

Teaching reforms: not a

Christopher R. Matthews argues that a consequence of the higher education reform is positive in that it improves teaching and plays to sociology's strengths



Stories of inspirational teachers are plentiful. These stories help us to explore pedagogical strategies that can switch on students to their extraordinary potential. It was lecturers with a background in sociology and anthropology, perhaps unsurprisingly, who fostered my own liminal learning experiences. It is such teachers, who seemingly have the ability to make their subject matter dazzle, that are largely responsible for the continuing success of our discipline.

However, what is sometimes absent from the romanticised retellings of such stories is that sociologists get a head start, a leg-up, if you will, over many of their colleagues at university. The passionate pedagogues who taught me had visceral, taboo, political, subversive and, dare I say it, 'cool' empirical case studies. I needed little encouragement to sink my academic milk teeth into these sociological debates.

Now, clearly, for some students a social scientific world-view might be challenging, but it is my experience that even the most dedicated Popperian can be brought round to the sociological imagination if one can find the correct hook with which to catch them. And it is precisely such hooks that sociologists, I would argue, have in abundance.

The nature of our science is tied up in varying ways and to varying depths with day-to-day lived realities. Indeed, these connections are an essential element of even the most theoretical of degree modules. Sure, all sciences have the same quality, but can they all boast the areas of research interest that we sociologists explore?

Furthermore, it is the inherent connection between our students' backgrounds and lives that can help to lock down fantastic sociological case studies within an embodied experience of learning. My own research with boxing has provided an empirical tool kit

which I return to time and time again (the Rocky films, for example, are writ large with structural and post-structural accounts of identity, amongst other things). This plethora of empirical themes, which are stitched into students' personal narratives, can give those of us teaching sociology our most powerful pedagogical instruments. With this position in mind, I would like to consider the place of sociology within the new market place of education.

As the sands of the education industry shift further towards a neo-liberal, market-driven model, inspirational teaching is of increasing importance. While we might not agree with the fundamental political and economic principles that are driving such change, it is a reality that many of us, especially those in the formative stages of our careers, are pragmatically accepting them as a means of obtaining and maintaining employment.

With an ever-increasing number of PhD graduates applying for what appears to be a stagnating or even declining number of jobs, recent graduates are increasingly aware of the demand to demonstrate experience and skill in teaching. The increased attention focused on 'student satisfaction', 'adding value' and the 'service of teaching' (I can feel you cringe) can draw us towards a default position of uncritically accepting that what the students want is more important than what they need to gain a well-rounded education.

Clearly there is an interplay here between listening to students and our understanding of what is necessary and appropriate in higher education. Maintaining a critical dialogue between the two is important if the trap of student satisfaction leading our teaching, rather than academically rigorous and passionate teaching leading to student satisfaction, is to be avoided.

Notwithstanding these precautionary comments, this shift has also helped to

centralise the student experience within the development, delivery and evaluation of degree programmes. For me, this is a positive outcome which has increased the importance placed on one's teaching credentials within the job market.

So while the focus for many is rightly on Gove, wages and working conditions in academia, there are a number of early career academics on temporary contracts diligently (desperately?) working to enhance their skills to switch on young minds.

This is not to say that this enhancement is dependent on market forces – clearly not – but rather to say that a by-product of the intensification of economic imperatives driving academia is an increased attention paid to academics' capabilities in the classroom.

Luckily for this next generation of passionate pedagogues, they have the same leg up that my lecturers had in that they have the same fantastic subject material to work with.

This leads me to my broader point: we should rightly be at the forefront of challenging the continued encroachment of economic forces into educational policy decisions. But it is to the detriment of the discipline if we are not aware of the positive educational outcomes which have accompanied this shift. Indeed, we should not ignore the fact that in the marketplace of education, sociology and sociologists have a unique product to sell (I can feel you cringe again).

My call here is for a more thorough realisation of the pedagogical opportunities that are embedded within our discipline as we move into a brave new commodified world of education.

A connected call is for sociologists to be at the forefront of their universities' digital transformations, whether this is in the form of using new media as teaching and communication devices, innovative assessment and learning strategies or simply embracing the clear sociological potentials of online social networking.

Perhaps this partial acceptance of the current trajectory of academia will not resonate with some readers' own political stances. And although I would certainly agree that we should challenge the prevailing trend of an increasing alignment with neo-liberal narratives, it would be remiss of us to not realise the potential that our subject matter has to switch on the minds of the next generation who might continue on such a fight.

• Dr Christopher R. Matthews is a lecturer in sport sociology at the University of Brighton.

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Open access update

BSA-HEA Workshop: Teaching Sociology in Higher Education

The BSA, in co-operation with the Higher Education Academy, is pleased to announce a one-day workshop that will focus on teaching sociology in higher education. Featuring keynote talks, interactive discussions and group collaboration, this session will explore some of the challenges and opportunities that lecturers face within the contemporary university landscape. Delegates will be encouraged to shape the direction of the day by working in groups to highlight issues connected to the teaching of sociology.

Speakers:

Professor Linda McKie
(Durham University)
Dr Christopher R. Matthews
(University of Brighton)
Alexander Seal (University of Surrey)

This event is aimed at anyone with an interest in teaching sociology. However, it will be most relevant to those wishing to advance their teaching skills, develop new pedagogical techniques and appreciate the pressures placed on lecturers in higher education. There will be ample time built into the day to share ideas, network and propose suggestions for future events focusing on teaching sociology.

Date: Saturday 27 September

Time: 10:30 –16:00

Location: BSA Meeting Room, Suite 2,
2 Station Court, Imperial Wharf,
Townmead Road, Fulham SW6 2PY

Cost: £40 BSA members
£50 non-members

Lunch and refreshments included

To register, please go to the BSA website:
<http://tinyurl.com/on8j9s3>

Questions and informal discussion
regarding the day to Dr Matthews:
c.matthews2@brighton.ac.uk

According to Hefce, all journal articles and conference proceedings published with an ISSN and accepted after 1 April 2016 will be subject to a new policy on open access (though early adoption is recommended). To be eligible for the post-2014 REF, work needs to be submitted to an institutional or subject repository within three months of acceptance. *See page four of the policy, link below*

The following is a summary of key points by Alison Danforth, BSA Publications Officer:

The Hefce regulations ensure that work submitted to the post-2014 REF will be open access within 12-24 months after publication via either the green or gold methods.

To be open access via the green method, the peer-reviewed accepted version (not the final publisher's pdf) of an article must be deposited in a repository no more than three months after acceptance.

An article may still be compliant if it is deposited and not freely accessible during an 'embargo period'. This element of the Hefce policy respects the embargo periods set by the publishers to encourage university librarians to pay for access in order to stay up to date with the latest research. This may help to ensure income that sustains the journals, publishers and organisations like the BSA, which depend heavily upon their journals to fund their work.

The Hefce policy allows embargos of up to 12 months for work submitted to REF main panels A and B, and 24 months for panels C and D (most sociology papers will come under the latter option). This means that the article listing may be visible in the repository, but not free to access. After the end of the embargo period, the peer-reviewed accepted version is made freely available.

The policy seems to expect that repositories will manage publication dates and embargo periods for work deposited shortly after acceptance.

Articles published under gold open access may also be compliant with the Hefce policy. One method of depositing gold articles is to provide a link to the freely available publisher's pdf for the repository. Repositories may have a variety of ways of managing this kind of deposit.

The Hefce policy does seem to encourage green open access, since it pushes universities to invest in repositories regardless of decisions about funding gold open access. The policy sets out certain



minimum technical criteria for repositories and meeting these criteria seems to be the responsibility of the repository. Individual academics are required to deposit their articles, but exceptions grant them leeway if their universities have not set up the repository as required.

Hefce does not insist on any particular licence for the deposited articles, only stipulating that the article in the repository must be discoverable, readable and downloadable.

As stated, Hefce does allow some exceptions to the policy, meaning that work may be eligible for REF without being open access. These are set out on pages six and seven of the policy. Many of the concerns that the BSA identified to Hefce seem to have been considered. Included in the exceptions are those that may not have access to a repository when publishing, such as postgraduates and early career academics, those working in non-UK universities which do not run repositories, research which has sensitive or third party data (and cannot be made open access), and those working at institutions that do not have a repository meeting the Hefce criteria.

• To see the policy:
<http://tinyurl.com/mldd9pb>

For more information on licences see:
<http://tinyurl.com/6rcxu> and
<http://tinyurl.com/pkpmvk3>

The BSA was engaged in the two consultation phases of establishing this new policy, and the consultation responses can be viewed here:
<http://tinyurl.com/obvfrcq>

The BSA invites comments on this policy, so please consider completing our short survey: www.surveymonkey.com/s/bsaoa6 or contact Alison at: alison.danforth@britsoc.org.uk