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The New Lecturer, Situated Learning and Identity: The Shift from Primary School Teacher to ITE Lecturer

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Background

This paper describes a critical incident concerning a lecture which occurred at the beginning of my second year as a lecturer. It analyses the questions this raised for me, the various means employed to address the questions and to reflect on them, concluding with the impact of discussion and reflection on my practice and developing confidence in becoming a legitimate participant in a learning community (Wenger, 1998).

"When one thinks of learning and teaching in Higher Education, one invariably thinks of the lecture" (Light and Cox, 2001, p.97), this area of practice was one of the most stressful areas of my developing role. Light and Cox credit Isaiah Berlin with likening the experience of delivering a lecture to, "walking over a causeway on a narrow bridge with lions on one side and tigers on the other" (2001, p. 97). Berlin then goes on to say how he felt 'no good' after delivering a lecture. This resonated with me and my new identity as a HE Lecturer. Biggs' statement, 'The lecture is therefore as good as the lecturer, not as crowd- pleaser but as scholar' (Biggs, 2003, p.101) added to my initial feelings of uncertainty at the same time as signposting the way to help me improve my lectures and develop my professional skills.

Research Questions

The focus of the enquiry took the form of re-evaluation of experience, development of skills and integrating existing knowledge with new knowledge as 'learning is a dynamic and fluid process which incorporates both direct experience and theoretical knowledge' (Harrison, 2002, p. 33).

How to improve my practice as a 'lecturer' through greater understanding of the role became the key research question.

Methods

As this practitioner research was concerned with introducing change through self development a qualitative form of evaluation and evidence gathering was appropriate as it is 'concerned with life as it is lived, things as they happen, situations as they are constructed in the day-to-day, moment-to-moment course of events' (RMEH, p.49). I believe that this method has validity as described in the RMEH (p.27) in that the 'account accurately represents the phenomena to which it refers.' To reflect on my practice I;

- had colleagues observe my lectures and give feedback;
- watched colleagues deliver their lectures and discussed my observations with them.
- sought advice from experienced tutors in relation to lecturing.

Then sharing the view of Fullan that

'innovators need to be open to the realities of others: sometimes because the ideas of others will lead to alterations for the better in the direction of change, and sometimes because the others' realities will expose the problems of implementation that must be addressed and at the very least will indicate where one should start,' (Fullan, 2001, p. 187)

- examined my practice and philosophy of education in view of my lecturing style and procedures.
- researched literature regarding the art of lecturing and development of personal identity in the HE role.

I believe the gathering of evidence from a multiplicity of sources using a variety of methods will give a balanced (triangulated) foundation for my development (Research Methods in Education Handbook [RMEH], 2001, p.67). Some of the colleagues I have consulted trained in other universities and so there is also a wider perspective on the skill of 'lecturing'.

The feedback I received was in the form of 'verbal accounts in natural language' (RMEH, p.26) a qualitative strategy which enabled people to feel they had contributed but not become stressed or overworked by their involvement in my study.

Frame

The socially constructed elements of this learning come from discourse and debate with both new and more experienced colleagues, attendance at Conferences, staff training, reflection on my own practice and the practices of others. Although it is, perhaps, more akin with 'situated learning' as described by Wenger (1998) and that is where I feel most resonance with a theory of learning, certainly as an adult learner. It is suggested that,

'professional development is most effectively promoted through the facilitation of problem-solving where practitioners engage in processes of reflection and knowledge construction' (Harrison, 2002, p.34).

Research findings

Assuming that 'effective change takes time,' and 'people need pressure to change, (even in directions that they desire),' (Fullan, 2001, p. 196) the aim of introducing and evaluating change in such a short time span was very ambitious, however the lectures I have given this year have induced less personal stress and I feel that following the new strategies and advice has helped make them better learning events for both the students and myself. I now feel more confident in my identity as a HE lecturer and am therefore more able to remove/ amend content which I feel helps the learner reach the learning outcomes rather than relying on my 'betters' as I was previously. I can see improvement as I continue my reflective log, and consider how I deal with situations now, I am finally moving towards to considering myself an HE lecturer rather than a primary school teacher.

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