

Inquiring how a lecturer keeps learning about their teaching.  
A personal history case study on reflective imagination

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**INQUIRING HOW A LECTURER KEEPS LEARNING ABOUT  
THEIR TEACHING – A PERSONAL HISTORY CASE STUDY  
ON REFLECTIVE IMAGINATION**

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## INQUIRING HOW A LECTURER KEEPS LEARNING ABOUT THEIR TEACHING – A PERSONAL CASE STUDY ON REFLECTIVE IMAGINATION

‘But I grow old always learning many things.’

Solon (c. 640 – c. 558 BC): Plutarch, Solon, xxxi

*In order to reverse the use of lecture-based teaching, it is argued that personal reflection can be used as part of the quality assurance process. This paper proposes one response to personal reflection – reflective imagination, which is summarised as an action plan with six activities. It combines two conceptual issues raised in the US, the need to think creatively about learning and the reflective mindset, and one issue raised in the UK, cultivating the entrepreneurial imagination. Reflective imagination is linked to wider social science research, the place of self and reflexivity in scholarship. Finally, a personal history case study is presented which records a visit to Harvard Business School. The visit implements the six activities associated with reflective imagination. This is a method paper exploring reflective imagination.*

### **Keywords**

Learning, reaching, personal case study, reflective imagination, method paper

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## **Introduction**

In higher education in the United Kingdom (UK) quality assurance has different names and different processes. One process evaluating the quality of learning and teaching is currently called “subject review” (Race 1999). It uses a peer review system based on a self-assessment document in which the subject team identify the aims and objectives against which their provision will be judged under six key headings:

- curriculum design content and organisation
- teaching, learning and assessment
- student support and guidance
- student progression and achievement
- learning resources
- quality management and enhancement

This paper focuses on the second heading, teaching, learning and assessment, and, in particular, the implicit question – how do lecturers keep learning about teaching? This is a vital topic because there is a disparity between the declared purpose of transformatory learning in higher education and much of the prevailing practice which in the main is

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transmittive (Brockbank and McGill 2000). By transmittive it is meant the one way transfer of knowledge from the expert lecturer to the dependent student learner. Teaching in this way does not necessarily facilitate effective learning because it is not student-led (Abd-Elsalam 2003, Mumford 1993).

There are now formal accredited certificated courses which enable lecturers to be recognised by the Higher Education Academy as either a 'Registered Practitioner' or an 'Associate Practitioner'. These courses educate lecturers about how to teach more effectively. Enrolment may take place at the start of or during a career. New researchers and lecturers are encouraged to enrol on such a course as part of their research training, institutional induction or appraisal system. But there are also informal approaches to study. One example is personal reflection in order to challenge the assumptions that underpin an individual's teaching method.

Personal reflection is part of the quality assurance process. It takes the form of a personal self assessment which may be documented or not, instead of an institutional self-assessment which is exhaustively documented. Personal self-assessment is driven by the traditional value of teaching being a vocation for a lecturer, wanting to put something positive back into society. The positive here is giving a student the opportunity to obtain advantages, which may be career-oriented, by acquiring new knowledge of a subject and understanding how that knowledge can be applied. More than that, it is about the student

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becoming a good citizen, who in turn will put something positive back into society.

(Mintzberg 2004.)

It should not be forgotten that both the formal courses and informal personal reflection are part of the ideological nature of higher education (Barnett 1990). Government policy assumes a link between improving ‘educational standards, national competitiveness, wealth creation, personal well-being, social cohesion, citizenship and the quality of life.’ (Robertson 1998, p. 27). The link is conceptualised through the notion of creating a learning society. Coffield (2000, p. 32) stresses the need to treat the concept and government programmes as issues for critical exploration:

‘to develop the theoretical understanding of the processes of learning, the concept of human capital formation and relationships between employment, training and education’

It has been noted that the paper focuses on the process of learning and, in particular, will discuss how one lecturer continuously inquires into how he learns about his teaching by revealing his personal reflection process – “reflective imagination”, which emerged from recent literature on learning and teaching. This will be achieved in three ways: by defining reflective imagination as a learning process, by relating the term to wider social science research about learning and by describing how reflective imagination was put into practice by the lecturer. Reflective imagination combines two conceptual issues raised in the United States (US), the need to think creatively about learning and the

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reflective mindset, and one issue raised in the UK, cultivating the entrepreneurial imagination. At the end of this Section, a Figure is presented in order to capture how the lecturer turned the conceptual issues into a practical action plan so that reflective imagination could be operationalised for him. This is not a prescriptive model, indeed, the term has deliberately avoided. Instead, it is one possible action plan, which readers can adopt, modify or completely change in order to adapt the ideas of reflective imagination to their individual needs and circumstances. Reflective imagination is then linked to wider social science research, the place of self and reflexivity in scholarship, which are then related to current policy debates. Finally, a personal history case study is presented which records a visit to Harvard Business School. It is too early to identify early implications of the visit – this is not an empirical paper, but a method paper exploring reflective imagination.

### **Learning about the learning process – reflective imagination**

Professor Howard Thomas, Dean of Warwick Business School, argues that there is the myth of standardised business education:

‘Business schools worldwide are beginning to realise that educational models are no longer static, isolated structures.’ (Thomas 2006, p. 8).

He argues this despite the 1999 Bologna Declaration, which aims to turn the heterogeneous systems of higher education in European countries into a European Higher

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Education Area, where higher education degrees are comparable, mobile and widely recognised. He also argues this despite other leading academics finding increasing uniformity around certain products, for example, MBA programmes (Mintzberg 2004).

One explanation for the variation in business education is that the learning process is a contested area, that-is-to-say, there are different models being used. The paper focuses on personal development. Coffield (2000) notes, however, that just in terms of the notion of the learning society, in addition to personal development, there are nine other models being used.

The aim of the personal development model is to promote individual self-fulfilment through greater participation in all forms of learning (Coffield 2000). Payne (2000, p. 2) notes that ‘When people make their own choices about learning they are much more likely to enjoy it.’ Bartlett and Rees (2000) add that people need guidance to ensure that choice in the learning market for individuals is not just increased but informed.

The author sought guidance by reflecting on recent literature on learning and teaching. This learning process is emergent and eventually led to the combining of two conceptual issues raised in the US, the need to think creatively about learning and the reflective mindset, and one issue raised in the UK, cultivating the entrepreneurial imagination. Out of this synthesis emerged reflective imagination.

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Before describing the concepts in more detail, it is important to note the methodological underpinnings of this theorising. The author takes a critical perspective, which has recently engaged with management practice. Brockbank and McGill (2000, p. 49) define critically transformative learning as:

‘not only deconstructing meanings and the taken-for-granted attitudes and myths and ways of seeing things, but also reconstructing by reconceptualizing and rebuilding – a continuous process that becomes the subject of further transformative learning.’

In other words, the researcher is:

‘No longer all-knowing, all-seeing, objective and omnipotent’ but ‘has been forced to re-examine his or her relation to the research process, and is now acutely aware of the social and historical positioning of all subjects and the particular intellectual frameworks through which they are rendered visible, the researcher can only produce knowledge already embedded in the power of those very frameworks.’ (Clegg and Hardy 2006, p. 435.)

This is a reflexive approach (Calas and Smircich 1999), of which more will be discussed in the next Section.

The critical perspective adopted here follows Flyvbjerg (2006), who proposes a methodology which relies on a particular case which is context-dependent. The case is the author’s personal inquiry into his teaching practice. The inquiry was a reflection on



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recent literature on learning and teaching, from which reflective imagination emerged. In short, existing concepts have been reconceptualized (Brockbank and McGill 2000) and then rendered visible in this paper (Clegg and Hardy 2006). The context of the case is described in detail in the last Section of the paper.

It is acknowledged that there are limitations with this approach, at both the theoretical and practical levels. At the theoretical level, Bourdieu (2000, p. 108) warns that deconstruction does not always lead to enlightenment:

‘it is naïve, even dangerous to suppose and suggest that one only has to ‘deconstruct’ these social artefacts in a purely performative celebration of ‘resistance’ in order to destroy them.’

This is especially true for those in higher education because the economic and social conditions that underlie the scholastic world view create the impression of impartial objectivity, which means that the world view may not be challenged enough. This line of thought echoes his earlier work on reproduction in education, society and culture. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) tackle the ideological function of the educational system head on as presupposing the illusion of neutrality, when the system services the dominant classes. Although there have been initiatives to widen university participation since Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) originally wrote their book, higher education opened up sufficiently over the last thirty years, especially in elite research-led universities both

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within and outside of the UK. University lecturers are unwittingly part of this reproduction system through their pedagogy.

At the practical level, by presenting an action plan, it might appear that the author is trying to diminish the role of other subjects: readers, researchers or managers. This could happen by not allowing readers to respond in their own way to reflective imagination (Nord and Jermier 1992). Readers should interpret the action plan from their own critical perspective.

The existing concepts that this paper drew on will be summarised first, they are then gradually reconceptualized as reflective imagination, which is represented as a Figure in order to capture how the lecturer turned the conceptual issues into a practical action plan so that reflective imagination could be operationalised for him. It is again emphasised that this is not a prescriptive model – readers can adopt, modify or completely change the plan in order to adapt the ideas to their individual needs and circumstances.

The first issue of the *Academy of Management Learning and Education* journal (2002) contains two papers deliberately grouped together in the Section ‘Essays, Dialogues and Interviews’. The Academy of Management is a prestigious US organisation, publishing four journals and hosting one annual conference. Each of the two papers paper raises a different conceptual issue in order to facilitate learning about the learning process. The first paper raises the issue of the need to think creatively about learning. The second

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paper suggests a process for thinking creatively and introduces the notion of the reflective mindset. Taking the papers together, they suggest why different business schools are likely to follow different paths and introduce educational models particular to their context.

The first paper is an interview with Russell L. Ackoff, who is one of the founders of operations research and systems thinking, because of the links he made between science and business. In the interview, he argues:

‘The fact is that teaching is the major obstruction of learning.’ (Detrick 2002, p. 58).

To elaborate, the problem arises from ‘the implicit assumption in most educational institutions that learning is the converse of teaching, that an ounce of teaching produces and ounce of learning.’ (Detrick 2002, p. 56). The problem for Ackoff is threefold:

‘The first was to equip students with a vocabulary that enables them to talk about subjects they do not understand. The second was to give students principles that would demonstrate their ability to withstand any amount of disconfirming evidence. The third was to give students a ticket of admission to a job where they could learn something about management.’ (Detrick 2002, p. 56).

The solution lies in the observation that ‘People learn from others by following their curiosity’ (Detrick 2002, p. 58). More practically, the solution lies in thinking ‘creatively about learning, every single aspect of the educational process ought to be

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questioned and systematically denied and the consequences explored.’ (Detrick 2002, p. 63). Ackoff tackles a range of issues, but emphasises the role of incentive systems to get staff to effectively take into consideration the needs of students, not just what faculty think they would like to do. This includes teaching students to learn how to learn.

In the second paper, Mintzberg and Gosling (2002, p. 64) are more explicit about how to question the educational process. The ideas were expanded on later as part of a wider review of managing and management development (Mintzberg 2004). In reviewing the International Masters Program in Practicing Management (IMPM) ([www.ipm.org](http://www.ipm.org)), which operates in five different business schools (the Indian Institute of Management, INSEAD, Lancaster University School of Management, McGill and a collaboration of faculty from Japan and Korea), Mintzberg and Gosling (2002) argue that:

‘Borders of different kinds get in the way of management education.’ (Mintzberg and Gosling 2002, p. 64).

Through the word “borders”, Mintzberg and Gosling (2002) are not just using a representational device as a means of managing the educational process, but are positioning themselves within debates about management education. They do not like MBA Programmes. This is because, despite

‘all sorts of revisions in recent years – in international activities, uses of new pedagogical technologies, efforts to include more “soft skills”, and so forth. Yet

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the fundamentals – the focus on business functions and on analysis and technique – have not changed.’ (Mintzberg and Gosling 2002, p. 65)

By highlighting borders and then crossing them, the IMPM is aiming to develop collaborative managers who get the benefits of management development (relating development to practice) with management education (the depth of insight that can come in the academic setting). Reflective imagination is also concerned with recognising borders of any kind and then building bridges between them.

Four of Mintzberg and Gosling’s (2002) borders are directly relevant to the current argument, all of which are related to a particular learning philosophy – the reflective mindset. The first border asserts that educating managers goes beyond globalisation. By this it is meant: ‘To broaden people beyond geographic borders means not only to teach about globalization, but also to provide a truly balanced international experience.’ (Mintzberg and Gosling 2002, p. 67). This is part of the reason why the IMPM operates in five different business schools.

The second border asserts that educating managers goes beyond teaching: ‘Learning occurs where concepts meet experiences through reflection.’ (Mintzberg and Gosling 2002, p. 66). This is a blended strategy in which formalised knowledge is linked to personal experience by confronting old beliefs with new ideas, a process enhanced by collaboration.

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The third border asserts that educating managers goes beyond functions. By this it is meant that: ‘The nature of managerial work, not the functions worked on, is the natural way to organize management education.’ (Mintzberg and Gosling 2002, p. 68). Management education should not be function-oriented and move away from studying in isolation marketing, finance, human resources and strategy.

The underlying assumption is that everything that effective managers do is sandwiched between reflection and action – managers work where thoughtful thinking meets practical doing. Here, I focus on thoughtful thinking, which lies at the core of the reflective mindset. The core of the reflective mindset concerns meeting yourself by deliberately getting out of the daily routine and doing something unusual. In the first module of the IMPM, participants take part in variety of activities:

- an initial out-of-doors activity, for example, touring historical sites, in order to loosen up the cultural baggage and to appreciate the stages of economic development
- there are drama workshops, exchanges on managerial work and personal styles, probes into learning organizations and appreciative systems and discussions of ethics and spirituality
- field studies in small groups, for instance, cultural audits to the organizations headquarters

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- outward bound type exercises

The fourth border asserts that educating managers goes beyond classrooms: 'Management education has to extend into the organization, by using work and making impacts.' (Mintzberg and Gosling 2002, p. 70). Each of the five business schools delivers a Module and the participating managers are expected to write a reflection paper a month or two after the managers have returned to their jobs. They revisit the material of each Module and link what seems to be relevant to their organisation.

Taking the two papers together, they set the context for the reflective half of reflective imagination. Reflection has five activities which form part of an action plan in order to operationalise this part of the author's learning process:

- every single aspect of the educational process ought to be questioned and systematically denied and the consequences explored
- there should be an international dimension to the questioning and exploration
- questioning and exploration, that-is-to-say reflection, links concepts and experiences
- the reflective mindset concerns meeting yourself by deliberately getting out of the daily routine and doing something unusual
- in the end, reflection has to return to the origins of the reflection, back to the organization, in this case, the educational process

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The two papers argue that managers from the UK are particularly good at reflection.

Ackoff states:

‘I think the British system is better than ours. Their managers are broadly educated people and ours are not. Most American managers are not well rounded. So I think an undergraduate program should be broadening; specialization should come at the graduate level.’ (Detrick 2002, p. 62).

This could explain why Mintzberg and Gosling (2002, p. 69) believe that there is a ‘British predisposition to reflection’. Keep and Westwood (2002) add a note of caution, suggesting that nothing fails like success, which may come to haunt the UK’s management educators.

More specifically, Chia (1996) argues that in the UK there is the prevalent emphasis on the vocationalisation of business programmes in order to make them more relevant. Chia’s (1996) reorientation promotes the cultivation of the entrepreneurial imagination. He requires a radical shift in pedagogical priorities away from teaching analytical problem-solving skills to requiring that management academics themselves, in the first instance, engage in intellectual entrepreneurship. This implies a conscious and deliberate attempt on their part to explore the world of ideas boldly and without the undue inhibitions of disciplinary restraints.



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For Chia (1996), literature and the arts provides the best means of stimulating the association of different ideas. This is because the traditional scientific mentality emphasises the simplification of the complex multiplicity of our experiences into manageable principles and axioms. In contrast, literature and the arts have persistently emphasised the task of complexifying our thinking processes and hence sensitising us to the subtle nuances of contemporary modern life. Breaking away from the dominant frames of thought and established conventions sets the entrepreneur apart from others.

Chia (1996) sets the context for the imaginative half of reflective imagination. Combining Chia's (1996) paper with Detrick (2002) and Mintzberg and Gosling's (2002) papers, an extra activity is added to the action plan in order to operationalise this part of the author's learning process:

- using our imagination in order to create and convey insights that help learners see their world in different and deeper ways, either by creating new knowledge or by conveying it thoughtfully

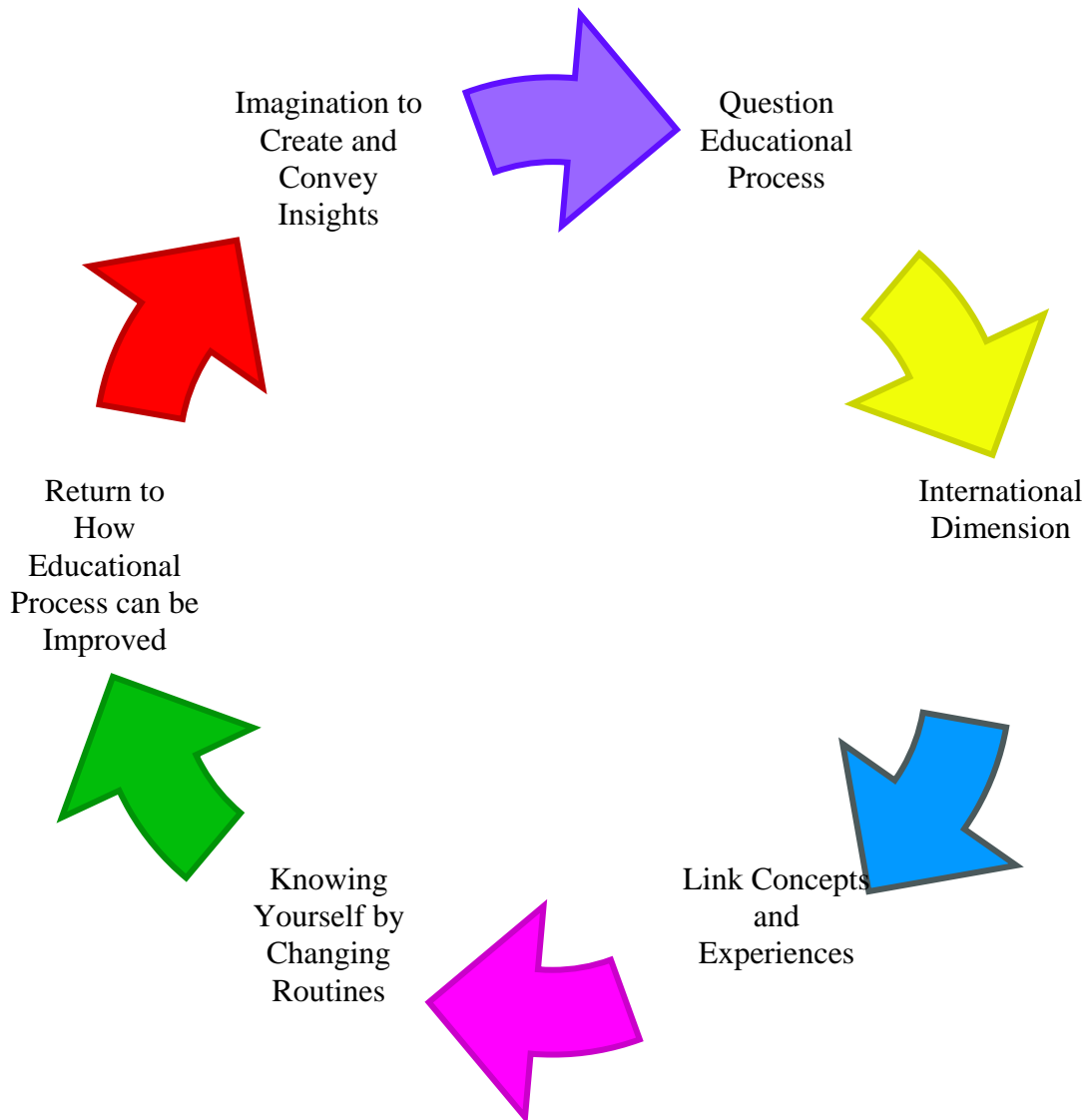
Reflective imagination then, as it is conceived in this paper, is a learning process which practically takes the form of an action plan consisting of six activities. It is a process to step back and critically consider important issues about the wider learning society, whether by reflection in the classroom, engagement in research or being a participant in

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the policy process. It represents academic institutions as havens in which to take stock. As Mintzberg (2004, p. 379) expresses it: ‘Society supports them [academics], in relatively small numbers, to be its conscience, in a sense.’ Figure 1 summarises the six activities of the action plan.

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Figure 1. Six Activities of Reflective Imagination



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### **Reflective imagination as an important social process**

It is tempting to narrowly focus on reflective imagination in business school teaching and view it as new, but this would isolate it from wider social science research about learning. Two processes from social science research will be highlighted here, the place of self and reflexivity in scholarship, which are then related to current policy debates. Self is linked to reflective imagination because the six activities are concerned with personal reflection. Reflexivity is linked to reflective imagination because the activities challenge the assumptions that underpin an individual's teaching method.

Harris (2001) notes that the place of self and reflexivity are widely debated by those working within the disciplinary frameworks of sociology and anthropology and those who are concerned with the development of social theory (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, Bourdieu 2000, Giddens 1984, 1990, Calas and Smircich 1999, Clegg and Hardy 2006). Harris (2001) extends the application of self and reflexivity to third sector scholarship and locates its application within existing social science scholarship. The place of self challenges positivist perspectives by, at its extreme, legitimising the researchers' own personal experiences as acceptable data. Denzin (1997) terms this "auto-ethnography".

Harris (2001, p. 757) explores the

'factors in my personal and family history that may have affected my choice of research projects, the way in which I have conducted and analyzed my findings, and the manner in which I have disseminated them.'

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She claims this as appropriate because ‘by acknowledging the role of our experiences and the role that we have played in research situations, we enable those who read our research findings, if they so wish, to evaluate them fully and to place them into context.’ (Harris 2001, p. 758).

Harris’ (2001) exploration of self is derived from early work on learning (Schon 1983, Kolb 1984). Schon (1983, pp. 241-242) describes his concept of ‘reflection-in-action’ as consisting in:

‘on-the-spot surfacing, criticizing, restructuring, and testing of intuitive understanding of experienced phenomena; often it takes the form of a reflective conversation with the situation.’

Similarly, in Kolb’s (1984, p. 26) theory of experiential learning, learning is depicted as a process in which

‘ideas are not fixed and immutable elements of thought but are formed and reformed through experience’.

Kolb’s (1984) work, however, has been criticised, notably for its unconvincing reference to the importance of context. Garner (2000), for example, acknowledges that Kolb recognises the influence of the environment, but argues that he makes no attempt to describe exactly what this influence is or how it can be best understood or measured. Such criticism leads Coffield, Moseley, Hall and Ecclestone (2004) to summarise the

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contribution of Kolb in terms of the need for more experimental evidence on which to base firm recommendations about pedagogy.

To offset the weaknesses of solely focusing on self and experiential learning cycles, the individual and the experiences of that individual need to be placed in a social setting in which there is adaptation to the environment. Reflexivity addresses these issues. It does this by reframing individual experience away from being a mirror of some real past event to being treated as a current performance that only makes sense as it is supplemented by others physically or symbolically present (Dachler and Hosking 1995).

Harris (2001) offsets the weaknesses of self and experiential learning by focusing on the researcher in reflexive mode. A researcher “constructs” the research setting that is, in turn, part of the researcher’s own social world (Beck 1992). The knowledge generated by research becomes a means through which the social world is constructed – not just for the researcher but also for research funders and the wider public (Deacon and Mann 1999). Harris (2001, p. 757) reflects on the way she conducts and analyses her research findings by acknowledging

‘my undergraduate education has been a very strong influence on my approach to research to date. In the early 1960s, the positivist social science paradigm was presented to us as truth, and we were urged to strive to be “value free”.’

She finds this energising because it ‘acknowledges explicitly what it is we are doing and how it affects our research ... Taking those hitherto hidden ingredients out of the closet

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and examining them give us new perspectives on our research endeavors for the future.’

(Harris 2001, p. 758).

Harris’s (2001) reflection on reflexivity is derived from current work on learning (Reynolds and Vince 2004) and one stream of organisational learning research (Shipton 2006). Reynolds and Vince (2004) emphasise the link between individuals within organisations, labelling this link “organising reflection”. They identify two developments: critical interpretations of reflection and a collective approach to understanding reflection. Critical interpretations raise questions about purpose and intent and about the assumptions and taken-for-granted on which organisational policies and practices are based – the questions may be neither comfortable or welcome. Collective approaches ask and answer the following question:

‘Can experience ever be constituted outside of social relations? We do not think so. Each of us, though unique as individuals, are positioned within society alongside hierarchies of power constructed around such factors as class, caste, racism, gender, age and sexuality.’ (Brah and Hoy 1989, p. 71.)

An example of how issues are positioned within society is quality assurance in UK higher education. Zorn, Page and Cheney (2000) argue that ambiguous terms like quality, customer service and efficiency become symbolic umbrellas to reshape practices with managerial biases. Applying Zorn et al’s (2000) argument to UK higher education, is quality about improving teaching, learning and assessment or is it about improving rankings. In other words, is quality about using our imagination in order to create and

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convey insights that help learners see their world in different and deeper ways, or is it about improving rankings, to increase student numbers and university income, which encourages transmissive teaching. Increased student numbers encourages transmissive teaching because teaching in a lecture hall is a convenient way of communicating the same information to large numbers.

Shipton (2006) also constitutes experience in terms of social relations. She has classified this perspective in a recent typology for organisational learning research as ‘Individuals Learning within an Organizational Context: The Descriptive Context’ (Shipton 2006, p. 246). The perspective draws from social psychology literature and is concerned understanding how individual learning is constrained or enabled by the environment as well as individual cognitive abilities (Simon 1991, Weick and Roberts 1993). Simon (1991, p. 125) has stated that

‘all learning takes place inside human heads and an organization learns in one of two ways: by the learning of its members or by ingesting new members who have knowledge that the organization didn’t previously have’.

In a similar way, Weick and Roberts (1993) have shown that, to achieve qualities such as “mindfulness” and “deftness”, individuals have to be trained and socialised so that each person has a deep understanding of both his or her role and that of the work group. According to this perspective, any limitations and constraints on learning are rooted in human cognitive limitations; because individuals experience bounded rationality, and



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because they vary in terms of the personality and cognitive capacities that they exhibit, there is always the possibility that data will be misinterpreted and less than optimum outcomes achieved.

This theme forms a central part of the ‘situated learning’ approach, which examines ideas surrounding “knowing” rather than “knowledge” (Cook and Brown 1999). Knowing involves gradually and almost subconsciously absorbing understanding what is required to perform well, including the questions to ask, the language to use and how and where best to focus efforts. Through storytelling, for example, communities of practitioners share their experiences of work using their own unique language and terminology (Brown and Duguid 1991). Accordingly, the way to promote organisational learning is to recognise its tacit dimension and to support communities as they develop the mechanisms required for sharing knowledge.

This theme also has a descriptive perspective. This type of research takes an ethnographic case-by-case approach that frequently makes generalisation inappropriate. Nevertheless, Gherardi, Nicolini and Odella (1998), for example, examining the progress of graduate apprentices within the Italian building industry, found that individual motivation and willingness to search for learning opportunities played a key role in determining which apprentices would successfully complete their training.

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Self and reflexivity are terms now occurring in current policy debates in higher education. Jenkins and Healey (2005) suggest an analytical framework to guide institutional strategies to link teaching and research. The framework ‘represents a key component’ of the Higher Education Academy’s engagement with understanding the relationship between teaching and research (Prosser 2005, p. 3). Prosser (2005, p. 3) also indicates that this ‘is one of international concern’.

The framework identifies four types of teaching-research links. The most developed link is described in a variety of ways. Griffiths (2004) suggests that teaching can be research-informed in the sense that it draws consciously on systematic inquiry into the teaching and learning process itself. Healey (2005) substitutes research-informed with research-tutored. Bradford (in Jenkins and Healey 2005) substitutes both with pedagogic research – enquiring and reflecting on learning. It is this enquiring and reflecting which relates current policy debates to self and reflexivity. Lecturers and institutions are being asked to reflect on themselves and their practices in order to improve teaching and make learning transformatory by being student-led (Brockbank and McGill 2000).

Reflective imagination adopts a research-informed strategy to link learning and teaching and acknowledges the place of self and reflexivity in scholarship. Jenkins and Healey (2005, p. 40) note that this type of research is under-developed both nationally and internationally:

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‘it does indicate that at present the specific strategies to ensure the links are largely from the ‘teaching’ side. It also suggests that the negative impacts of research selectivity on teaching are probably not being addressed through institutional research strategies.’

### **Engaging with reflective imagination – a personal history case study: Harvard Business School**

Although I continuously reflect on how I teach and the systems I participate in, my engagement with the learning process became more energetic after winning the Aston Excellence in Teaching Award (2005). An important caveat to make is that, for me, winning the Award made me question whether I really deserved it. Nevertheless, as part of winning the Award, there is a £5000 research grant to fund a project focused on learning and teaching.

This Section will not discuss any research findings – these are not available yet. Instead, it will discuss research methods – how the ideas about reflective imagination, presented in the previous Sections, were operationalised. This is only one response to the literature presented. The research strategy followed the action plan suggested by Detrick (2002), Mintzberg and Gosling (2002) and Chia (1996). The strategy will be outlined by linking different aspects of the plan together. The strategy will then move from personal reflection on learning to informing current practice. This is consistent with the shift from self to reflexivity.

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I am questioning and exploring how I teach and the systems I participate in by identifying an international example of good practice in learning and teaching, by observing and participating in that practice and then by reflecting what the implications might be for my experience of learning and teaching. The international example of good practice I have selected to observe and reflect on is the teaching of Professor Max Bazerman who is based at Harvard Business School.

Harvard Business School was selected for two reasons: its ranking according to one of the more respected business school ranking lists and its reputation. Harvard was selected because the Financial Times ranked it the best Business School for MBA teaching in the world in 2005 (Financial Times 2005, p. 13). The ranking has slipped to number two in 2006 (Financial Times 2006, p. 13). Harvard was also selected because it is famous for its use of The Case Method ([www.hbs.edu/case/index.html](http://www.hbs.edu/case/index.html)), which is replicated in many other Business Schools, including Cranfield where I was a Lecturer (2000-2003) and then a Visiting Fellow (2003-2006).

Professor Max Bazerman was also selected for two reasons. First, Max is an expert in one of the fields I teach – decision-making. Second, he has won teaching awards himself – this means that he has been institutionally recognised as a good teacher. In particular, Max has extensively researched and published in the field of behavioural decision-making (Bazerman 2006), including the multiple selves hypothesis (Bazerman,

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Tenbrunsel and Wade-Benzoni 1998) and the role of ethics (Banaji, Bazerman and Chugh 2003). He has won three teaching awards, two of which are from leading American Business Schools ([http://dor.hbs.edu/fi\\_redirect.jhtml?facInfo=bio&facEmId=mbazerman&loc=extn](http://dor.hbs.edu/fi_redirect.jhtml?facInfo=bio&facEmId=mbazerman&loc=extn) ). In 2002 and 2004, Max was named one of the top forty authors, speakers and teachers of management by Executive Excellence. In 2003, he received the Everett Mendelsohn Excellence in Mentoring Award from Harvard University's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. While at Kellogg, Max was named 'Teacher of the Year' by the Executive Masters Program of the Kellogg School.

The observation of Professor Max Bazerman's teaching links concepts and experiences of learning and teaching by participating in an Harvard Business School Executive Education Programme, 'Changing the Game: Negotiation and Competitive Decision Making', run between 23-28 October 2005. Max originated, manages and teaches on the annual Programme. Following the participation, Max was interviewed about his teaching philosophy, specifically drawing on the Programme as evidence of his philosophy. By doing this, I am deliberately getting out of the daily routine in order to focus and reflect on a different way of teaching. Although extremely useful, observation by itself is limited, despite the exchange of feedback, because it can focus on technique, for example, how well were the intended learning outcomes of the session communicated.

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The linking of participation and interview, of experience and concept, reveals both the teaching technique and the underpinning teaching philosophy.

The Team responsible for the Quality Assurance of the Executive Programme were also interviewed in order to understand the relationship between the content and the administration of the Programme. In addition, informal discussions were held with other participants in order to discover their reflections on the Programme. The data was triangulated between the teacher, the student and the administrator.

For the questioning and exploring to develop how I teach, the observation needs to inform current practice, in other words, where I work – the educational process at Aston Business School, and context in which the School operates, Aston University and the UK higher education environment. This paper is the start of that reflection.

To be more specific and to summarise the above discussion, the research question becomes – what can I and Aston University learn from Professor Max Bazerman and Harvard Business School? The research question is divided into research objectives which are grouped into three themes:

1. Learning from Professor Max Bazerman:

- to observe Max in action delivering his decision-making material

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- to be a participant observer in the use of the Harvard Case Study Method
- to interview Max about his teaching philosophy by discussing the why and how of what he does

## 2. Learning from Harvard Business School:

- to reflect on Harvard's customer care by taking part as a fee-paying participant would
- to interview the Administrators responsible for the Quality Assurance of the Executive Programme
- to discuss with other participants their reflections on the Executive Programme

## 3. Informing current practice:

- to disseminate good practice in Aston University through Aston Business School's Research Centre in Higher Education and Learning and Management (HELM)
- to disseminate good practice more widely by publishing research findings
- to engage with current policy debates in higher education

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As the research objectives are tackled, it is hoped that each one is reflected on imaginatively, by cultivating Chia's (1996) entrepreneurial imagination. Whereas Chia (1996) draws on literature and the arts, I will collaborate with colleagues to tease out learning. Collaborating with colleagues simulates team activity. Teams are hotbeds of creativity and innovation because they bring people together with different knowledge, skills and experiences (West and Markiewicz 2004).

There are limitations with this approach. Only one case study has been investigated, which makes the data particular to one context and difficult to generalise from (Shipton, 2006). Harvard Business School will only grant visitors limited access because it is a private university relying on payments from all its students, which in turn limits the amount of data that can be collected. It has been noted that this type of research is under-developed, adopting a research-informed strategy to link learning and teaching and acknowledging the place of self and reflexivity in scholarship, which means that the research method is novel (Jenkins and Healey 2005).

It is hoped that the limitations have been addressed. Having a novel research method is overcome by implementing a research strategy, in this case the six activities of reflective imagination, emerging from recent literature on learning and teaching and wider social science research about learning. Having one case study is overcome by acknowledging it



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as a descriptive account founded on ethnographic data, my personal history of choices leading me to visit and learn from Professor Max Bazerman and Harvard Business School. Having limited access is overcome by practically maximising the access I had – pre-arranging a schedule of activities.

### **Conclusion**

Reflective imagination supports one objective of UK national policy which is to maximise the potential benefits of the relationship between staff research and scholarship and student learning. The relationship matters from a staff point-of-view: ‘it is strongly arguable that unless there are benefits to teaching (and to other activities like community service and knowledge transfer) there is no case for doing research in universities at all.’ (Brown 2005, p. 2). More importantly, the relationship matters from a student point-of-view: ‘It is becoming clearer that those students who are not learning in an HE environment that is informed by research, and in which it is not possible to access research-related resources, are at a disadvantage compared to those who are’. (Research Forum Report 2004).

In particular, reflective imagination adopts a research-informed strategy to link learning and teaching and acknowledges the place of self and reflexivity in scholarship. This was achieved in three ways. Reflective imagination was defined, wider social science

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research about learning was related to the term and how reflective imagination can be put into practice was described.

Future research could further explore the term reflective imagination and define it in alternative ways. It could also relate the term to alternative literatures, expanding its application to other contexts. Finally, in addition, future research could build up more examples of practice, so that a repertoire of case studies can be used to reflect real-life issue and help lecturers keep learning about teaching.

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