of the Arts in Professional Education: Surveying the Field." *Studies in the Education of Adults* 47 (1): 64–80.

Jarvis, Peter. 2010. *Adult Education and Lifelong Learning: Theory and Practice.* Abingdon: Routledge.

Kinsella, Elizabeth. 2007. "Educating Socially-Responsive Practitioners: What Can the Literary Arts Offer Health Professional Education?" in *The Arts and Social Justice: Re-crafting Adult Education and Community Cultural Leadership* edited by Darlene E. Clover and Joyce Stalker, 39–61. Leicester, NIACE.

Knight, Sara. 2016. *Forest School In Practice.* Los Angeles: Sage.

Krueger, Richard, and Mary Anne Casey. 2014. *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Loads, Daphne. 2010. "'I'm a Dancer' and 'I've Got a Saucepan Stuck On My Head': Metaphor in Helping Lecturers to Develop Being-For-Uncertainty." *Teaching in Higher Education* 15 (4): 409–421.

Lupton, Mandy. 2013. "Reclaiming the Art of Teaching." *Teaching in Higher Education* 18 (2): 156–166.

Mavromihales, Mike. 2015. "A Methodology for Delivering Manufacturing Technology and Workshop Appreciation to Undergraduate Engineers & Technologists." Paper presented at the University of Huddersfield Inspire Conference, Huddersfield, January 14. http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/view/subjects/LB2300.html

McGregor, Catherine. 2012. "Art-Informed Pedagogy: Tools for Social Transformation." *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 31 (3): 309–324.

17

Mezirow, Jack, and Associates. 2000. *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress.* San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

QAA (Quality Assurance Agency). n.d. *The UK Quality Code For Higher Education*. Gloucester: QAA. http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code

Reynolds, Cheryl. 2015. "The Impact of a Game-Based Approach to Bourdieu on Learners Training to Teach in Post-Compulsory Education at an English University." Paper presented at the University of Huddersfield Inspire Conference, Huddersfield, January 14. http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/23228/

Snyder, Jaime, Robert Heckmann, and Michael J. Scialdone. 2009. "Information Studios: Integrating Arts-Based Learning into the Education of Information Professionals." *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 60 (9): 1923–1932.

Spatz, Ben. 2016. "Touching Landscape: Intersections of Embodied and Ecological Pedagogy (unpublished)." Paper presented at the University of Huddersfield Inspire Conference, Huddersfield, June 21. http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/29145

Sword, Helen. 2007. "The poetics of teaching." *Teaching in Higher Education* 12 (4): 539–541.

Sykes, Penny. 2015. "Experimenting with Cooperative Learning to Enhance Non-Academic Outcomes in Interior Design Education." Paper presented at the University of Huddersfield Inspire Conference, Huddersfield, April 14. http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/23420