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Culture of HE in FE – Exclave or Enclave?

Name: ?

Abstract

This paper explores the concept of culture within Further Education Colleges (FECs) from the perceptions of twenty-six lecturers delivering Business Higher Education Programmes (BHEPs). It offers a brief overview of the history of both FE and HE in England, and how they have evolved. This then will provide an understanding of the perceived/real differences between FE and HE culture, and whether these two cultures can merge together, or will become 'hybrids', as suggested by Parry and Thompson (2002). The study will in fact show that the culture of HE in FE [in England] is similar to that of an 'Exclave', but is developing within this, a culture which might be viewed as an 'Enclave'.

Key Words: Culture, HE in FE, Culture of FE, Culture of HE.

Introduction

Like any organisation in the commercial sector, educational institutions are also organisations, and as such will have their own cultures and sub-cultures. This paper discusses the perceived culture of Further Education (FE), and that of Higher Education (HE) from lecturers' ($n=26$) delivering Business Higher Education Programmes (BHEPs) in Further Education Colleges (FECs). Today, this may be viewed as a hybrid culture (Parry and Thompson 2002). Subsequently, the concept of culture is considered, and from this, a brief overview of HE and FE will be offered. In addition to this, the lecturers' perceptions of the culture of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are examined. The paper will then move on to consider if the two cultures of HE and FE will offer up an alternative culture(s), or whether the FECs who deliver Higher Education Programmes (HEPs) will remain, what Parry and Thompson (2002) call, 'Hybrid' institutions.

HE in England

Smyth (2006) and Smart (2002) have highlighted the ‘monastic link’ with universities, and how universities grew out of cathedral schools; thus leaving behind the medieval legacy for today’s society to inherit (Smyth 2006). It is said that: “The earliest university chancellors were the agents of the bishops in whose dioceses the universities were located,” (Smyth 2006: p. 1).

The modern day mantle of ‘university’ is often likened to that of the ‘Oxbridge model’; again nothing new, as Truscot wrote on this in the 1940s. Truscot (1943) when defining a university did not see it has an ‘organization’ but more as a collection of people, suggesting that the term derives from the Latin ‘*universitas*’, which he claims is: “...a body of ‘teachers and scholars’ – nothing less and nothing more,” (Truscot 1943: p.46). Further, Truscot (1943) saw the modern day education organisation (at that time – referred to today, as a ‘university’), merely as a set of buildings, which he defined as a ‘corporation or society’; where the *universitas* (teachers and scholars) could be spread over a number of different locations. Therefore, for Truscot (1943) it is about the people, not the bricks and mortar, and that it is the people that are important when offering a definition of culture, when discussing the organisation. Today, authors’ writing on, and/or about organisations, would take a different view to that of Truscot, as they see an organisation as a group of people coming together for a common purpose (Meek 1988; Huczynski and Buchanan 2001; Vecchio 2005; Mullins 2006). Rollinson (2005: p.4) defines a organisation as:

A social entity brought into existence and sustained in an ongoing way by humans to serve some purpose, from which it follows that human activities in the entity are normally structured and coordinated towards achieving some purpose or goals.

From these two different viewpoints it can be seen that both refer to a collective of people coming together, and as such the title given to them like 'XYZ University' is nothing more than a name or a brand (from a marketing perspective). The difference is, that those authors writing on 'Organisational Behaviour', see the organisation as having a personality of its own, or like Rollinson (2005), an organisation is an entity in its own right. This personality, in reality, is nothing more than the culture of the organisation, which is derived from peoples' individual and/or collective personalities. Further, the personality of the person in charge of that collective (be it a small business or a huge corporation), will have a major influence on the culture of that particular organisation. In addition to this, there may well be outside influences that also effect the culture of an organisation (in this case a college or university), for example, National and Local Government, funding bodies, inspectorates, consultants, professional bodies, to name but a few.

Russell Group Universities

The 'Civic Universities' went on to become members of a much larger group – 'The Russell Group'. This group was formed in 1994, from a meeting of Vice Chancellors and Principals at the 'Hotel Russell' (where the group later took its name from), in London (The University of Liverpool 2006) and was deemed the elite amongst universities (Beckett 2001). This group of universities are seen to be research intensive; Giddens (1999) quoted by Hayes (2002,144-145) suggested that universities are concerned with: "...the pursuit of knowledge without fear or favour." This is not a new concept, Truscot was writing about this in the 1940s, as was Barnett in the 1990s. Currently, many new universities (old polytechnics), tend to be seen as teaching universities (Knights 2006), but it needs to be said that many do carry out research. Therefore it could one could say that some of these new universities may wish

to emulate those universities who are members of the Russell group, and with this in mind, might have fallen under the ‘Narcissical’ spell of the Oxbridge model (Stiles 2004). The fact remains, that any institution that takes the mantle of ‘university’ should undertake research, as this is the very core of what a university is about, that is, seeking out new knowledge, and disseminating that knowledge to both peers, students, and the commercial sector. Having said this, there are suggestions that the Russell Group be reduced more in line with the ‘Ivy League’ American universities, which comprises of just ten members. On the 01/06/2009 Sir Roy Anderson was reported as suggesting that there should only be five members, and that these should be privatised to form elite academic institutions (Attwood 2009; Ross 2009).

Brief History of FE

FE has existed for some time, the first institute being formally constituted in Edinburgh in 1821 (British Training International 2006). Despite existing for over two centuries, there is in fact, very little written about FE (Ainley and Bailey 1997). Richardson (2007) wrote that the term FE first appeared in official regulations in 1917.

New demands were placed on FE after World War II, as new skills were needed. This forced FE to focus on day-release and evening classes (Richardson 2007). In 1943 a white paper, ‘*Education Reconstruction*’, highlighted the intention that all teenagers should be provided with the opportunity to attend FE by law (Richardson 2007); this was repealed by the 1988 ‘Education Reform Act’.

...the 1988 Education Reform Act repealed the duty on LEAs of 41 years’ standing to establish County Colleges and abolish the concept of NAFE (while designating ‘advanced courses’ as part of higher education: Mansell, 1991, p.114). These measures were followed by the decision signalled in the 1991 white paper *Education and Training for the 21st Century* [italics in original] (cm. 1536), to remove entirely from LEAs their responsibility for the sixth-form colleges and FE (other than non-vocational adult education, which remained in local authority hands until 2003). (Richardson 2007: p.391; also quoted in Feather 2009: p.17).

From this, FE moved forward to form new partnerships with industry, that is, a consociation with the 'Manpower Services Commission' (MSC) in the 1980s, and the 'Training and Enterprise Councils' (TECs) in the 1990s (British Training International 2006). Due to this new vocational and technical orientation, FE became known as the 'handmaiden to British industry' (Smith 2007). This appears to be in disaccord with what Ainley (2000) suggested, when writing that FE was the backbone of the UK, but is now a relic of the past, and as such, was in decline; this therefore brought the inference that FE needed to constantly reinvent itself. Ainley (2000), likens the environment that FE resides in, as similar to that of World War II, where he writes that FE is like Poland, surround on all its borders by schools (Germany); higher education (Russia), and training (Austria-Hungary). Further, he quotes how Professor Melville sees the future of FE, writing that: "... 'While we do not expect FE to disappear, it will not be so identifiable' (*TES* 12/11/99)," (Ainley 2000:p.1). From this, it is obvious that FE is likely to take on some new form of identity, which may relate to Parry and Thompson's (2002) views that those FE institutions delivering HE will become a 'hybrid'; namely, it will carry the genetics of both HE and FE.

The 1960s saw a 'second chance' at education being provided to young people leaving school, with little or no qualifications; similar opportunities were offered to adults in the form of evening classes (British Training International 2006; Smith 2007). This paper will highlight that some universities are now adopting this view towards education, which is a move away from the traditional view of knowledge production, or as 'originators' of knowledge (HEQC 1993; Harwood and Harwood 2004), whereas those in FE are viewed more as practitioners or 'interpreters' of that knowledge (HEQC 1993; Simmons 2003).

In 1992 'The Further and Higher Education Act' came into force, which allowed colleges to be financially independent (Smith 2007). This forced colleges to both operate, and compete in, a 'Quasi-market', which introduced (what is considered today as),

‘managerialism’ and ‘marketisation’, (Smith 2007). Then in 1993 colleges were incorporated (Ainley 2000; Jaquette 2009), where control was removed from the local councils and given central government (Jaquette 2009). From the above it can be seen that FE is a provider of second chances at education, and because of new initiatives, it is constantly having to reinvent itself, or develop new missions (see the works of: Parry and Thompson 2002; Parry 2003; Parry et al. 2006; Parry and Thompson 2007).

Having given these two brief histories and their individual origins, it should now have laid the foundations to consider the main element of this study, that of HE in FE, and whether or not different cultures will manifest, or if it will remain known as a hybrid of HE and FE. It is accepted that there are other factors to consider such as widening participation and franchising that impact on these different institutional cultures, but the brief overview was to give a basic understanding of how the roots of FE, and HE were formed. It is also accepted that both FE and HE have seen significant changes in the last 20 years.

Overview of the concept of culture

Here one decided to interweave with the discussion around different authors’ viewpoints, some of the findings from my own research to highlight where there is agreement, or where there is significant differences in celebration.

Culture – What does it mean?

When researching culture it became apparent that similar terminology are used when defining culture in respect of educational institutions; as it is for institutions in the business sector. This is no surprise as universities today, like commercial businesses, are large complex organisations with structures (Barnett 2000), mission statements, and in some instances,

employ large numbers of people, which in turn, may influence that culture. Obviously, this is too big an area to cover in the confines of this paper, therefore, a brief overview of literature on culture will be given; the focus coming mainly from an educational perspective.

Both Silver (2003: p.159) quoting Barnett (1990), and Simmons (2003) discuss culture as a taken for granted set of values, meanings, and signals. These elements govern behaviour; which means, they are read and understood by those on the inside – be it the institution, department, or a group the person belongs to. Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) also refer to values, beliefs, and behaviour; using Reginald Rose’s American theatre piece ‘Twelve Angry Men’ as an example. Here one angry juror asks of another juror, why he is always so polite, the answer given was for the same reason the first juror was always angry, it was the way he was raised; basically, the family culture he was raised in – given that they are both American citizens. Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) go on to discuss how every person will carry certain cognitive traits, motives, and ‘potential acting’. With the first two traits, this would fall under Hofstede and Hofstede’s (2005) ‘Mental Programming of the software of the mind’, or conditioning. Political acting is where the person pretends to be part of the group, learns the correct signals to give off when interacting with that group, and uses the group to aid them to climb to a higher level of social interaction, or promotion in their current or future employment (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). This on reflection, is not too dissimilar to ‘Machiavellianism’, where people manipulate others for personal gain, and are both rational and unemotional (Rollinson 2005). Additionally, these people tend to be loners, and have little or no loyalty to the person, group, or the organisation; their own personal gain is what is important to them (Rollinson 2005). Meek (1988: 461) argued that:

Several studies have shown that academics may tend to give greater allegiance to their profession than their college or university, which may produce conflict between the interest of the individual academic and the interests of those who manage the institution (see, Goulder 1958, but see also Meltzer 1956; Merton 1957; Box and Cotgrove 1966; Hind 1971).

Silver (2003), writing on HE culture identifies a similar view point:

There is, therefore, the constant likelihood of rival or conflicting values and allegiances. The symbols and myths shared most keenly by individuals and groups in an institution may not be those treasured by the institution itself. (Silver 2003: pp. 158-159)

This indicates that the different departments or groups, and even individual people, may have independent itineraries they need to fulfil. Subsequently, these separate aims, goals and agendas may be out of kilter with the aims, goals, and agendas of the organisation (Meek 1988). Colbeck (1998) may suggest that this is the impetus for 'role confusion'. In regard to HE in FE, it could be a case of 'not invented here' (Blackwell and Preece 2001). The phrase 'not invented here' or the 'the way we do things around here' is very prominent in many works looking at defining culture. However, when defining what culture is, it becomes very complex, and this is apparent in an article available on the Internet by Gray (1998) entitled: "*Organisational Culture and the psychological contract – A review of literature*", where he offers many leading authors' definitions on the term. These various definitions, although different, do have one thing in common – people. It should be remembered, that it is the people who work for an organisation that make up the culture of that organisation. Instead of focusing on the values of an organisation – a lifeless set of bricks and mortar, or brand, the research should consider, and focus more on the employees, both as individuals and as collectives. Additionally, their (management and employees) values, beliefs, attitudes, and personality need to be understood. Having said this, Meek (1988) suggests that the culture of the organisation is a control mechanism for management to enable them to measure efficiency and effectiveness, and that this cannot be accomplished. This is because people [as Hofstede and Hofstede, (2005) point out], have a number of different 'selves', [although Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) refer to these as sub-cultures], and it is these that are difficult to identify. For example, how can the researcher studying the culture of a given organisation and its employees, possibly know what sort of factors have impacted upon the individual

being interviewed, before they arrived at work, or, whilst at work? They could have just been disciplined or promoted, had a row with the partner, or even been in a car accident; this list is not exhaustive. All these factors and many more, may impact upon the individual's mind set and attitude(s), depending on their personality(ies), which in turn could impact on the group dynamics, and also the department (more so if the person is a manager).

Clegg (2008) would refer to different cultures within various sub-groups/cultures of the organisation, as 'communities of practice' (CoPs), whereas Becher and Trowler (2001) may view these as 'Tribes and Territories', and Strathern (1996) as 'sectors'. However, one can give these sub-groups/cultures any modern name to put a new slant on the idea. But there is still the perception that the main culture of the organisation is viewed as stemming from the Chief Executive Officer's (CEO), or Managing Director's (MD) personality (Rollinson 2005; Mullins 2006). Viewing this from the educational perspective, the Vice Chancellor's (VC) personality, or the Principal's personality, may be infused into the culture of their individual institutions. Many Principals today now call themselves CEOs, which, as we know, is a managerial identity taken from the commercial sector and has been adopted into the FE hierarchy. Nagy and Burch (2009: p.229), quoting Quiggin (2001) discuss HE CoPs in Australia, and suggest that the:

...funding cuts in public funding has been exacerbated by pressure to adopt a market or pseudo-market orientation in teaching and research and by the imposition of a 'managerialist' style of governance.

This is almost identical to what Smith (2007) wrote in regard to FE (see above), so it would seem from this that HE is also becoming a victim of the Government's 'Narcissical' (Stiles 2004) view of corporate culture, that is, the foci is towards quantifiable results, efficiency, commercialism, and competitive markets (Meek 1988; Nagy and Burch 2009). To this end, if a person "...can recognise the qualities of a space," (Blair 2009), then that person is likely to be affected by that space. This study identified that the qualities of the spaces (culture) in

some FECs (participants' perceptions), are more like corporate production lines, and as such, management may view lecturers as production operatives (Taylor 1999; Hayes and Wynyard 2002). Twenty-three participants out of twenty-six, stated 'yes', they felt like production operatives. Two female lecturers said they were not; although one of these participants did suggest that at times she did feel like she worked in '...a sausage factory'; the last participant could not reach a decision. On the subject of production operatives, Int. 8 commented:

[laughs loudly].....ooooooooooooohhhh I've got a lot of sympathy with that view...err.....I think the way in which FE is treated...we are nothing more than manufacturers of tins of beans...We are pushing out bits of paper, you know, people with qualifications. The only way to rise above it is your own professionalism. (Feather 2009: p.186)

In addition to the above, the participants often referred to themselves as a 'Jack-of-all-trades'; Int.8 on this subject stated:

We are Jack-of-all-trades, definitely, and it's often been said, if you go into FE, you might come in as a specialist...and you might spend ten per cent of your time on your specialism...After about two years, you'll teach bloody anything [starts laughing]. (Feather, 2009: p. 180)

Again this may be due to the managerialism and marketisation practiced in many of the colleges visited, in that they are very target orientated, funding driven, with minimal resources, and as such, the lecturers needed to cover more subjects in order to meet both the needs of the college, and those of the students. Research shows that lecturers in FE have 'high class' contact hours (Young 2002; Simmons 2003; Harwood and Harwood 2004; Feather 2009; King and Widdowson 2009).

As highlighted at the beginning of this paper, there is a clear cultural difference between FECs and HEIs, which stems from the foundations laid when these institutions first came into being. Simmons (2003: p.3) wrote:

The foundation of HE culture is...completely different from that of FE which is much more closely controlled and determined through awarding bodies, Learning and Skills Council and OFSTED/ALI inspections.

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in 2006 identified that there was too much micromanagement, and that FE may be over regulated (DfES 2006). The FE/HE divide appears to be constant, that is, each have different operational, financial, and cultural factors (Temple 2001; Parry and Thompson 2002; Parry et al. 2003).

Meek (1988) warned of the dangers of one institution borrowing key concepts from other disciplines, which in some cases become distorted, or worse, institutions may take on certain aspects of those concepts which suit their particular need at that time. However, when dissecting these concepts to fit their own needs, they may have lost the meaning behind the concept. This could be a reality today, for example, FE has taken the graduation ceremony from HE and adopted it into its own culture. However, how many FECs senior management or lecturers know the meaning behind the ceremony, or indeed, why it takes place? Additionally, there is the question of research, like King and Widdowson (2009: p.28) clearly point out, lecturers in FE have very little time to conduct research, but as indicated earlier, research is viewed as a 'core purpose' of HE. Many of the participants interviewed in this study were teaching twenty-five or more hours per week. One participant reported that she had taught thirty hours per week, in one term, and that because of the pressures placed upon her, she was actively seeking other employment. Another commented that if her autonomy in the classroom was encroached upon, or taken away by management, that she would leave education altogether.

Methodology

An ethnographical and interpretivist approach was used for this study; thus using a triangulation of philosophies to offer some validity to the findings (Robson 2002; Silverman 2002). A sample of twenty-six participants were drawn from a survey questionnaire (n=150) sent out to lecturers delivering BHEPs in FECs (n=92 returned); the survey covered a large

geographical area of England. A 'purposive' sampling strategy was used to select twenty-six lecturers, which was drawn from the fifty-two volunteers (out of the ninety-two questionnaires received back), who self-identified on the questionnaire that they would like to take further part in the study. The purposive sampling ensured that certain groups were represented, that is, gender, age, time teaching, full- or part-time contract, geographic spread around the Yorkshire and Humber regions of England, ethnicity, and current position in the college. A semi-structured interview was conducted, lasting for no more than one hour. The interviews were recorded, and later fully transcribed; content analysis was then employed to identify recurring themes within the narratives collected. In regard to the research ethics, the participating individuals' and their institutions' identities were preserved in accordance with the 'British Education Research Association (BERA 2004) guidelines.

Findings

When the participants for this study were asked to define the culture of their own individual FE institutions, five suggested they had no idea what the culture of their FE institution was, as they worked in HE. I found this interesting, because these lecturers were employed by an FE institution (admittedly to deliver BHEPs, but some of them also delivered FE programmes), on an FE contract, delivering FE hours (contact time – twenty-five hours plus), and paid at FE rates. The research found that there was a 'them and us' culture (or what I would call an 'Exclave'), developing within some of the institutions visited. Int. 16 stated that:

...the business school was run as a department of an FE college. All the entrepreneurship, all the freedom gone, and so we will have been erm, run by FE rules. If I wanted [to work for] an FE college, I would have joined an FE college; I came to a business school. (Feather 2009: p. 184)

Here this participant does not allude to HE, but instead focuses on the title, and freedom once enjoyed as a business school, and perhaps he saw this more like a business academy rather than a HE or FE institution. At the time of interviewing this participant, his particular institution had just made ninety-five lecturers redundant, many of which came from the business school (as he referred to it), with more to be announced. Int. 13 suggested that her college was “...regimented around systems and procedures,” and that these were required to satisfy the funding bodies. She went on to say that there was a “...definite.....us and them perception between teaching staff,” at the college. This particular participant constantly reminded me that she was finding it difficult to answer questions on the culture of her FE institution, as she did not work in FE. This was not a unique situation, Int. 15 believed that she worked for a university, stating: “...the admin.....which we have.....have a sort, as you know, is a special situation that we’ve, [we] don’t have admin support that other universities have (Feather 2009: p. 184). The phrase of ‘them and us’ was raised a number of times, Int. 20 commented on how her manager was positively encouraging this division amongst those who delivered HE and those who delivered FE.

From the above narratives, it is clear that a ‘them and us’ mentality is still inherent between the two cultures of HE and FE, and that it is not only government bodies or the different cultures themselves that are driving this perceived wedge. To this extent taking Ainley’s (2000) comments earlier where FE was likened to Poland in World War II, it is in reality nothing more than an exclave, that is, a cultural territory surrounded by other cultural territories. It would appear that some of the participants may actually be forming ‘enclaves’ – basically, where they are surrounded by territories of similar cultures, but the characteristics are different. That is, they see themselves different to their colleagues and as such may have fallen under the ‘Narcissical’ reflection of the ‘Oxbridge’ model (Stiles 2004), and wish to appear as part of this group, or at least on a similar level. One could suggest that certain FE

institutions may have also fallen under this spell, with the formation of the '157 group', which could be likened to the 'Russell Group' of universities that are perceived to be research led, and the elite institutions within HE. The '157 Group' is:

...named after paragraph 157 of the Foster review of further education, which suggested principals from "larger, successful colleges" should have a greater involvement in policy making...fewer than 30 colleges meet the group's strict entry requirements...only colleges with a turnover of £35m a year, and an Ofsted (sic) rating of one or two (the highest) for management and leadership can join the 157 group. (Beckett 2007: p. 9)

Beckett (2007) goes on to say that the £35 million is flexible, but the OFSTED rating is not. This could be evidence of FE wishing to be, and have the same perceived status and recognition as that of HE. Burkhill et al. (2008) wrote that over time lecturers in FE delivering HEPs may choose to mirror lecturers in HE. As such, the possibility remains that one institution, CoP, sector, tribe, sub-culture, etc, may be endeavouring to learn the symbols, behaviour, myths, values of the other, and subsequently give off the same signals and appearance, with the view to being imbued with the same status and resources as those in another.

Comments on managerialism started to enter into some of the responses given on the culture of FE. For example, Int.19 – "overworked, hard pressed staff"; In regard to work, one interviewee commented on how his manager had asked him to deliver a French lesson to some students, despite the fact that he could neither read, write, nor speak French. Int. 20 stated: – "It's run as a traditional bureaucracy"; Int. 22 – "It's very unstable, driven by funding, by targets; I have never known so many colleagues off sick"; Int. 6 – "Blame! It's a blame culture"; Int. 15 – "Heroes and villains, and blaming people; very bureaucratic"; Int. 21 – "Pressurised, we have no control, very authoritarian"; Int. 17 – "Blame culture, there's a phrase called 'Teflon Management'". On one occasion, a particular FE institution was referred to as suffering with the 'Yosser Hughes' syndrome, where senior management were

perceived as taking on any project to gain funding, without considering whether they had the capacity, resources, or the skills to undertake the task.

I realise from the narratives, and subsequent discussions, that this paper seems to paint a very dark picture of HE in FE. However, these are the narratives, perceptions, and anxieties of the lecturers working in FECs, CoPs, tribes, or sectors, and as such, they needed to be highlighted, as they appear to be out of kilter with current perceptions of HE in FE. King and Widdowson (2009: p. 29) write:

It is essential that HE in FE offers an experience which, although different in many respects from traditional “undergraduate” experience nonetheless offers high quality and relevant learning, and qualifications which are valued by students and employers alike.

This quality of experience would be hard pressed to deliver if staff in FECs feel like, and are offering, such negative narratives on their particular institutions’ culture. Some of the participants reported that their culture was one of ‘getting the students through as quickly as possible.’ From the narratives collected, there appeared to be a sense that no student would be allowed to fail a particular course (in this instance business programmes). Int. 7 stated:

I’m trying to be polite now, erm.....I think it’s get them [students] in.....get them [students] a piece of paper, and get them [students] out, and you don’t fail them [students] in between.” (Feather 2009: 185).

This comment was echoed by Int. 11 at a different institution; he said: “...we are pushing students through that are not capable...we’re turning out students now like a conveyor belt...it’s just erm, money, money, money,” (Feather 2009: 185-186). This participant felt that the degree was devalued, and that he was considering setting fire to his own degree. This then does not align with King and Widdowson’s (2009) views of qualifications that are ‘valued’ by students, as this participant at one time in his life, was also a student, as were many of the other participants.

HE culture characterised

Here the participants were asked to share their perceptions of HE (not HE in FE), per se. Almost instantly, the participants took on a different demeanour, and when answering the question, appeared to be savouring the moment. Some closed their eyes, and spoke in hushed tones; others sat upright expressing keen interest in the subject, whilst still others, took on a more relaxed mode of posture. Int. 18 likened HE to a graceful swan, and that “...HE has more control, is more focused, more professional; I’ve always wanted to work in HE.”

Three of the participants referred to the mystique of HE, and in particular, the academic gowns that are worn at graduation ceremonies. Interestingly, none of them referred to their own gowns and regalia that they wear to their own institution’s graduation ceremonies. This then offers some support to the earlier discussion of adopting aspects of one culture to fit in with the needs of the adopting institution, and the subsequent dangers of practicing this, as outlined by Meek (1988), or the ‘Narcissistical’ view as outlined by Stiles (2004). Others perceived that there was collegiality in HE, in that lecturers in HE were asked to teach on programmes, and not told what they had to teach, like they are in FE. One participant related to his wife’s experience of HE, and not his own, almost living the HE experience through his wife, who worked at a prestigious research led university. This may be the case for such universities, but not for many of the ‘new teaching’ universities (old polytechnics). In reality, these new teaching universities are not too dissimilar to colleges, in that lecturers are told what they are going to teach. Having said this, they are asked (in some HE institutions) what subjects they would like to teach, but may also find that they have other subjects to cover that are not necessarily in their specialist subject area. Another example is where Buckinghamshire New University announced that it was going to offer people a ‘second chance’ at education, and will turn nobody away (Oxford 2008). One lecturer, reported by Oxford (2008), stated that at Buckinghamshire New University if you like teaching that is

good, but if you wish to do research, that would need to be done in the lecturer's own time; again not too dissimilar to colleges, that is, these lecturers at this particular institution seem to have heavy teaching loads. Additionally, it was shown at the beginning of this paper, that the mission of FE was to offer second chances, which is not what HE's mission is; the core of HE is research, and the seeking of new knowledge (Truscot 1943; Barnett 2005), and for some elite HE institutions teaching comes a poor second (Beckett 2001). Truscot (1943) would see these teaching universities, not as universities, but more like super schools. Denham (The Universities Secretary) was reported in the 'Sunday Times' as saying that 'new universities' should revert back to being polytechnics, and provide more adult education in the form of vocational degrees, which was sparked by a 'class war' between Vice Chancellors over the £1.5 billion funding available through the RAE (Grimston 2009). What then is the difference between new universities and colleges? It would appear very little, with the exception that a university will have the 'Royal Charter' to develop, deliver and bestow degrees. But, as we know, recently, colleges have been given powers to develop and deliver foundation degrees (King and Widdowson, 2009).

Other perceptions of HE from the participants, were that the HE culture supported an academic role, whereas in FE many of the participants felt that this was not the case, and that they were not given the resources necessary to undertake research. For example, one participant had to share a computer with five other lecturers. Int. 4 stated: I think HE in an FE environment is an extension, rightly or wrongly, of A-level, in fact it is [draws word out].....the way it's delivered is very FE style, (Feather 2009: 190). This is evidence of what Ritzer (2002), and Hayes and Wynyard (2002) would call the 'Macdonaldization of Higher Education'. Indeed, one view is that lecturers in HE have become a 'Lesser Breed' (Oxford 2008) in that they only teach, and undertake no research, and as such, this could be seen as

‘dumbing down’ degrees, so that students can pass qualifications easier, as outlined by Int. 11 above.

Can the two cultures mix?

Given everything discussed above, can the two cultures of HE and FE mix? Parry and Thompson (2002) and Parry et al. (2003) suggest that from the merger of the two cultures, a ‘Hybrid’ institution will evolve. To some extent, this study has shown that this may be the case, with the intentional divide by some managers of HE lecturers from FE lecturers. At some of the institutions visited, they had separate buildings to their FE colleagues. For example, one college visited had given itself the title of ‘University Centre’; this is not to be mistaken for those university centres that are an integral part of an HEI. This particular centre was part of a college, but instead of been located within the main campus, was actually set in the countryside, however, FE was still delivered on this site, and some of the BHEP lecturers did deliver FE programmes. But those who only delivered BHEPS were exhibiting behaviours that could be constituted in furthering the divide between FE and HE and becoming ‘enclaves’, instead of the main intention of the government to bring HE and FE closer together. To this end, Parry and Thompson’s (2002) ‘hybrid’, in my opinion, would be better described as an ‘enclave’, as this study shows that these lecturers see themselves as being different to those surrounding them.

Many of the participants felt that their college was fragmented and trying to serve too many masters; but despite this, four of those interviewed perceived that it was not FE that would have to change, but HE. The comments were that HE was coming their way (more toward an FE style of delivery and mission), and that they were masters at competing for funding in this sector. This could be viewed as a warning shot across the bows of HE, in that

these four participants perceived universities would struggle to compete successfully for funding in this sector.

Seventeen of the participants believed that the cultures could not mesh. Int. 22 struggled with the concept of the two cultures meshing, saying: “With great difficulty.....err.....No! I do, I don’t, I really struggle to see that happening....I really can’t.” Int. 18 commenting on the same subject said: “No! But I don’t see why it should either.....if you’re coming for.....[the] HE experience, we can’t give it you.” Int. 23 spoke on similar lines and believed that the HE experience could not be provided by FE institutions, because he believed FE students, unlike HE students, are not self-starters, do not use their own initiative, and are not self-disciplined. Again, this is counter to what King and Widdowson (2009) suggested about giving the HE in FE student a ‘quality’ experience they expect; especially now they are aware of the financial contribution they [students] make. What King and Widdowson (2009) are inferring here is that students are paying customers, rather than investors in their own knowledge. As such, they expect the same sort of service they would receive in the commercial sector, when in fact they should be viewing their fees more like an investment in their education and potential employment prospects in the future.

Conclusion

This paper was not intended to be negative towards colleges delivering BHEPs in FE. As stated earlier, the perceptions and anxieties that emerged, were what the participants in this study believed was happening in their particular institution. They commented that these anxieties were affecting them, both in terms of the standard of delivery they wished to offer the student (that would be more in line with King and Widdowson’s 2009 comments above), and in terms of their own health. Some said they were suffering with stress, or that their colleagues were off work with stress. This is how they perceived, and interpreted their CoPs

(Clegg 2008; Jawitz 2009) or sector (Strathern 1996), and as such were trying to make sense of that environment. These lecturers do valuable work, often with limited or no resources, and certainly do much on a 'good will' basis, which as some expressed, was becoming very thin.

One of the problems seems to be that the FE environment appears to be in a constant state of flux, with new initiatives being constantly forced upon FE, for example, widening participation, 14-19, HE in FE, to name but a few. Subsequently, nothing seems to be given time to settle in before the next initiative is enforced. This led to comments of fragmentation, and the 'Yosser Hughes' syndrome, where some colleges are seen to be willing to do everything and anything that the government suggest, as long as there is funding to be had. Some participants commented that management should stop and think whether the college has the resources, staff, or skills to implement these new initiatives. Additional comments made were that their individual FEC was funding and target driven, and that teaching was almost an afterthought.

Many I spoke to said that the delivery of HE was both stressful and complex, especially if the lecturer had a mixed timetable. That is, if one lesson was delivered at the FE level, and the next was at an HE level, they felt that this was a difficult transition to make, and therefore the lesson may not provide enough depth. If reversed, this could be worse; as the lesson could be delivered at a level students could not comprehend.

Many of the participants felt that they were little more than production operatives, enticing students into study, and churning them out at the other end with qualifications. Additionally, many of those interviewed were teaching in excess of twenty-five hours per week, the average was nearer to twenty-six; some had worked in excess of thirty hours in one week. The standard contract was for them to be on site for thirty-seven hours per week and it soon becomes obvious that there are not enough hours for these lecturers to complete their

other duties, and as such, many said they had to take work home with them. This left no time to undertake research or write papers for publication, which many expressed a wish to do. Subsequently, the amount of dedication and professionalism these lecturers displayed, was for the students, and not for the college. From this, it became evident that there was little or no loyalty towards the college they worked for, and instead their loyalty was to the students.

It was also evident via observation, and the narratives collected, that morale and motivation in some of the institutions visited, were seriously affected. One could perceive that this may affect the student experience, but it did not. These lecturers fell back onto their own individual professional standards, and as Int. 8 stated above, this is all he had left.

The culture of FE, and HE in FE, was seen by the participants as very bureaucratic, authoritarian, and policy driven. This is not unexpected, even though those lecturers delivering BHEPs (and some managers), might wish to distance themselves from FE, they remain answerable to the same senior management of the college. These senior managers (Principals, CEOs, and Directors) develop strategies and make policy for their colleges, and it is their personality and management style, that sets the main culture of the college.

A number of participants saw the culture of their college as one of “blame”, and the phrase ‘Teflon Management’ was used, which suggested that management did not take responsibility for anything that went wrong, but instead blamed the lecturers. This is evidence of educational institutions taking on a more corporate like image, not just in FECs, but also in HEIs. Long gone have the days of the ivory tower, today the vision is one closer to that of the commercial sector, and as stated above, educational institutions may be trying to imitate large corporations, by adopting their terminology, management philosophies, and management styles. One only has to look at the new buildings of some institutions, in both HE and FE, which further imitates the imagery of commercial corporations – that of the modern corporate black glass and steel. These then could be the hybrids Parry and Thompson (2002) discussed,

and one day education may be delivered under one roof; we have already seen the launch of educational academies (BBC News 2007a, 2007b) in partnership with local councils, educational institutions, and businesses. The study has shown that some colleges may be trying to become 'enclaves', or communities/societies in their own right. For example, the '157 group' and some HE business departments within FECs may be endeavouring to elevate their status amongst the other groups and institutions within education.

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