

# Ten years of National Teaching Fellowships:

four stories from education

Edited by Dr Tony Brown, University of Bristol

[escalate.ac.uk](http://escalate.ac.uk)

**The** Subject  
Higher Centre for  
Education Education  
**Academy** ESCalate

## Published by

ESCalate  
HEA Subject Centre for Education  
University of Bristol  
Graduate School of Education  
35 Berkeley Square  
Bristol  
BS8 1JA  
Email: [heacademy-escalate@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:heacademy-escalate@bristol.ac.uk)  
[www.escalate.ac.uk](http://www.escalate.ac.uk)

© Dr Tony Brown and ESCalate April 2011

ESCalate production team - Dr Fiona Hyland and Teresa Nurser

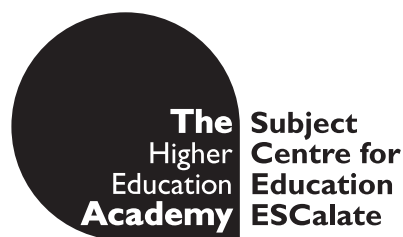
Permission is granted to copy and distribute this document in unaltered form only, for the purposes of teaching, research, private study, criticism and review, provided that the original author and publisher is acknowledged.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of ESCalate.

# Ten years of National Teaching Fellowships: four stories from education

Dr Tony Brown

Visiting Fellow, University of Bristol  
[tony.brown@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:tony.brown@bristol.ac.uk)



# Contents

---

Foreword 4  
Tony Brown (Visiting Fellow, University of Bristol)

---

Introduction 6  
David Sadler (National Teaching Fellow, 2005)

---

With love and anger 9  
Elizabeth Chapman Hoult (National Teaching Fellow, 2004)

---

What do we stand for in teacher education? 13  
Des Hewitt (National Teaching Fellow, 2009)

---

Listening, nurturing, and pulling: 17  
a passion to teach with care  
Caroline Walker-Gleaves (National Teaching Fellow, 2001)

---

A teaching journey 21  
David Watson (National Teaching Fellow, 2008)

---

# Foreword



Creating a national scheme, the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS) that recognises and rewards teaching excellence, marked a significant policy shift in higher education (HE) in England, around ten years ago. The competition has remained fierce, with a tough grading scheme applied fairly but ruthlessly to all applications that meet the scheme's requirements and which go forward for consideration. The original award of £50 000 for individuals meant a significant change in circumstances for individual award holders, many of whom used the award to support research and travel. The reduction of individual awards, in 2006, to £10 000 has lessened opportunities for individual award holders to travel and expand their international perspective on teaching and learning – this at a time when HE needs a more international perspective but when universities in the UK risk becoming more insular, and where survival and damage limitation are threatening to dominate policy and practice.

Staff in the education discipline were under-represented in the early years of the scheme. In recent years the proportion of Fellows from within the discipline of education has steadily increased, although those teaching undergraduate level studies in further education (HE in FE) have struggled to gain Fellowships.

The increasing numbers of award holders with an education specialism led to a decision in 2008 by ESCalate staff to review the way it profiles Fellows. This is a sensitive area. The award and recognition are a personal acknowledgement of excellence. There is no requirement on Fellows to do more, subsequent to receiving their award. Nevertheless, invitations by ESCalate to individual Fellows to provide contact details and a public statement of their interests met with very positive responses. Unsurprisingly, most Fellows are enthusiastic about sharing their ideas, and wish to promote excellence in teaching and research into student learning.



ESCalate has built up a database of Fellows with expertise in Education (<http://escalate.ac.uk/ntf>), a valuable resource for colleagues from which to gain ideas and develop practice.

In 2010 ESCalate staff took the decision to invite a small group of Education-based Fellows to expand on their experience, describe the impact of the fellowship on their professional lives, and share their thoughts about learning and teaching. This resulting publication is part celebratory – both of the scheme and the individual Fellows – and part exploratory: an attempt to explore the impact of the Fellowship process on the individuals involved in ways that colleagues within education will find useful.

The four Fellows who discuss their professional lives in this publication were encouraged to write positively and fully about themselves – something of a cultural challenge for many British people – and one which brought feelings of embarrassment for some of the writers.

We hope the publication serves to illustrate the huge diversity of those who are successful and the diverse trajectories that their professional lives have followed. If there is one message to take away from reading this publication, it is that you have to be outstanding as a teacher to be successful in the Fellowship competition, but you can be outstanding in your own way.

**Tony Brown**  
**Visiting Fellow, University of Bristol**  
**April 2011**

# Introduction



David Sadler, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students and Education),  
University of Tasmania

I write as a National Teaching Fellow (NTF) as well as someone who, in a former capacity as a Director of the Higher Education Academy (HEA), had oversight of the scheme and was previously involved in the consultations to reduce the award from £50,000 to £10,000, and develop a project strand for institutional bids. As I left the HEA, the NTF scheme was reverting back to just the individual strand and additionally engaging academics in Wales, who will be joining those in England and Northern Ireland.

My Introduction will track some of these changes by focusing on the value of the NTF scheme at sectoral, institutional and individual levels. I start at the individual level for like all fellows, I have my own 'story' and my own 'journey'. The four stories from education below share the traits that can be said to typify the experience of being a NTF. The passion which infuses these stories is palpable and is clearly linked to the process of articulation and re-articulation of teaching philosophies that Walker-Gleaves identifies. This is one of the most positive and enduring aspects of the rigorous nomination and application process. This was the first step in my own

personal transformation and was a genuine epiphany, in the sense of suddenly finding a confidence and a voice for my own approach to teaching.

For many NTFs, the sense of being in Chapman Hoults words, a 'free radical', in the midst of often unsettling change in higher education, is another recognisable element. Hewitt's writing picks up on this thread too. I will comment below on the sectoral impact of NTFs, as distinct from the NTF scheme, but I contend they have greater potential as a collective force of policy critique than has been hitherto realised. The collective combination of passion, expertise and experience in the NTF community could be a greater force for change than currently, where the navigation of the waters of change is often a highly individualised experience. But this is to jump ahead of myself. Turning back to the individual level, Tony Brown laments in his foreword the drop in funding in 2006 as limiting the opportunities for international networking and travel. I do not dissent from this and as a recipient of the larger sum I have used the money to broaden my perspectives beyond the UK shores and outside the boundaries of my own

discipline. Ultimately, this has led me to a job literally on the other side of the world, where I now have the luxury of experimenting with my philosophy of learning and teaching across a whole institution. But a different argument that was a factor in the changed system was to spare the NTFs after 2006 from the requirement to complete and be accountable for a major project. I know this was both an opportunity for some and a hurdle for others, especially those combining the NTF project with many other commitments.

Walker-Gleaves notes how her NTF supported her PhD. National Teaching Fellowships have been used for professional development in many instances. Together with the capacity to build networks at national and international level, this has led to CV enhancement and new career opportunities for individuals. This must be balanced by the recognition that for some Fellows, the award has not been beneficial – with them being labelled ‘teachers’ in an environment that privileges research.

My own experience of working with senior institutional leaders, including those in the research-intensive universities, leads me to the conclusion that this is not so often a problem at the institutional level, but rather a problem with the local culture in schools and faculties. Institutional enthusiasm for the NTF scheme can be measured in many ways including the disappointment expressed by Pro-vice Chancellors after receipt of the news of unsuccessful nominations. More positively, the NTF scheme has helped to raise the profile of learning and teaching and provided elements of an infrastructure and some criteria through which it may be rewarded. For example, it has led to the development of institutional internal awards and fellowships for teaching, both as a step towards NTF nomination and to address local ideas

for innovation. The project (group) awards were designed to address institutional agendas for change in learning and teaching and have led to some interesting projects. In these straitened times, these became an obvious target for cuts. As funds for teaching are cut in institutions, I question the wisdom of losing this institutional strand.

At sectoral level the NTF scheme has been seen as part of an overall architecture of support for learning and teaching that embraced Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning, the HEA including the subject centres and much else. In fairness, it should be noted that there has been some scepticism over the capacity of relying on individuals to effect wider change and on the possible divisiveness of singling out individuals. These and other reservations have prevented the scheme operating in Scotland, but the extension to Wales is a major step forward.

There is no doubt that the NTF scheme has changed over time – initially having separate categories for ‘rising stars’, support and senior staff for example. There is just one category now and some concern in the sector that the winners are increasingly at senior levels. This can be read in divergent ways as both a weakness of the current scheme and a testimony to its increasing currency. What is clear is that there is sufficient political interest in celebrating excellence and determination to show that there is investment in an excellent student experience that the NTF scheme endures without serious challenge – I hope I am not tempting fate!

I close by returning to the individual level of analysis. David Watson presented me with my NTF award in 2005. I did not realise how this fantastic night was actually the cross-roads in my career. Like many Fellows, I became famous for five minutes, then used





by my institution to drive learning and teaching agendas across the whole university. I also developed networks and friends from outside the university who shared my interests more than those inside it. My philosophy around the student experience took me to the HEA. Ironically, I got further away from my discipline, from the practice of teaching and from engagement with students that underpinned my NTF

nomination – a process identified by Chapman Houtt and indeed many others. By contrast, Watson speaks of the necessary relationship of academic leadership and management to effective teaching and learning. My new role is an attempt to bridge these two perspectives. This is my own story and journey, to add to the four from education.

# With love and anger



Elizabeth Chapman Hoult, Faculty of Education,  
Canterbury Christ Church University

In 2004 I was awarded a National Teaching Fellowship (NTF). The award – £50 000 – and the opportunities that came along with it, expanded my universe considerably. Seven years later I feel like a free radical in a stagnant higher education system where the primary instinct seems to be to retain the status quo even though decay appears inevitable. I am charged with something that challenges all of that. The structures which held fast all the time that universities received guaranteed public funding are proving un-resilient in these bleak economic and political circumstances and as a sector we will have to do things differently, whether we like it or not. The NTF has been a gift; it has given me a licence to begin to imagine an entirely different kind of university.

My project has focused on how 'non-traditional' adult learners negotiate their ways through a system that appears to be set up to cater for the needs of younger learners from more advantaged backgrounds. It seemed to me at the time that the widening participation agenda, a core element of the New Labour government's HE policy, was concentrated too exclusively on young students and that we needed to think more seriously about these

older learners. Adult learners are particularly interesting to me because they refuse to conform to what Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) call the 'educational mortality rate', which increases the further down the social order we care to look. In so doing they offer a serious challenge to the notion that HE merely reproduces pre-existing levels of advantage and disadvantage. These learners, by their very nature, have resisted the social script set out for them.

My own experience of attending a Russell Group university as an 18 year-old provided me with a rich source of inspiration for thinking about HE as a reproductive project. The fish fingers and slot machines of my childhood in a working-class seaside town were very different from the gymkhanas and holidays in the Dordogne of my peers. English Literature – my degree subject – had offered me a powerful alternative to the grim realities of the steel works, the dockyard and The Sun in my hometown. But at university the work of Lawrence, Eliot and Milton were reduced to the sort of urbane analysis that would prepare students for a lifetime of dinner parties, rather than a social revolution. I hated the lazy

self-assurance of the upper middle classes and the way this confused privilege with ability. Even though I had great experiences at other universities where I went on to do post-graduate work, that enduring memory of the university's collusion with elitism and complacency stayed with me. My application for the NTF was driven as much by unresolved anger about the limitations of universities to adapt to a genuinely diverse student body as a claim for excellence.

Embedded in my NTF project was a PhD. Early on, the award allowed me to travel, gathering interview data from a range of particularly resilient adult learners in HE institutions. I hadn't got too far into the project before I realised that the language and methods of social science were limiting; the nuanced and rich descriptions of transformational learning that kept arising in the interviews was strangled by coding systems and thematic readings. Other important perspectives on the effects of class and age on teaching and learning also seemed to be missing from the study. There may be nobody better than Pierre Bourdieu at providing the big picture of the inequalities involved in HE but there is nobody better than Willy Russell at showing what those challenges mean to the individual learner. I combined literary and empirical data, not using the literary as decorative accessory, as some sociologists do, but taking drama and fiction equally seriously as a representation of reality.

The work of French post-structuralist philosopher, Hélène Cixous (1975) and her revolutionary ideas about the realm of the gift was a strong influence on my thinking throughout the work. Her key idea that 'femininity' (not to be confused with biological femaleness) is a political, psychological, artistic and mystical force captivated me. Central to her argument is the case for gift-giving without

expectation of return. Such feminine gift-giving challenges 'masculine' ways of understanding the world in terms of hierarchy, property and binaries. The world of HE is, when read in her terms, extremely masculine. Institutions are arranged in strict hierarchical order according to their prestige which is based on their histories, their wealth and, sadly, the levels of pre-existing capital that their students bring with them when they enrol. What Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) observed in the French HE system in the middle of the twentieth century – that it is entirely reproductive of levels of social capital – is no less true of the UK HE system in the new millennium. And despite the huge advances in scholarship of teaching and learning, knowledge is still regarded fundamentally in terms of property – to be owned and sold (or 'transferred') and jealously guarded. To receive a gift in these circumstances has been something of a miracle.

The PhD that grew out of my NTF won an award – the British Education Research Association award for the best doctoral dissertation in 2010. The judges praised the way it 'took risks' and 'broke new ground'. I would not have been able to take those risks had it not been for the NTF because it allowed me to escape the apparently safe structure of disciplinary and institutional limits and to say original and provocative things about teaching and learning. Those bounded spaces protect the interests of those with vested interests in maintaining the status quo. You need courage if you are going to take them on. 'You need to find a community,' my PhD supervisor, Dr John Moss, wisely observed when it became clear how far I wanted to go in challenging the social science orthodoxies. The community that I found was not disciplinary, nor institutional, but was among the network of national teaching fellows. Among the NTF network, associated colleagues at the Higher



Education Academy and the Subject Centres for English and Education I found supportive, open and imaginative thinkers who did not think I was mad in what I was attempting to do and who were prepared to give me safe spaces in their institutions and publications to try out my ideas with new audiences.

The confidence I developed from speaking at HEA national events and international equivalents at International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning gave me the confidence to speak about teaching and learning at much higher levels in the institution than I had previously encountered. I led staff development sessions and became accustomed to speaking at full staff conferences and leading cross-university working groups.

Perhaps as a result of this higher profile, in 2006 an opportunity arose that allowed me to take on a university-wide role in developing these ideas strategically. I was promoted to the role of Director of Regional Academic Development and repositioned at the centre of the University, rather than in the Faculty of Education. I found myself at meetings that were chaired by government ministers and working with senior managers from the other HE providers in the region on common issues. In this sense I have been able to extend my influence to political circles and funding bodies as well as the academic community. An example of this has been the South East Coastal Communities project (SECC)

which I have jointly co-ordinated with my colleague Dr Stuart Ashenden from the University of Greenwich. The idea behind SECC was that universities ought to find ways of sharing their intellectual capital with the communities in which they are placed, and in particular the communities who have traditionally benefited the least from the public funding of higher education. It has been a major, £3m project which has incorporated nine universities. My involvement marked a major turning point in my career. It was the point at which my ideals collided with the real politics of higher education funding. A huge advantage of the project has been that it has allowed me to work with inspirational colleagues, such as the Community-University Partnership team at the University of Brighton, who are impressive, not just because of the innovative nature of their work but because of their generous ways of working. Not everybody works with such a clear understanding of the collective good, though, and understanding how to be tough and streetwise while staying true to a philosophical commitment to the gift has been a hard but necessary lesson for me.

I have spent much more time in the last three or four years with colleagues outside of the institution than those inside. I won other bids which allowed me to work in ways which broke down the barriers between the university and communities. A drawback was that, ironically, although I had more influence on



senior managers and policy makers in HE than I had ever had before, I hardly had any opportunity to teach and this became an increasing concern for me. I started to yearn for a time when I could use the word 'project' more often as a verb than a noun again.

My NTF work and my professional role were becoming more and more dislocated. I had found a meeting place for them in theory, if not practice. In 2009 I collaborated with my friend and colleague Dr Ian Marsh exploring the possibilities of imagining a radically new way of thinking about what a university could be. The paper, which we called 'The Feminine University' was presented at the Society for Research into Higher Education conference in 2009. It generated a lot of excitement and three weeks worth of letters to the Times Higher Education. The utopian ideas of the feminine university are grounded in a strong understanding of the harsh realities of university funding that I have learned from the SECC project and my regional role.

Since 2010 I have been back in the Faculty of Education where I started off and where I lead on Knowledge Transfer. I remain keen to find ways of understanding how our work with external communities can be informed by the idea of the gift.

In the next phase of my NTF work I want to think much more deeply about what this feminine university might look like. In the last year I have spent an increasing amount of time working in India.

Conversations with colleagues there have helped me think more imaginatively about models of teaching which differ from the Western ones that we take to be natural and neutral. The award has broadened my horizons enormously, not least by taking me into international arenas. It has allowed me to complete an original PhD which has deepened my thinking enormously; it has given me confidence to make my ideas heard at senior levels; it has allowed me to have an impact nationally with policy makers and given me an opportunity to lead across a whole region.

I don't know what the future holds for the sector. We live in a world in which knowledge is produced and shared in ways that render the academic modes of dissemination risibly redundant. I think that it is timely to imagine a feminine university that does not simply reproduce privilege but which takes the idea of transformational learning seriously and which refuses to play the games of hierarchy, exclusion and ownership. The NTF has allowed me the space and given me the confidence to think in those ways.

---

## References

- Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J.C. (1977) *Reproduction in education, society and culture* (trans. R. Nice). London, New Delhi: Thousand Oaks, Sage, p 73.
- Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J.C. (1979) *The inheritors: French students and their relation to culture* (trans. R. Nice). Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Cixous, H. (1975) *Sorties: out and out: attacks/ways out/forays* (trans. B. Wing). In H. Cixous and C. Clément *The Newly Born Woman*. London: I.B. Tauris Publishers.

# What do we stand for in teacher education?



Des Hewitt, Education and Social Science, University of Derby

Following publication of the education white paper *The importance of teaching* (DfE 2010), many teacher educators like me have started to question their position. After all, not only will schools look different, but it also seems that the role of universities in teacher education will change if the proposals in the white paper are eventually implemented. Taken with the proposals for changes in fees in the Browne report into higher education (Browne, 2010), this all adds up to the biggest ever challenge for university teacher educators.

Our first reaction may be panic, anxiety and even anger at the threats to the status quo. 'Haven't we just worked so hard to gain an 'outstanding' grade in our recent OFSTED inspection?' The years of working to build strong partnerships with schools have been difficult, but the goodwill is incredible. Universities are by no means perfect, but they have made a major contribution to the development of education in schools. 'It doesn't make sense to denude this very provision, at the point when it seems strongest.'

I would like to argue that achieving the National Teaching Fellowship award in 2009 is the single most important factor in helping me to adapt to and mould the circumstances in which we now find ourselves. I see theory and practice as being inseparable in teacher education. I will explain this through the following areas.

## **Social justice through teacher education**

Whilst it is all too easy to become transfixed by the daily requirements of our own institutions and the wider sector of teacher education, I believe that fundamentally our aspirations should centre on providing all learners with the opportunity to experience a meaningful and challenging education for its own sake and for the future. In short, 'do good well'. 'Always treat people decently'.

Ten years ago, when I became a teacher educator, this was my answer to a student who wanted to know the secret of being an effective teacher.



This same principle has governed my own approach to the development of a strong and successful programme of Initial Teacher Education.

Excellence and social justice have been guiding lights for me in my journey from teacher educator to leader of a successful and influential team at the University of Derby. Throughout, I have maintained a commitment to professional improvement whilst still being true to the values which led me to join the profession ten years ago. Importantly, as members of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) we have a duty to support each other in developing our approaches to teacher education. This duty exists at a personal and institutional level. A commitment to subject and professional bodies such as the HEA and the Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) should be central to our sense of mutual support.

The tone of the learning experience is as important as the content. As teachers we model cognitive learning strategies, social skills, emotional resilience in intellectual endeavour and social responsibility. That is why treating students with decency and humanity should be central to how we approach teaching:

*'Every time we learn something, we learn something about learning.'* (Claxton, 1990)

My teaching approach is centred on self-regulated learning and understanding the power of learning

strategies. Reading about the possibility of teaching learning strategies for self-regulated learning in Palinscar and Brown (1984) was an epiphany for me. Their work has become a theoretical driving force for my research and teaching. My own experience as a teacher suggested that learning (in schools and at university) can be thrillingly engaging or passive and tedious. This was in part informed by my research to explore the experience of learners in teacher education:

- The assessment lives of student teachers. Teaching inspired research project, University of Derby, 2006.
- The development of teacher reflection on placement. ESCalate workshop, 2007.
- The power of the tutorial. Teaching inspired research project, University of Derby, 2008.
- Professional resilience in student teachers. Research inspired curriculum grant project, University of Derby, 2009.

When students pay higher fees to study, the quality of their learning experience will be an even more significant factor in their choice of where to study. Research into learning and teaching in school and universities will provide the insight and foundations upon which improvement and adaptation to changing circumstances are built, for example by rationalising the student experience of assessment, more centred on and regulated by the student. The seminar is a powerful mediating tool for formative assessment



linking university-based workshops and school-based activities. This relates to my reading of the principles of assessment of learning (Black and Wiliam, 1998). Whereas our students previously had to wait a long time before receiving feedback on school-based activities, they now receive early feedback within group seminars. Overall I believe that this has contributed to overall student satisfaction of 95% in the National Student Survey in teacher education at the university.

### **University and school partnerships**

Developing and leading an integrated model of partnership learning is the future for all schools and universities. This involves a more cohesive and coherent learning experience integrating university-based learning and school-based training. This can only be achieved by developing a shared understanding of the role and the aims of the partnership. This includes cohesive and coherent links between taught programmes and training undertaken in schools. Partnerships must go beyond Initial Teacher Education to provide continuing professional and leadership development.

The power of partnership is an important resource for developing the learning of trainee teachers. Whilst traditional school placements are still necessary for trainee teachers, they are not sufficient. In 2004 I developed a model of short focused placements for students in schools in challenging circumstances. The head teacher of one local primary school (with the lowest SATs results in England) called me to say that

her pupils were 'buzzing' after the visit to her school of a group of BEd students. They had produced a drama activity and a whole unit of work covering mathematics, all centred on the story 'Six Dinner Sid':

*'Your students produced a tapestry of the houses Six Dinner Sid visited every night. I've never seen anything like it before.'*

*Head teacher feedback on the short focused placement I organised (2005)*

Supporting each other through professional networks is part of the wider 'learning community'. Over the last three years, I have led a group of providers across the Midlands in the development of student teachers' practice in relation to Special Educational Needs and Disability. With regular meetings to review the work of the group, staff from special schools and teacher educators have been working together to implement training for hundreds of students in each institution. Observations of teaching provided opportunities to critique teaching materials and interview students. Peer review of this kind provides a constructive opportunity for each provider to make progress in preparing students for teaching and supporting all learners.

The white paper suggests a model of teacher education based on a University Training School. This offers the opportunity of developing research-informed principles and practices for teacher education in a closer school partnership. Many



schools are already involved in 'Professional Learning Communities'. Whilst the opportunities for training from Local Authority advisers and consultants may be more limited in light of the Comprehensive Spending Review (2010), University Training Schools may even strengthen such communities of practice. The ultimate guiding light should be the quality of learning experience and outcomes of learning for children (and consequently for adults). If there has been a difficulty in recruiting schools to existing initial teacher education partnerships, it could be that there has been an insufficient focus on the impact on children's learning of initial teacher education.

Together schools and universities can work together for the common good of children and all learners. There is uncertainty, but there is also great potential for the future. Courage, principle and collaboration are the way ahead for teacher education.

---

### References

- Black, P. and Wiliam, D. (1998) Assessment and classroom learning. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice*, 5 (1), 7-74.
- Browne, J. (2010) *Independent review into higher education funding and student finance. Securing a sustainable future for higher education*. London: HMSO.
- Claxton, G. (1990) *Teaching to learn*. London: Cassell.
- DfE (2010) *The importance of teaching: schools white paper*. London: HMSO.
- HM Treasury (2010) Spending Review 2010. London: The Stationery Office. [http://cdn.hm-treasury.gov.uk/sr2010\\_completereport.pdf](http://cdn.hm-treasury.gov.uk/sr2010_completereport.pdf) [accessed 16 March 2011]
- Palinscar, A.S. and Brown, A.L. (1984) Reciprocal teaching of comprehension-fostering and comprehension-monitoring activities. *Cognition and Instruction*, 1, 117-175.

# Listening, nurturing, and pulling: a passion to teach with care



Caroline Walker-Gleaves, School of Education, Durham University

Ten years after winning a National Teaching Fellowship whilst teaching at Sunderland University I can look back and say it was a profound turning point in my career in higher education. Born of urban industrial development in the early twentieth century, Sunderland University is a mid-size urban institution of the North East of England, which has served the needs of an increasingly local community since the 1970s. Known nationally for its pioneering work in increasing access to education within deprived communities, the student body has a very significant white, working class adult and part-time student population, mainly composed of individuals who are the first in their families to study in HE. These characteristics describe me well – a white working class woman, born and raised in a deprived urban community, the first generation in my family to attend university, and who had studied part-time for many years, amassing qualifications that I hoped one day would assure me entry to the ranks of ‘university lecturer’. When I first became a lecturer at Sunderland University in 1999 I was confronted by these similarities, as well as by some differences, between many of the teaching staff and me and determined to understand these whilst getting to know this community of which I had become a part.

In this effort, during the first year of my appointment, I laid out – metaphorically – my ‘teaching stall’ in the form of structures, timetables, course materials and not least, relationships that I envisaged would form the basis of my work as a HE teacher. Being in many ways strikingly similar to the students whom I was teaching, I came to understand that the university’s maxim ‘Sunderland is life-changing’ should happen at a relational level, through provoking a student into a risky argument in an essay; or handing work back just one more time with writing scrawled all over it; or planning a seminar around students’ experiences rather than abstract concepts. I took this mission to heart, hoping to change lives through individual interactions of learning. Buoyed by the enthusiasm and increasingly adventurous work that students were handing in, and validated by the affirmative and encouraging comments from external examiners, I spent more and more time organising my classes differently in time, space and content, and began to submit substantially altered module guides to the Quality Committee. To my surprise, I came to the notice of my department’s staff: some were deeply suspicious of what I must be doing, stating that as a ‘university lecturer’ I could not justify spending so much time with students. Others were concerned by



my compulsive need to make such terrifying demands on students who had never studied before. Others were simply bemused by the large numbers of presents I received at the end of every semester, almost always with the same message – ‘thank you for forcing me to be better than I thought I was’. When it came to nominating a faculty member for consideration for the University’s application procedure, I think that one reason they chose me was the sheer volume of flowers that arrived at the School of Education reception every term!

In truth though, it was the flowers – and the messages – that made me decide not only that I could engage with the National Teaching Fellowships, but also that I was demonstrating something original – excellence perhaps – in my work that was making a profound difference to these students. When I joined the University I was what Hoyle (1975) would call a ‘restricted’ professional in that my focus of teaching was mainly on educational outcomes as a function of classroom behaviours. Hoyle and many others since have used this term critically when comparing it with ‘extended professionalism’ that, they argue, takes a more sophisticated account of pedagogy, predicated multiply on context and collegiality as well. But it was this notion of the restricted professional that contributed to my eventual pedagogy and what for me, has contributed to a much deeper understanding of student learning. For me, there seemed to be a

paradox at the heart of my work: the university’s espoused mission was to change lives, and learning seemed to resonate with the notion that the students’ acceptance to study at university was at the centre of all our work. But in this relentless focus upon being ‘life changing’ of the actual lived experience of the students – their individual hopes, aspirations, triumphs – seemed to be cast into shadow. For me personally it seemed as if we had somehow put aside what I saw as our central purpose to change one life at a time.

In 2000, a year after I had commenced my employment at the university, I began to understand and to question deeply for the first time, the received wisdom that being a so-called ‘extended’ professional gave one a clearer view of pedagogy. I began carefully to examine the possibility that being a ‘restricted’ professional would allow me the freedom to experiment with new forms of pedagogic relationship that put centre stage, students’ ‘lived experiences’ of learning. It was these ideas that informed my work and that I sought to recount and describe in my National Teaching Fellowship application. Although I have always found the idea of engaging in anything that is both public and competitive frankly terrifying, it is ironic that the reasons I was able to apply at all were the contradictions and inconsistencies in my own background. At Sunderland I was both comforted by the familiarity of the students’



backgrounds and the dual conflict of aiming low because of dulled expectations, yet aiming at all because of fervent aspirations. I took this philosophy with me when I wrote my final application, after I had been selected as the University's candidate.

I won a National Teaching Fellowship in 2001, and it gave me the courage and voice to argue tentatively that this 'restricted' view of pedagogy could actually be re-stated as a purposeful pedagogy that placed relationships and the 'in between space' centre stage in understanding students' learning. The money that I won allowed me to take some time away from teaching, and to travel to universities around the UK where I discussed my ideas on relational approaches to teaching. I have written many papers pursuing the philosophy of relationships, throughout, seeking to explore the impact on education of more progressive and personal interpretations of learner-centredness. But still, although I had won the award, because I had no other point of reference I assumed that what it really meant to be a university lecturer from my background was to be forever 'restricted' and seek to enhance learning only through a focus on narrow behaviours prescribed by the missions of learner-centredness and responsiveness. I had not realised that I was allowed to clarify for myself what this meant in practice, exploring as I went along assumptions about what 'learner-centredness' actually meant. Although it took time, it slowly dawned on me that attention to all elements of teaching was

indeed being 'learner-centred', and moreover, that my learner-centredness was encapsulated in the beliefs and practices of 'caring teaching'.

Such revelations were predicated upon my reading around the experiences of the students whom I taught, centred upon a localised and empowering interpretation of teaching, drawing on the work of Belenky et al (1986) on narratives of underrepresented groups, but also, critically, on the work of Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings. I had come to be interested in the work of these latter two writers because they clarified for me the complex dichotomy within my teaching: an ambivalence toward the existing curriculum structures that seemed to govern all aspects of the university's teaching and a compulsion to make a reality of the university mission to be 'life changing', no matter what it took. Gilligan and Noddings seemed to offer me that possibility: Carol Gilligan through her theorisation of a 'relational justice' that validated individually negotiated experiences of learning and Nel Noddings through her theorisation of caring relational zones with the emphasis on motivational displacement and engrossment.

Using Noddings' and Gilligan's writings I came to realise that the dimensions in my teaching which I had not explored before were predicated upon my own autobiography. Step by step I took Gilligan and Noddings as my guides and 'translated' critical



elements of my work into relational and caring teaching. I changed taught classes into a series of small seminars so that I could explore 'cognitive and emotional engrossment'; I changed assignment deadlines into early hand-ins and last-chances so I could try out relational justice in assessment; I changed module teaching into experiences and practice sessions so I could try out fidelity and cognitive consonance.

All of these interactions, all of the experiences I have described, have taken place over the last decade. Whilst the financial reward of the National Teaching Fellowship gave me the freedom and yes – credibility – to speak and to be listened to, it has ultimately been the act of reflection that I feel has made me a better, more insightful teacher. That initial writing of that essay to 'claim' my excellence was the starting point in my explaining my interest in understanding the contexts from which my students come and the experiences that continue to shape them as learners and future teachers. Then the constant reflections on why I won the award in the first place have led me to

examine my own context and experiences and to decide that affecting the wider community of teachers – becoming 'extended' – is not more important than remaining 'restricted': it's just as important. Although 'Changing Lives' was my story, I had never assembled it before in a cohesive narrative form either for myself or for others. The National Teaching Fellowship allowed me to do this, and through its composition, I have been able to glimpse hitherto unseen patterns and unacknowledged relationships between my own learning experiences and my teaching practices, thus making connections between myself as a learner and as a teacher.

---

### References

- Hoyle, E. (1975) Professionalism, professionalism and control in teaching. In V. Houghton *et al.* (Eds) *Management in education: the management of organisations and individuals*. London: Ward Lock Educational in association with Open University Press.
- Belenky, M.F., Clinchy, B.M., Goldberger N.R., and Tarule, J.M. (1986) *Women's ways of knowing*. NY: Basic Books.

# A teaching journey



David Watson, Principal, Green Templeton College, Oxford

I have been asked to reflect on my experience as a teacher in higher education, and why the National Teaching Fellowship is important to me. For a little while I may keep my status as a pub quiz question: who is the only former Vice-Chancellor to be a National Teaching Fellow? When I lose that distinction I may last a little longer through the corollary: who is the only former Chair of the Advisory (Selection) Committee to become a Fellow? From this I hope it comes across that I am very proud of my Fellowship and what it represents.

In 2006 I was privileged to be invited to present the newly inaugurated Teaching Awards at the University of Oxford. I concluded my introductory speech as follows:

*“After many years in the business I remain convinced that being an effective teacher is high up the list of intangible benefits that attract bright women and men into academic careers. Events like this evening’s mean that for many it is still the feature that gives them most satisfaction. Some people in and around higher education would quarrel*

*with this view. They believe, for example, that (in the words of Lord May, President of the Royal Society) success in the Research Assessment Exercise is “the only game in town,” or that commercial exploitation of university-based knowledge is the path to personal as well as institutional enrichment. I think that they are wrong.”*

In 2010 I attended this ceremony again, as a Head of House. My career has almost come full circle: my first major job in UK HE was as a course leader in an interdisciplinary field, as was my role when I was awarded my Fellowship. In addition, and during the course of this career, I have played other relevant roles: as a senior manager, as the head of two institutions (one large, and one very small), and as a contributor to a number of national and international agencies and initiatives (Watson, 2007a, 2007b).

My disciplinary background is as an historian, and I have been an active teacher and researcher in the history of ideas. I am proud of my published work in this area, including my books on the American



philosophers Margaret Fuller published in 1988 and Hannah Arendt published in 1992. However, I have moved significantly over time to apply this disciplinary training and experience to HE policy and practice, including pedagogy (Watson, 2008).

Although I come from a line of school teachers (my grandfather taught science and my father languages in state secondary schools), I always knew that I could never match them in terms of the patience and vicarious satisfactions it takes to be a really good teacher in schools. I did, however, have some experience at this level: as a gap-year teacher in Julius Nyerere's wonderful experiment in 'education for self-reliance' in Tanzania in the momentous year of 1967-68; immediately after graduating as a supply teacher in North London (the last year when you were regarded as qualified with just an Honours degree); and as a part-time teacher of music in a Quaker school in Philadelphia while I worked on my PhD (at the University of Pennsylvania, 1971-75). But from when I was an undergraduate student in history at Cambridge (1968-71) I knew I wanted to be a teacher in HE.

In that respect I have basically had five jobs over 35 years in five very different English institutions.

**Crewe and Alsager College of Higher Education, Senior Lecturer then Principal Lecturer in Humanities, 1975-81.** These were the heady days of public sector 'diversification',

following the James report and the major cuts to teacher education. My key responsibility was the development of a new suite of courses in the humanities.

**Oxford Polytechnic, Dean of the Modular Course then Assistant Director (Academic), 1981-90.** I went to Oxford as the fourth Dean of the pioneering undergraduate Modular Course. With colleagues I was responsible for its re-design and re-validation for its second decade. During my Deanship the course at least doubled in size on every dimension (see Watson, 1989; Bines and Watson, 1992). I continued to teach throughout, with responsibility for the compulsory final year history module 'Theories of social change (4910)'.

**Brighton Polytechnic/University of Brighton, Director and Vice-Chancellor, 1990-2005.**

During my fifteen years as head of the polytechnic and university, the institution developed a substantial reputation for partnership work (for example, the establishment of the Brighton & Sussex Medical School), for innovation (for example, the annual Learning and Teaching conferences), and for civic engagement. Two of my books build substantially upon this experience (Watson, 2000, 2007b). Working with colleagues, I also continued my interest in professional formation (Bourner, Katz and Watson, 2000).



**Institute of Education, University of London, Professor of Higher Education, 2005-10.** After retiring from Brighton, I was appointed to the Institute's new chair of HE management. One of my main responsibilities was as Course Director of the Institute's highly successful MBA in Higher Education Management, which began under the leadership of Professors Michael Shattock and Gareth Williams in 2002 (Watson, 2009a).

**Green Templeton College, Oxford, Principal, 2010.** Green Templeton is formally Oxford's newest College, formed in 2008 through the merger of Green College, with its strong traditions in medicine, health, and education, and Templeton, the foundation stone of Oxford's work in business and management. It has approximately 500 students, all post-graduate, and focuses on issues of human welfare. One of my main tasks is to ensure that the College adds value to their academic experience.

In addition to conventional teaching and research supervision I regard my developmental work with groups across the sector in the UK and abroad as a form of teaching. I have found widespread interest on the part of institutions and groups in the outcomes of my research and development activities on lifelong learning, academic frameworks, professional formation, widening participation, community engagement, ethical standards in governance, and leadership and management (Watson and Taylor,

1998; Schuller and Watson, 2009). It has also been a privilege to serve on national and international bodies seeking to improve higher education: the Council for National Academic Awards; the Funding Councils; the ESRC Teaching and Learning Programme; the Institute for Teaching and Learning (fore-runner of the Higher Education Academy); the Paul Hamlyn National Commission on Education; and especially the Dearing Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (Watson and Amoah, 2007).

This story may appear to some readers as more about management than about teaching and learning in HE. I would argue that it is not. Academic leadership and management is a necessary (but of course not sufficient) condition of effective learning and teaching, especially in the complex relationships that characterise higher education. I learned this lesson through meta-analysis of a substantial body of evaluation work on the 'natural experiment' of the Oxford Polytechnic Modular Course: students appreciated charismatic and inspirational teaching, but they also needed sound organisation and trust in the system. Somewhat later I published with Jean Bocock (then of the union NATFHE): *Managing the University Curriculum: making common cause* (Bocock and Watson, 1994). At that stage this was a highly controversial proposal, and Jean and I were attacked accordingly. Subsequently, I would suggest, it has become an orthodoxy, as well as a widely recognised source of professional obligation.



My latest book is on university morale (Watson 2009b). Why is so much discourse about contemporary higher education structured around (real and imagined) unhappiness? What should we be doing about it? Reflection on how and why we came to be in the business is a good start at the answer.

---

### References

- Bines, H. and Watson, D. (1992) *Developing professional education*. Maidenhead: SRHE/Open University Press.
- Bocock, J. and Watson, D. (Eds) (1994) *Managing the university curriculum: making common cause*. Maidenhead: SRHE/Open University Press.
- Boumer, T., Katz, T. and Watson, D. (2000) *New directions in professional higher education*. Maidenhead: SRHE/Open University Press.
- Schuller, T. and Watson, D. (2009) *Learning through life: report of the inquiry into the future of lifelong learning*. Leicester: NIACE.
- Watson, D. (1989) *Managing the modular course: perspectives from Oxford Polytechnic*. Maidenhead: SRHE/Open University Press.
- Watson, D. (1990) *Managing strategy*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Watson, D. (2007a) Academic identities and the story of institutions. In R. Barnett and R. Di Napoli (Eds) *Changing identities in higher education*, London: Routledge, p 175-81.
- Watson, D. (2007b) *Managing civic and community engagement*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Watson, D. (2008) *Historical methods applied to higher education policies and practices*. London: TLRP. <http://www.tlrp.org/capacity/rm/wt/watson> [accessed 16 March 2011]
- Watson, D. (2009a) Can we teach higher education management? In V. Bamber, P. Trowler, and M. Saunders *Enhancing teaching and learning in higher education: theory, cases, practices*. Maidenhead: Open University Press, p 113-120.
- Watson, D. (2009b) *The question of morale; managing happiness and unhappiness in university life*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill/Open University Press.
- Watson, D. and Taylor, R. (1998) *Lifelong learning and the university*. London: Falmer Press.
- Watson, D. and Amoah, M. (2007) *The Dearing Report: ten years on*. London: Bedford Way Papers.

Discussions in Education Series

Ten years of National Teaching Fellowships: four stories from education

ISBN 978-1-907207-32-7 April 2011

## ESCalate

University of Bristol  
Graduate School of Education  
35 Berkeley Square  
Bristol BS8 1JA UK

Tel: 0117 331 4291

Email: [heacademy-escalate@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:heacademy-escalate@bristol.ac.uk)

This is one of a series of discussion papers commissioned for ESCalate, for more details see our website.

[escalate.ac.uk](http://escalate.ac.uk)

**The**  
Higher  
Education  
**Academy** **Subject**  
**Centre for**  
**Education**  
**ESCalate**