Investigating university lecturers’ pedagogical constructs in the working context

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ABSTRACT

This project investigated university lecturers’ pedagogical constructs with reference to the context of practice. It used a qualitative research framework, based on semi-structured interviews, to establish ways in which lecturers conceptualise, approach and relate to teaching and learning. The sample was representative of fifteen disciplines. The theoretical framework underpinning this study was socio-cultural theory. Seven ‘filters’ to practice were identified, each was analysed in respect of its impact on pedagogical constructs, and with reference to the degree of agency available to respondents. This study also makes strategic recommendations for educational development and the enhancement of academic communities.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background
This research project examined teaching practice in context, with reference to the structures, policies, and environments in which UK university lecturers operate. It identified what elements of this context impact on higher education lecturers’ approaches and conceptualisations of teaching and learning. Examining the context of practice rather than psychological and cognitive processes at work in the act of teaching (Dunkin, 2002; Entwistle et al., 2000; Entwistle & Walker, 2002; Hativa et al., 2001; Hativa & Goodyear, 2002 for example) provided a useful insight into the realities of teaching, the structures within which lecturers operate, the communities inhabiting those structures, and the degree of agency (individual ability to position towards and respond to structures) available to individuals in their context of work.

Aims
The main aim of this project was to produce qualitatively informed knowledge about lecturers’ ‘pedagogical constructs’, which have been defined as ‘the way they conceptualise, approach and relate to teaching and learning’. The research therefore examined how lecturers understood what teaching and learning was about, how they perceived they went about teaching in practice, and why, as well as how, they positioned themselves towards their context of work. It also inferred some broader lessons for educational development and the academic communities working together to enhance the student experience.

Methods
A case-study approach was chosen. Eighteen lecturers were interviewed in seven different institutions, covering fifteen different disciplines. Semi-structured interviews were carried out, lasting between one and one and a half hour.

Results
Seven ‘filters’ to teaching practice were identified which operate at different levels of practice with a degree of overlap. Four of them operate at the macro level of practice – the institution, external factors, academic labour and the research-teaching nexus. Two operate at the meso level – department (or equivalent) and discipline – and one at the micro level of the individual – pedagogical beliefs. The term filter was used (as opposed to ‘factors’ for example) to emphasise the subtle impact on practice, the range of possibilities, and the notion that a degree of choice can be exerted in emphasising one filter or another.

Within this framework which delivers a rich description of the context of practice, fluid and dynamic responses were shown to act as modulators of the way lecturers conceptualise and approach teaching and learning.

Recommendations
Strategic directions for the educational development function were inferred from this study. These directions are based on an acknowledgement of the
different levels of practice, and of the degree of agency (broadly room for response and manoeuvre) available to groups and individuals within them. It suggests that educational development interventions aimed at levels of practice where there is scope for agency (even limited) and/or ideological stances are more likely to be effective than interventions in areas where there is no such scope. At levels of practice where structures are not amenable to agency, it is likely that contribution to policy making would be more useful. A three-tier level of input for educational development is suggested. Recommendations are also made in respect of the broader academic communities involved in the student experience.
MAIN REPORT

Introduction
In this project, the ways in which academics conceptualise and approach their practice were examined with reference to the context of practice, and to academics’ responses to that context. This project was prompted by two factors. The first of these factors was my awareness, as an educational developer, of the challenges facing new lecturers in practice when seeking to make changes to the curriculum or to the way they approached teaching and learning. Although they might have acquired knowledge and skills to change the way they went about teaching and learning, new lecturers were often unable to effect change in their department for a number of reasons which were investigated. Second, through my own acquaintance with the literature on teaching and learning I recognised that much of the theoretical underpinnings in educational development programmes are based on a psychology-based approach to teaching and learning (Malcolm & Zukas, 2001). Much of this literature, which is briefly surveyed below, tends to focus on cognitive processes, intentions and beliefs, and on strategies to enable or enact them. This body of knowledge which has become the dominant model for teaching and learning seemed inadequate to reflect the realities of teaching in practice. Those experiential drivers informed my own approach, both practically (what I wanted to investigate), and theoretically (how to conceptualise teaching and learning).

Background
The activity of teaching at university level was for a long time taken for granted and seen as unproblematic - a function performed by experts in their fields of research who seemed de facto qualified to pass on their knowledge to future generations. This partly explains the scarcity of research on teaching in HE until the early eighties. However, in a context of increased massification, teaching has become an activity at the same time more complex (directed at an increasingly diverse body of students in increasingly ‘flexible’ learning environments), more problematized (through educational development and targeted funding initiatives), and more managed (through audits and managerialist understandings of practice).

Given the drive towards professionalizing and enhancing practices in HE, it has become crucial to examine teaching and learning, and to assess how the context of practice impacts on the way academics conceptualise and approach teaching. This is the topic of this research project.

Given the reservations outlined above regarding the relevance of educational development programmes to the realities of practice, I questioned in this project whether an abstract focus on theoretical knowledge borrowed from the field of psychology (broadly understood) to account for teaching and learning was likely to generate an accurate rendition of what was actually happening in practice. There is of course value in the propositional knowledge generated by this approach in terms of the accounts it produces on thinking, problem-solving, learning processes, motivation, etc. However it does not consider issues of transfer to practice, applicability to diverse student groups,
compatibility with academics’ own beliefs and values, or the structural factors framing academics’ everyday practice. Apprehending teaching practice in this broader sense has yielded additional useful and realistic knowledge about teaching and learning that can inform understandings of the pedagogic field, policies regulating practice, and the central functions of universities (HR, educational development, and academic services for example).

Situating the project in the literature
Given the practice-oriented stance taken in this project, a socio-cultural approach was adopted. It is briefly described in the next section. This project is also specifically informed by the literature on teaching and learning which looks at teaching as an interaction between individuals (teacher to students). A substantive body of work exists, focused on conceptions of teaching – the phenomenographic tradition (Akerlind, 2003; Dall'Alba, 1991; Martin et al., 2002; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999; Trigwell et al., 2002) - and on approaches to teaching based on teachers’ beliefs (Dunkin, 2002; Entwistle et al., 2000; Entwistle & Walker, 2002; Kember, 1997; Kember & Kwan, 2002; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001). These studies have reached a degree of consensus on the way university lecturers conceive teaching and learning. A pattern has emerged ranging from ‘transmissive’ conceptions, where teaching is seen as imparting information, to ‘facilitative’ conceptions where the lecturer is concerned with promoting conceptual change in students. Prosser and Trigwell for example, in their substantial work (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999) based on a number of related studies (Prosser et al., 1994a; Trigwell et al., 1994) identify six conceptions of teaching – from ‘teaching as transmitting concepts of the syllabus’ to ‘helping students change conceptions’ (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999, 144).

Similar typologies appear in the non-phenomenographic tradition. For example, Samuelowicz and Bain, in their study of Australian and British lecturers identify five categories from ‘teaching as imparting information’ to ‘teaching as supporting student learning’ (Samuelowicz & Bain, 1992, 98 – 101). Dunkin and Precians, investigating ‘dimensions’ of teaching which they define as ‘beliefs about the most important ways of enhancing student learning revealed by individuals in talking about effective teaching’ propose a related set of categories (Dunkin & Precians, 1992, 484).

Although there is some debate amongst these researchers as to the number of categories, the location of some of them in relation to the teacher-centred as opposed to student-centred poles, and the possibility – or not – of having a transitional category of ‘facilitating learning’ (Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001). This body of research has clearly established a consensus around the existence of a number of conceptions spread on a continuum between transmissive and facilitative conceptions, and the related teacher-centred versus student-centred approaches to teaching.

The significant contribution of these studies still confines teaching and learning outside the reality of practice and abstracted from the broader context of practice (Ashwin & McLean, 2005). The nature of teaching as captured through these analyses tends to reduce teaching to ‘a technology of
behaviour’ (Malcolm & Zukas, 2001, 36) and offers similarities with the nature of teaching excellence as examined by Skelton in his study of teaching excellence, particularly in respect of it being perceived as individualised, psychologised, practical and performative (Skelton, 2005, 58-59).

‘Conceptions’ of teaching describing lecturers’ experiences of teaching remain an intellectualised expression of a restricted, highly situated, specific experience which tends to understate context. Prosser and Trigwell for example define a teaching context as follows:

[University teachers] ‘enter teaching and learning contexts with a range of prior experiences of teaching and learning and ways of conceiving teaching and learning. The context itself evokes certain kinds of prior experiences which then situate the university teachers in those contexts. The experienced contexts are the teaching and learning situation the teachers find themselves in’ (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999, 159).

This work also tends to disregard subjectivities. As reported in that research, prior experiences (the closest they get to examining subjectivities) serve mainly to explain the relation between ‘intentions’ and ‘strategies’ (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999, 94).

As a result, the categories of conceptions on which consensus has been reached by these researchers are very neat and suggest that teaching behaviours can be predicted and controlled (Malcolm & Zukas, 2001, 35). However, this framework does not account for agentic behaviours, and positioning adopted by university lecturers as a result of ‘identification’ or ‘resistance’ to values or ideological frameworks. Issues such as power, room to manoeuvre, pressures on university lecturers to teach certain skills and behaviours are not explored. This informs this study’s own choice of a socio-cultural theoretical framework so that structural and community-based factors that may affect the way university teachers approach teaching are explored more fully.

**Methods**

The theoretical framework for this study was broadly a socio-cultural approach (Engeström, 1999; Engeström, 2001; Lave, 1993; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). This enabled the capture of context with reference to the ‘tools’ used by lecturers (methods, resources for example), and the frameworks for practice – communities, structures, rules and conventions, discipline, and organisation of labour. Within this context, lecturers’ room for manoeuvre and ‘idiosyncratic’ positioning – their agency – was also examined.

Respondents were asked to talk about their role and identity, their disciplines, their institution, their department, their approaches to teaching and their intentions in approaching teaching in this way, their views of the aims of a university education, and of their roles as tertiary educators.
The following disciplines were represented: Geography, Psychology, Sport Science, Foreign Languages, Education, Human Resources Management, Nursing, Information Science, Multimedia, Digital Art, Mathematics, Engineering, Classics, Economics and Chemistry. A case study approach was chosen to provide rich context-related depictions, with reference to the main concern of this study which was to capture the impact of context – hence decisions concerning the choice of disciplines, curricula, and institutions. In addition, the sample was representative of gender, levels of seniority, and degree of experience.

The data were analysed through iterative cycles of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing in which the researcher imposes meaning on the data in an open-minded and tentative way (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The approach was two-tiered. In the first instance, the data were coded in line with the theoretical and literature frameworks chosen for this study. They were then inductively coded with reference to the themes and patterns emerging. Data were also examined ‘horizontally’, across all the cases, and ‘vertically’, within each case, to be able to draw analytical connections across the sample, and at the same time identify conflict, contradictions, and positionings within each case.

**Results**

Seven ‘filters’ to teaching practice were identified. Broadly, they operate at different levels of practice, although there is some overlap. Four of them operate at the macro level – the institution, external factors, academic labour and the research-teaching nexus. Two operate at the meso level – department (or equivalent) and discipline – and one at the micro level of the individual – pedagogical beliefs. They can be represented as below:
Within this framework, which delivers a rich description of the context of practice, fluid and dynamic responses were shown to act as modulators of the way lecturers conceptualise and approach teaching and learning. Those ‘agentic’ responses often (but not exclusively) took the shape of ideological positionings, i.e. what lecturers considered was the ultimate purpose of a university education (e.g. to prepare students for work? to develop them on a personal basis? to equip them with the means of changing the world in which they will operate? to socialise them into the arcane of a specific discipline?).

The discipline filter
Disciplines have generally been examined in the literature through the epistemological lens (Donald, 2002; Donald, 2005; Neumann, 2001; Neumann et al., 2002 for example) focusing on differences in the way different disciplines organise and validate knowledge. Other studies have focused on disciplinary cultures (Becher, 1989; Becher & Trowler, 2001 for example). In this project, it was found that although these characteristics do matter of course, there are also agentic interpretations of what the discipline is about that are not captured in the literature above. Disciplines were constructed by respondents, in terms of their own beliefs and values (their educational ideologies), as for example in the case of one respondent in this study who taught Chemistry and thought it was a discipline that taught criticality above anything else: ‘It can make you […] a sort of person who is not accepting the way things are dished out.’ Some respondents deliberately chose to distance themselves from strong disciplinary allegiance as in the case below:

I don’t have a particular tie for (sic) my discipline. I don’t think that my duty is to turn out good geographers. I very much feel that if a student gets through a degree in geography at X and I have taught them, I would hope, if I have been successful that they would be able to approach social questions in an analytical way and that would allow them to actually open up different questions (Respondent 1).

This study also emphasised two important factors that came in the way of strictly epistemological or culturally-bound apprehensions of the discipline – the locus and status of the discipline. Lecturers who saw their discipline as servicing other disciplines (e.g. modern languages), and those who were based in disciplines that were perceived as subsidiary to principal disciplines (e.g. psychology in a medical curriculum) tended to have perceptions of their field, and approaches to teaching and learning that were dislodged from what they saw as dominant approaches in the rest of the curriculum:

Right and how is it for a psychologist to be working in a medical sort of environment you know in terms of status in terms of relating to medics?
It can often be quite tricky I mean from the perspective of the student it can be a kind of an uphill battle trying to persuade them that it’s really important - I mean that human behaviour is
fundamental to their health very often. You know, in so many ways from the way they cope with stress relating to their decision to comply with treatment measurement, you know just tons and tons of ways. But often from the get go a lot of students, they are very keen on the anatomical side, the pharmacology, the cutting and slicing, you know that hard core element of physical practice and they often find psychology and human sciences a little bit fake because there are often no certainties, you know there is nothing tangible to work with sometimes, and I mean it’s difficult for me to say what other lecturers in more clinical specialties think. I suspect they often think of it as being a very soft science and not even a science at all even perhaps…. (Respondent 8).

and removed from disciplinary content:

The great thing about this is that it does not necessarily require knowledge or expertise in the subject matter beforehand. Tutors are given this kit which has notes. This is like two to four pages of background, so you have a little bit of knowledge (Respondent 8).

The new multi-disciplinary fields represented in this study, in which respondents felt free to navigate the paradigms inherent in this multi-disciplinarity, were shown to have a moderating effect on any specific disciplinary epistemology. For example, a respondent teaching digital arts was able to choose as suited his beliefs the technological or the artistic paradigm, and when it suited him, to accommodate both:

You can look at the plurality of forms to find support for any position you can take in terms of the prevalence in technology, the foregrounding of it, or the subsuming of it within different kinds of artistic processes. So you can find a model for whatever way into the subject you want. I am still ambivalent, I haven’t made my mind up about that, because of my own development. You have some students who are more - we use this term very affectionately - 'geeky' than others. I have turned into a geek over the past four years, more so than before, so my obsession with technology is part of the dialectic within it (Respondent 12).

The department
This filter was found to be a crucial unit in terms of its impact on practice, although departments were found to be very different in shape and form; from the ‘traditional’ collegial unit, to the large ‘post-modern’ compound where individuals might not know all of their colleagues. This was a filter which was very agentic in nature, where alliances and conflicts impacted on teaching approaches and conceptualisations. Small departments could bring people to coalesce in their approach to teaching, sometimes with a real sense of collegiality. However, small departments did not automatically breed epistemic
cohesion. A case in point was a small language department of 3 individuals, which was divided between the communicative language activities and the more theoretical translation section which the respondent concerned felt was ‘irrelevant’. In large departments, individuals were able to create their own immediate community, and where divisions existed, they were able to take advantage of those departmental splits. Large departments could also generate a sense of isolation and anomie in which lecturers felt estranged from colleagues, uncertain of their relation to the larger group, and going about their practice with no strong sense of direction or allegiance:

Within the subject groupings, there are pathways, the digital arts pathway is one of them. Now in my mind, I am assigned to that pathway but in reality I teach across the board. [...] That’s were one senses one belongs. As far as I can see, you are free to choose to pick where you want to belong. So you can call yourself a lecturer in creative technologies, you can call yourself a lecturer in art and design, a lecturer in digital arts and for example media, for example I teach a media subject. That aspect of the job description is quite fluid. (Respondent 12)

The institution
Respondents indicated that aspects of their teaching practice were directly related to their institutions’ stance, and that was not always perceived as pedagogically sound. Regulations on group work, the teaching of employment skills, the use of virtual learning environment [VLE], feedback to students for example were repeatedly perceived as institutional directives that took little account of pedagogical principles, as illustrated below:

University policy comes in the way because university policy says that we have to give the students notes. All notes have to…, for all core courses all notes must be on Blackboard. This is for the Hong-Kong Chinese students, for dyslexic students who can’t take notes down, and what that does, it gives an easy way out to students who are not dyslexic or Chinese and they take the easy path so the majority of the students are given an easier path which means they can’t learn it - without writing, without testing. So they are given that easy path (Respondent 18).

As in Henkel’s study (Henkel, 2000), respondents in this study did not always identify strongly with the institution. A majority of respondents indicated that they endorsed the institutional mission - but rarely totally or unquestioningly - and two of them showed little awareness of what that mission might be. Culturally, the institutional filter was perceived as the locus for structural disturbances or constraints, and imbued with narratives about history and antecedents. The most crucial identificatory element in this filter was the institution’s stance on research and teaching. The institution’s research status was perceived as important, even in ‘teaching’ institutions. Interestingly,
respondents in research-led universities were also the most likely to derive a sense of comfort and control in pedagogical matters.

**Pedagogical beliefs**

Academics’ beliefs about student learning, motivation, intelligence, the make-up of the student body, the most effective form of curriculum, and other such beliefs play an important role in the way they conceptualise and approach their practice. This filter shares a relation to the ‘conceptions’ and ‘beliefs’ literature examined earlier in this report. It is a highly agentic filter, and one susceptible to ideological positionings. This filter is structurally informed by dominant themes in higher education, such as ‘deep-surface’ learning, the effects of the widening participation agenda, and generally ‘folk’ beliefs about students’ laziness, instrumentalism, inability to concentrate, the nature of what being a ‘good’ or a ‘bad’ student is, and so on. These beliefs led to approaches which could sometimes be deleterious. For example some respondents in this study indicated that they adopted piecemeal approaches to teaching and assessment (e.g. broken-up lectures, short assignments, etc) in order to address what they perceived as negative attributes or attitudes in their students.

By far the most commonly stated divergence between students and lecturers was in terms of their mutual expectations - students only wanting to get a good degree, academics seeking to do more than this. Strategies were deployed to try and bridge this perceived gap – ‘academic’ modules to ‘educate’ students; inclusion of theoretical notions in vocational curricula; active learning; systematic critique; and so on.

All respondents in this study, with the exception of one, were using some form of e-learning. Methods used were generally not of the ‘conversational’ communicative type (Laurillard, 2002), and were often limited to putting notes, timetables, instructions, worksheets on the VLE. It appeared in this study that the use of technology being always deliberate, and leaving little scope for improvisation, contributed well to reflecting on practice. The following e-learning uses were recorded:

- shifting the burden of responsibility onto the student (independent learning)
- guiding students in looking for resources, validating some sources
- making different use of face-to-face time, assuming that students had read the posted material. Although this was problematic in its own right, either because students had not read the material, or because this method of giving out the material to students was perceived as having dubious pedagogical value.
- peer-learning
- reinforcing face-to-face interactions
- challenging ‘browsing’ tendencies: refusing to fall into the trap of sending students ‘information gathering’ and seeking to take them out of that mode, and engaging them in learning to critique and disagree with the material.

This filter was highly susceptible to the pervasion of policy-induced ideologies and to agentic behaviours. It highlighted as its main area of dynamics the conflict between beliefs/intentions/ideologies and the content of the
curriculum, or the affordances of practice. Assumptions regarding efficacy or non-efficacy of methods and strategies led to perceptions of what was disabling, and what enabling, emphasising again the role of agency.

**Academic labour**
Factors in this filter identified as hindering practice included the following:
- Reliance on part-time staff who needed to be trained and mentored, and whose role in the department did not adequately address tutoring or learning support needs.
- Under-staffing with related issues of heavy teaching loads, large groups of students and insufficient time or resources
- Lack of facilities (no language lab to teach languages); budgetary cuts that forced department to part with technical staff and reduce the amount of activities in the lab; lack of computers and other equipment.
- Academics feeling overburdened and stressed
- Academic role being devalued when on short contracts
- Lack of training in teaching skills, different approaches of part-time staff
- Space and class size inadequate
- Scale of the operations to deliver the curriculum (e.g. one lecturer who coordinates 30 small PBL groups for 300 students).

An important theme in academics’ reflections on the way they worked related to the invisibility of academic labour (Macfarlane, 2006), in terms of the way it was measured, the distribution of teaching and research time, and the way students and the general public were ignorant of the true nature of academic work. Stress-related stories were present in these narratives, and linked to disempowering feelings of not being able to do one’s work properly. This was summarised in one of the respondents’ reflection that ‘it is only sustainable because people are completely exhausted’. Nearly all respondents – whether in institutions where time was contractually determined, or simply ‘recorded’ – felt that a large part of their work was unaccounted for. For example, preparation, meetings with students, tutorials, feedback to students, peripheral duties like induction, clearing, fairs, admission, were not included in the accountancy systems used to measure workloads.

Other issues included:
- Over-reliance on staff commitment for student support
- Research done during weekends/free time/sick leave
- Contact time negotiated with Head of Department which can create inequities
- Lack of understanding in respect of the nature of innovation.

Generally this filter afforded very little agency or scope to do things differently. Tensions with research were exacerbated at this level, with very little choice for respondents to focus on teaching or research at periods that suited their own intellectual availability.

**Teaching-research nexus**
This practice filter permeated other filters. It impacted on the way academics related to their discipline (as teachers or as researchers), to the institution (the
direction given by an institution on teaching and research has a considerable impact on pedagogical practices), the departmental communities, and of course on the filter of academic labour, including in the area of promotion structures.

Teaching (in its relation to research) was perceived as a ‘second-best’ function by all respondents in this study, including by those who operated in institutions whose primary function is teaching. Those with an interest in teaching working in research-intensive institutions saw their interest curbed; or it could only be maintained at a cost for their own professional advancement, as one respondent indicated:

Good teaching and engagement with the students is tiring. [...] And then thinking well what does that mean for the fact that you know, one of my colleagues is publishing ten things a year and I am not (Respondent 1).

The teaching-research nexus filter is a highly structural filter with significant implications for the way communities operate and individuals within them relate to each other:

The way the university funding and regulations and support have gone, they treat the two things completely separately. Inordinately heavy demands are made both on the quality of teaching and on the quality of research. And inevitably the pressures are to do sort of very high tech research led by research grants, not the sort of thing and not people who are going to be transferring that knowledge to the students very easily. It’s pushing them apart rather than together. That’s very unfortunate; it is not a healthy response. But the idea of research and teaching informing each other, of course they do. We have kept that going over here and I must say that this department is good. Many universities even this university in some parts have tried to sort of pre-empt the research assessment exercise and say some people are research active and other are not, and those who are not are sort of given piles of teaching and then ignored on the research side (Respondent 9).

Whilst respondents indicated that this structural heaviness could be counteracted through adequate support and adequate distribution of workloads, it was also felt that the strong separation between the teaching and research functions, in terms of policy, funding, operationalisation, and perceptions were having detrimental effects on teaching practices, as for example reported by Respondent 18:

If you put time and thought into teaching, you are slightly crazy, you are never going to get to the top if you do that because people who do get to the top put a minimal
amount of time into that and they find ways out of it. So they are very very careful with their time, they always put post-docs in to do their tutorials rather than they do it.

Interest in teaching can even be explicitly curbed, as indicated by Respondent 16:

Our own Head of Department is under pressure from the higher authorities in the School, and he passes these pressures down on us. And if you are seen to be spending too long on your teaching, you are told.

External influences
This filter captures the interface of higher education with external stakeholders and comprises regulatory and professional frameworks, including the relation to employers and professional accreditation bodies. It also includes what could be termed the ‘invisible pedagogic college’ (Barnett, 1990; Halsey & Trow, 1971, for references to the ‘invisible college’), i.e. outside influences affecting pedagogical practices – colleagues in other institutions, networks, and bodies such as the HE Academy or Subject Centres.

To a large extent, the relation of HE to the world of work had been naturalised in this sample. Academics had absorbed as inevitable the employability agenda. Interestingly though several respondents had included in their ‘vocational’ curriculum a number of ‘critical’ elements. Examples included:

- concerns for sustainability in an Engineering curriculum
- attention to developing ‘abstract’ thinking in a Nursing curriculum
- emphasis on ‘academic modules’ that ‘educate’ students in a Management curriculum
- a ‘critical’ component in a Chemistry curriculum dealing with ethical issues so that students do not systematically accept ‘the way things are dished out’ (e.g. production of food, remuneration of MDs in large chemical firms, etc)
- integrated approach where soft skills ‘colonise’ a hard biological science curriculum (as for example in the medical curriculum)

In the same way, the need to monitor quality through regulatory frameworks was perceived as unavoidable. Although some respondents indicated that this provided space for reflection and review, many saw the quality constraints as unavoidable hoops that needed to be jumped. A few also indicated that aspects of the quality agenda could be deleterious to effective learning - e.g. use of student evaluations, need to produce regular bell curves for distributions of marks on modules, requirement to provide notes in advance of teaching session, etc. On the whole respondents found that the emphasis has shifted from ‘what’ was being taught to ‘how’ it was being taught, and more importantly on how the ‘outcome’ was being measured.

The impact of influences outside of the institution cannot be minimised. Supported by instant communications via the web, and a growing network of ‘teaching’ conferences across the UK, and beyond, many respondents in this
study indicated that they sought advice, support or information outside of their immediate circle of colleagues. These networks seemed to be particularly important in emergent disciplines (e.g. digital arts) where much of the knowledge base is unstable, and input is sought from outside. Collaboration with colleagues in other institutions or in the field of professional practice therefore had an indirect effect on internal practices.

Conclusions
This study yielded four important findings:
1) structures and communities impact on the way individual lecturers conceive and approach teaching and learning, but this impact is moderated by agentic/ideological responses to structures and communities
2) ideological beliefs impact particularly on the way lecturers understand their discipline and shape their pedagogical beliefs.
3) Agentic responses to structures and communities are possible but there exist areas of practice where lecturers are constrained by structures (e.g. the research-teaching nexus, academic labour)
4) There are implications for educational development practices

Recommendations for educational development
Strategic directions for the educational development function can be inferred from this study. These directions are based on an acknowledgement of the different levels of practice, and of the degree of agency available to groups and individuals within them. It suggests that educational development interventions aimed at levels of practice where there is scope for agency (even limited) and/or ideological stances are more likely to be effective than interventions in areas where there is no such scope. At levels of practice where structures are not amenable to agency, it is likely that input in policy making would be more useful. It therefore suggests a 3-tier level of input for educational development.

Direct interventions tier:
These take place at levels of practice where individuals/groups have scope for agency
- At the departmental level, which was shown to be a highly agentic locus, and a space for collaborative and competitive ventures that could both benefit and impede pedagogical practice.
- At the level of the discipline which was shown to be a fluid and ideologically-laden construct.
- Towards the filter of pedagogical beliefs as this was shown to be highly agentic and ideologically rich.

Critical Forum tier:
These interventions take place where individuals have very little agentic scope, to complement the policy-making dimension outlined below, by contributing to a critical debate, and by exploring new ways of practising – a kind of R & D mode within HE practices. Such input will be beneficial in respect of aspects of the discipline filter, academics’ beliefs about teaching,
learning and assessment for example. There is also scope, within this orientation, for exploring new definitions of academic labour, and the nature of the link between research and teaching.

Policy-informing tier:
These types of interventions are directed at areas of practice which are not amenable to agentic behaviours. At this level, it is likely that input in policies to inform and advance practices will be the most effective strategy for the educational development function. The institutional filter is an important locus for this kind of input, as are of course the very structural filters of research-teaching nexus and academic labour.

Some recommendations for academic communities involved in the student experience

- A degree of institutional reflexivity concerning the stance towards teaching and research would help counteract ambiguous or changing policy agendas in respect of teaching and research. More reflexive funding strategies, avoiding clashes between different initiatives, might help promote this within institutions.

- Institutions ought to consider developing R&D modes of operation to provide scope for risk-taking activities in respect of innovative teaching approaches.

- Institutions ought to be mindful of providing scope for adaptation to fit the purpose and needs of departments in policy implementation given that departments have been identified as a crucial locus for the enactment of change.

- Local interpretations of policies by quality managers and administrators do not always address the needs of academics on the frontline. In the same way, academics do not always recognise the high level of professionalism in the administrative function. Institutions ought to work towards blurring the boundaries between academic and non-academic functions, and educating ‘on a par’ staff across professional boundaries.

- The impact of institutional policies on teaching and learning is significant and can hinder good practice. Dialogical encounters (including Academic Services, Student Services, Human Resources, etc) ought to be fostered.
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