

THE TEACHER AS LEARNING BARRIER – THE CASE OF A UNIVERSITY COURSE

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Fazekas, Nóra; Beck-Bíró, Kata
Corvinus University of Budapest

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The purpose of this research was to explore students' cognitive and emotional experiences during an MA course (Organisation Development – OD) and to discover the barriers that we, as course instructors, unconsciously construct, and that hinder the purpose of the course and/or the students' learning and developmental processes. The findings were expected to help the teachers redefine the course curriculum, if necessary, including the teaching methodology and messages, as well as the performance appraisal system, in order to achieve a deeper and/or broader impact on students.

We examined our educational practices through the lens of RRI (as the guiding principle of methodology resulting in a participative, qualitative research design) and OD (as the field of research, providing an additional, internalised value set). The topic itself was the impact of higher education teachers on student learning, including societal context and student–teacher relationships, which we viewed and interpreted with the approaches of constructivism and critical pedagogy.

We included three current and three former students, two current consultants (quasi teachers who are course alumni) and one current teacher – all of them volunteers within the sample. Data were collected during three focus group discussions involving the same participants, and further semi-structured interviews. The circle of data collectors was therefore opened to the sample itself, enabling governance of the research by peers – producing knowledge via collaboration and dialogue. The contact occasions were all followed by writing reflection journals by the lead researchers (authors). The collected data was processed by the lead researchers as well as by the participants themselves.

Through the case study we acquired an understanding of the alienation between university teachers and students – that is, how teachers lose touch and become less responsive, despite innovative, benevolent, student-centred and value-driven educational and pedagogical principles and become oppressors, barriers of learning. We also discovered, however, that the used research approach succeeded in bridging the gap and in creating true dialogue.

The dissemination of our case provides findings about the conflicts of evaluation and development in student–teacher relationships and introduces dialogue as a tool for curriculum improvement.