Glasgow School of Art, Scotland

Linda Drew

Response commentary

Leading with difference: the particular case of learning and teaching leadership in the creative arts

Biographical notes:

Professor Linda Drew, PhD, has been Deputy Director and Director of Academic Development at the Glasgow School of Art since August 2011. Linda was formerly Dean of the Graduate School for Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon at the University of the Arts London (UAL). She is a member of the Singapore British Business Council and an External Quality Reviewer for arts higher education for the Singapore Ministry of Education. Linda also held the position of Head of College at Chelsea College of Art and Design (2006-07). Before joining the University of the Arts as Dean of Academic Development in 2003, she was Co-Director of the Art, Design and Communication subject centre based at the University of Brighton. She is editor of the peer-reviewed journal *Art, Design and Communication in Higher Education* published by Intellect books and is the elected Chair of the UK's Council for Higher Education in Art and Design (CHEAD). Linda is an alumna of Saint Martins School of Art, a Fellow of the Design Research Society (FDRS) and a Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts (FRSA).

When I was asked to contribute a commentary for this special issue of *TEXT*, I must say I was delighted as it presents a new body of work in a field which is still developing, both in Australasia as in Europe and North America. Also, the work of the createED project and network are extremely well showcased in this collection of articles and case studies, bringing a depth of field and a context for the work.

This special issue also adds to the field of teaching and learning scholarship. Studies of disciplinary variation in teaching or teaching scholarship have received limited attention. A collection of studies edited by Hativa and Marincovitch (1995) is one of the first recorded which gathers cases from different disciplines with respect to implications for learning and teaching. Within that collection, Murray and Renaud examine disciplinary differences in teaching and their relationship to student feedback and ratings of instruction. In their study, arts and humanities teachers scored higher than social science and natural science teachers on six out of ten teaching behaviour dimensions. This finding implies that 'arts and humanities teachers tend to exhibit a wider range of teaching behaviors that contribute positively to student instructional ratings than social science or natural science teachers do' (1995: 38). When we ask the question, 'What can be learned from the context of teaching in the creative arts?', these studies echo those of Alison Shreeve on teacher identity and practice and, in particular, the analysis of what can be learned from systemic approaches to the development of learning and teaching within a creative arts institution (Shreeve, Simms & Trowler 2010).

Further case studies and disciplinary variation in improving student learning were the subject of the 7th International Improving Student Learning Symposium in 1999 (Rust 2000). In these proceedings, Trigwell, Prosser, Martin and Ramsden (2000) studied relations between approaches to teaching, academic leadership and disciplinary differences. It was noted that where arts/business teachers perceived a leadership environment which was supportive of good teaching, they adopt a more conceptual change/student-focused approach. This finding still deserves further investigation in relation to the development of teachers and departmental heads in arts departments.

However, there have been some studies which connect disciplinary culture to the nature of teaching and learning processes, learning outcomes and conceptions of teaching (Drew 2004, Neumann 2001, Neumann, Parry & Becher 2002). Neumann (2001) provides an overview of studies of disciplinary difference and further applies this to the nature of teaching, teaching practices and approaches. More importantly, she makes connections between these approaches, disciplinary differences and student learning. This study concludes that further systematic study of this area needs to be conducted to further explore the links between teachers' conceptions founded in disciplinary identity and the implications for the improvement of student learning. Neumann, Parry & Becher (2003) come to some important conclusions which are well illustrated with disciplinary examples:

> hard applied subject fields, where the emphasis, in both curriculum and assessment, on problem solving and practical skills is expected to manifest itself as an important product of a degree course. Here a strong value is placed on the integration and

application of existing knowledge (Smart & Ethington 1995). It is commonly observed that the vocational nature of most applied programmes leads to a clear expectation of their subsequent employment opportunities: the claim is rarely made for the development of widely transferable skills. … soft applied programmes, not unexpectedly, share this vocational slant, and the skills they develop are also practice related, their knowledge base tends to be more eclectic, and their implicit emphasis – shared with soft pure knowledge – is on the enhancement of personal growth and intellectual breadth (410).

Studies of teaching scholarship have also highlighted disciplinary variation although it is not always clearly demonstrated. Huber and Morrealle (2002) situate this area in an orienting essay as a preface to their edited collection on disciplinary styles in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Their claim is that 'disciplinary styles empower the scholarship of teaching by guiding scholars to choose certain problems, use certain methods, and present their work in certain ways' (4). In other words, those scholars' findings can be presented in contextually contingent ways. Differences are therefore presented in this collection, but only at the level of the personalised accounts. It should be noted that this work was carried out by the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL). Approaches to teaching have, however been shown to relate to approaches to teaching scholarship in the disciplines (Leuddeke 2003). Leuddeke confirms his working hypothesis that staff teaching hard/pure or applied subjects were more likely to adopt an information transmission/teacher-focussed approach to their teaching, while those teaching soft/pure and applied subjects generally take a more conceptual change/student focus. He also concludes that this has implications for teacher development and development of teaching scholarship in the disciplines citing organisations which can support such disciplinary driven development. Clearly, createED and it's successor CALTN fits with this notion of an organisation structured around 'disciplinary driven development'.

The particular context of creative arts

There is a body of work concerning the historical and societal context of the creative arts disciplines. It should be noted that most of this literature is to be found either in specialist journals or published by art schools' presses in the pursuit of mapping the territory of the discipline, much of it regards the processes peculiar to the studio context or practicum and this area is highlighted as a distinctive feature through several of the articles in this special edition.

In a study of the history of arts education, MacDonald (1970) notes that from it's beginnings in the early nineteenth century the sector had virtually nothing to do with the academic disciplines of universities. The teaching of art (and latterly also design and media) had evolved independently which could be considered a discipline of vocational practice.

The practice of liberal apprenticeship was called into question by the 1980s, due to the increasing number of students enrolled in these courses in art schools or in

university faculties of art, design and media. The best known critique of this approach is in the seminal article by Cal Swann:

> The so-called 'traditional' teaching method in art and design, as far as studio work is concerned, has relied very heavily on a one-on-one tutorial that generally takes place between the tutor and the student as a discussion about the particular project on which the student is working. It is usually an examination of the work 'on the drawing board' and often results in the tutor demonstrating his/her own expertise to improve some aspects of the student's work – more or less a 'sitting-by-Nellie' approach. Most of the teachers in art and design would call it a traditional 'atelier' method derived from the master artist/craftsman showing an apprentice how to do it, which is a kinder description but it comes to the same thing (2002: 50).

This is however, a description of a context with close teacher-student relations and is arguably more student-focused than some other university contexts. This is something which Swann strongly advocates as the future direction of the sector.

Key practices of the learning and teaching landscape for the creative arts are also discussed by Reid and Davies (2000), in their study of design learning. They identify the key practices of that environment: project-based learning; the public critique; studio-based teaching; and, the 'final show'. All of these practices require students and teachers to work closely together in collaborative and cooperative practice. Small group teaching is a feature of project-based learning that is normally conducted in small groups or as individual student activities, but in both cases, the interaction between student and teacher is usually frequent and close. The final show is effectively an independent learning project which affords the student more time to progress from project proposal, through experimentation processes and execution, to final exhibition. Blair (2010) has also discussed the practice of the public critique or 'crit' and the context of the studio setting. In many of these studies of the context, studio-based teaching is seen as the basic template for all learning and teaching activities. The thread through some of the articles in this special edition questions the centrality of those modes and practices as well as broadening out the focus and role of industry in the studio.

Leadership issues

A central theme running through many of the articles is that of becoming identified as a leader, and as a leader for learning and teaching in the department or faculty. The process of becoming a leader has been analysed by few studies in creative arts education with the notable exception of the chapter including case studies by Journeaux et al/ (2008). They characterise this process as

> full of growing pains as the boundaries move and change and experience becomes an essential part of development. Institutions conscious of this need have put more management and leadership training in place for newly appointed staff in positions regardless of the role they play or their positioning within the university (53).

The lesson learned in this thread is that creative arts practitioners in education, however, seem to adapt to the changes and realisation that impact is possible by

drawing on a range of skills developed within the discipline. A general criticism of higher education management and its difference with the highly polished private sector is that it is often regarded as 'untidy' (Elvidge 2005) with too many self managed professional academics who have little regard for the sense of unity and organisation as it has little to do with them personally. It is probably a real strength that characteristics of creative arts educators fit well in a system that relies on people being able to constantly embrace change, instability and ambiguity.

Scholarship and development issues

As most of the case studies illustrate, real resources, including staff time and money are required to support these developments. This thread is reflected by an earlier study of educational development and scholarship in an international context (Breslow et al. 2004). This begins to put the role of educational leaders and developers into sharp focus. Should we carry out these intensive development activities at the expense of others? Who will this benefit and will some of our development intentions fail to be realised if these activities are given space and resource within the development team? It could be said that moving from a focus on the individual in development terms (Bowden 1988, Martin & Ramsden 1992, Ramsden 1994) to a focus on the level of activity in the department (Knight & Trowler 2000) actually enhances the impact of the development outcomes. Development outcomes and outcomes for student learning are also enhanced if this development occurs over a sustained period of time (Martin & Ramsden 1992). Course teams encouraged to reflect on aspects of their own professional learning and the impact on the course team are more likely to collaborate in curriculum design which adopts a student-focused approach to teaching (Drew & Vaughan 2002). Engaging with a scholarship project, whether it focuses on the industry studio or work integrated learning may be a more sustainable and tangible way of meeting all of these objectives, both for the individuals concerned and for their course teams and departments.

Recognition and academic status issues

In pursuing a 'traditional' educational development activity, for example a postgraduate certificate in higher education or a development workshop, the individual member of academic staff is usually clear about the possible rewards and recognition available. These rewards may include:

- learning outcomes, for their professional development which often lead to personal growth and increased satisfaction;

- pedagogic knowledge, which enhances their own subject and content knowledge; and,

- award of 'credit' in the form of, for example, a Postgraduate Certificate or for continuous professional development.

Using the action research case studies as an example the further benefits and recognition afforded from the scholarship model also include: reflection on process and outcomes; peer recognition; publication or public dissemination of outcomes

(perhaps within the institution to begin with); and, enhanced learning outcomes – for both the participants and their students (Breslow et al. 2004).

The readers of this special issue are to be encouraged to read within and across the collection of articles and case studies, as I have, to gain further insight to both the individual academic perspectives and also broader strategic themes for the creative arts sector in Australia and abstracted beyond.

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