

2020

Supporting Academic Synergies Through co-Evolution of Teaching and Research Excellence from Evidence-Based Practice.

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Supporting academic synergies through co-evolution of teaching and research excellence from evidence-based practice

Keywords: co-evolution; excellence; pedagogical innovation; researching practice; scholarship; synergies; teaching and learning; transformation.

Abstract:

Ireland's first Technological University (TU) came into existence in January 2019, merging three existing higher education institutions. This work is set in the context of this new TU, and explores how teaching, learning and educational research can co-evolve to generate synergies supported by evidence-based practice of the core activity sets of the lecturer. In the disciplinary domain of Business Education, the Head of Learning Development and Head of Research have identified the benefits of aligning aspects of their work in supporting academic staff to plan and undertake structured inquiry into their teaching. This is predicated on our belief that the range of work involved in supporting teaching and research are not mutually exclusive. Having a clear vision, followed through with actions, that is underpinned by shared values and common grounds for intellectual commitment, we wish to take advantage of what working more closely together on shared initiatives can bring for staff and students. We share an aim of:

- exploring conscious continuous researching and teaching integration in Business Education.
- increasing evidence of teaching excellence in Business Education through evidence-based practice;
- the removal of a silo mentality in the disciplines;
- creating synergistic approaches in teaching and researching in the College;
- supporting collaborative and collective thinking and learning;
- building research capability from teaching capability;
- promoting and recognising excellence within teaching across the College and raise the profile of teaching as an evidence-based practice.

Initial conversations focused on how integrating research and teaching can drive excellence and pedagogic innovation in practice. Ultimately, an exploration of concepts and practice of excellence in relation to teaching and research can ensure a quality student learning experience. The importance of involvement of staff with strong pedagogical skills has been highlighted where strategic decisions related to teaching, learning and assessment are being made. Bringing business school theory to teaching practice, the work draws on theories of co-evolution existing within various fields such as sociology and biology (Thompson, 2005) and combines this with the synergy construct from the strategic management literature (e.g. Shaver, 2006). In combining these approaches, we are hoping a framework can be developed that can recognise and capture the interactions and complex underlying processes between teaching and research that ensures institutional fitness and also facilitates the respective heads of teaching and learning and research in integrating synergies into the process. This approach is not deterministic, but recognises that in co-evolutionary processes, traits and characteristics of participants change and 'fitness' emerges. As progressing excellence and innovation in teaching and learning with staff involves seeking evidence-based methods to inform their teaching practice, a key challenge going forward is how to gather the right types of evidence to demonstrate teaching excellence. We would like to open a conversation with colleagues at the conference, discussing and building in multiple perspectives and other solutions from colleagues facing similar challenges in their institutions. This will continue to encourage new ideas and fresh ways of thinking about our work.

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Research-led teaching:
Defining and celebrating a tradition
University of Kent, 26 February 2020

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COLLEGE OF BUSINESS, TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY DUBLIN



Context and Challenges

Context



New entity:
TU Dublin
Existing
structures: HEA

Identifying
Synergies:
Opportunity for
these roles to
work more
closely together

Challenges

Cultural shift
away from silos in
Business
Education
disciplines

Engagement at
School level:
Teaching,
Learning,
Educational
Research

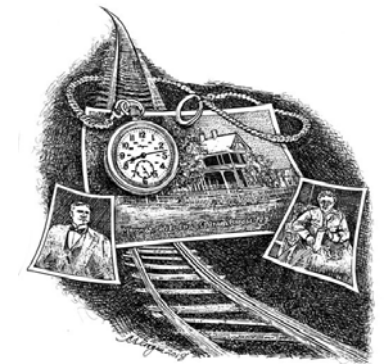
Roles [College of Business]

Head of Learning Development

Head of Research

Co-evolution as an approach to excellence at the nexus of teaching and research

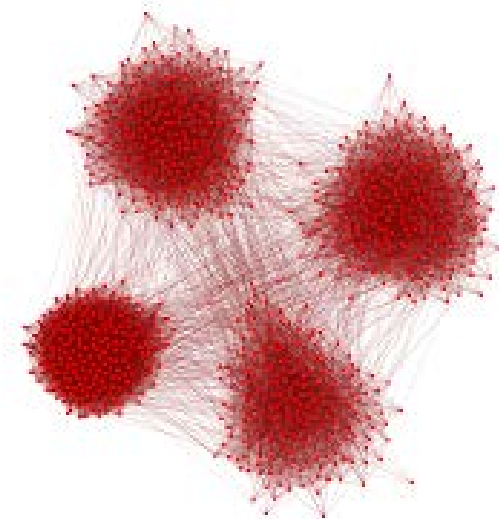
- ▶ Co-evolution is concerned with the logic of understanding how individuals, groups and environments influence each other.
- ▶ Studies consider the influence of the macro on the meso environment, but also on peer to peer groups influence.
- ▶ Coevolution does not have to be about relationship interactions, but also stories or rituals between and across groups
- ▶ Emphasising coevolution means a focus on the process rather than outcomes.
- ▶ Opportunities to create synergies and excellence in process.



A theory of co-evolution

- ▶ Rather than explaining coevolution through different theoretical lenses, we draw on a theory of coevolution from the field of evolutionary biology (Thompson, 2005 , Gomulkiewicz et al., 2007b) and sociology (Cherns, 1976 , 1987 , Jessop, 2004 , Norgaard, 2006).
- ▶ Three criteria for coevolution to happen (Thompson, 2005 , Gomulkiewicz et al., 2007b):
 - ▶ the existence of co-evolutionary hot and cold spots
 - ▶ selection mosaics
 - ▶ trait remixing

What could this look like in an educational context?



References

- ▶ Thompson J.N. (2005). *The geographic mosaic of coevolution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
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