MA Higher Education: Pedagogic Framework

All modules will not only be underpinned by, but also (and uniquely) prefaced by an explicit pedagogic framework to draw out the integration of the theories and values upon which the programme is built (Figure 1). Within that framework, the integration of contemporary educational theory emphasises the key concepts of:

Connectivity: in terms of connections between concepts, theory and practice, teaching and research, disciplinary methods, teachers and students. These connections will be made explicit through the application of tools such as concept mapping and social network analysis. These tools will be explained in the non-credit bearing introduction to the programme so that participants are equipped to engage with the pedagogy of the programme as well as the content.

Transformation: in terms of the structure of knowledge and how learning in different contexts requires recognition of the significance of different knowledge structures and how they interrelate. This is informed by contemporary theories such as: threshold concepts, semantic gravity, student-as-producer, meaningful learning. These concepts are emphasised in the integrated depiction of the theoretical basis of the programme offered in Figure 2, showing that participants' perspectives can start and end with a focus on their own disciplinary expertise.

The online nature of the programme means that it is crucial to fore-ground the pedagogic framework within all the materials presented (Kinchin, 2012a), as in the absence of face-to-face contact with teachers the programme structure needs to be explicit with the course materials. This framework will help to provide coherence across the diversity of content that will be offered. All modules will be guided in their construction by these pedagogic principles, which will also be used in programme evaluation.

Regulative Discourse underpinning development of the Diploma and MA in Higher Education

Bernstein (2000) refers to curriculum in terms of its regulative discourse (RD) and instructional discourse (ID). The RD refers to the values that underpin the curriculum. ID refers to content selection, sequencing, pacing and assessment. Bernstein argues that the ID is always embedded in the RD, whether the RD is explicit or implicit. We wish to fore-ground the key RD components as four key programme principles (after Vorster & Quinn, 2012):
1. Contribute to the development of participants' theoretically informed understandings, and teach in ways that support epistemological access for a diverse student body.

2. Respect participants' disciplinary backgrounds, and to encourage participants to interrogate the nature of their own disciplines and relate this to ideas presented in the programme.

3. Promote reflective practice, requiring critical engagement based on evidence and theory with the roles and practices of higher education teaching, rather than having as its goal the teaching of a set of generic skills and techniques.

4. It is often necessary to disrupt participants' existing beliefs about teaching and learning.

This then flows on to the consideration of the 'powerful knowledge' (sensu Wheelahan, 2010) that participants should develop over the course of the programme. Such powerful knowledge is required to develop 'expertise' rather than 'procedural competence'. This form of knowledge is a pre-requisite for participants to contribute to the evolution of the theory and practice of the academic field in which they are practitioners.

Powerful knowledge is a product of learning described variously as deep (Marton & Säljö, 1976), meaningful (Ausubel, 2000; Novak, 2010) and cumulative (Bernstein, 2000; Maton, 2009), in order to generate qualitatively rich understanding that is in turn related to appropriate practice knowledge (Kinchin and Cabot, 2010). Maton (2013) described a universal desire for the construction of this type of knowledge that aims to generate ideas that have utility beyond the specifics of their originating contexts. Characteristics of teaching that will support this learning have been specified by Biggs (2003: 17), including:

- Make the structure of the subject explicit
- Encourage the active participation of students
- Build on what the students already know
- Assess for structure rather than independent facts

The regulative discourse underpinning the programme will inevitably have a weaker semantic gravity (i.e. it is less context-specific) than the more transparent instructional discourse, and so initially will prove more challenging to most programme participants. It is within the aims of the programme to help participants to relate these discourses and their concomitant knowledge structures as they 'ride the semantic wave' (Kinchin, 2013b), and develop their expertise in the field of higher education.
Expectations for the journey

Our focus on knowledge structures within this programme helps participants to develop a sense of a coherent journey in which:

*The tutor nor the student should be in doubt about the overall aims of the course and its larger pattern of working over the session; nor about the place of each week in that pattern; nor about the shape of any one week in itself.*

(Hoggart, 1982: 9)

When constructing a curriculum there is an implicit view of the student embedded within the pedagogical framework and in the selected content to be covered within the programme. Ulriksen (2009) has developed the concept of *the implied student* to make explicit the relationship between the expectations of the students, teachers and institution. Ulriksen (2009: 522) sees the implied student as drawing attention to the unspoken anticipations about what studying is and what the meaning of the study is whilst emphasising the structure of the programme, the mode(s) of teaching and the teachers’ expectations. He summarises this as:

*“the study practice, the attitudes, interpretations and behaviour of the student, that is presupposed by the way the study is organised, the mode of teaching and assessment, by the teachers and in the relations between the students, enabling the students to actualise the study in a meaningful way.”*

As the ‘students’ on this programme will also be university staff, who by various measures will already have been ‘successful students’ within their home discipline, there will be some expectation that programme participants will already possess some study skills (though these may be discipline-specific), and that participants will also be proactive in their studies, with some internal motivation for undertaking this particular programme.
Figure 1: A juxtaposition of the linear chain of practice (teaching) with the underpinning network of understanding (pedagogy), indicating the relative strength of semantic gravity acting on each (redrawn from Kinchin, 2012b and modified after Maton, 2009).
Figure 2: Integration of the conceptual and experiential components of the programme to emphasise the connectivity and the central position of transformation within the underpinning theory. (Redrawn and modified from Kinchin, 2013)
Module structure:

Whilst the details of each module will be different, the generic structure is outlined in figure 3. In this, it can be seen that there are points that will be common to all participants, and there is some choice in routes to arrive at these points. The module will start with a common introduction; there will be a formative assessment task along the way, and a summative assessment at the end. In between the three common points, there will be some choice in personal study pathways. This will be facilitated by a list of possible readings and will be guided by the interests and motivations of individual participants. These personal pathways should be discussed with personal tutors to ensure that participants do not venture down unproductive tangents that could lead them away from the aims and objectives of the module.

Figure 3: Generic structure of modules

For many, the easiest way of envisaging a module is from the end, backwards (i.e. what are the intended learning outcomes and the nature of the summative assessment?). This provides the ‘target state’ that all participants are aiming to reach. The opening content is designed to set the
scene; introduce ideas, and provide information. This is also the time for programme participants to set their own target outcomes alongside the module aims and objectives. It is important to reflect upon what it is you want to get out of the module – what you want to gain in terms of understanding and skills, and what you need to do to achieve your aims. You need to discuss with your tutor what support you may need to get the most benefit from the module.

During the first ‘personal pathway’ phase of the module, you will be exploring the issue, examining the literature and relating it to aspects of your professional practice. It is often helpful at this point to maintain a dialogue with your peers who will have different perspectives on the module that will depend upon their personal motivations, prior experience and knowledge, and the nature of their job role and existing disciplinary expertise. It is important to realise that different perspectives are not necessarily better or worse than your own – just different. As participants start to explore a range of literature sources, personal pathways will often diverge. As you move from the recommended readings to other sources that you find, it is suggested that you share these materials with others. This will not only help them, but will help you to develop your intellectual arguments as you explain to your peers and to your tutor the relevance of the work of other authors and how they contribute to the development of the structure of your understanding. Some readings will represent ‘dead ends’ in your thinking, or will diverge too far away from the module outcomes to be helpful at this point. But that is more interesting than following an over-prescribed route that will limit creativity of thought and personal development. Maintaining a dialogue with your tutor is also important here to decide when to focus on depth rather than breadth of reading.

The formative assessment is a key point in the module. Formative assessment does not contribute directly to your overall grade for the module, but is does provide a point where you can get important feedback and help you to re-focus your efforts so that during your second personal pathway phase, you have a clear goal towards the summative assessment.

The ‘target state’ is not the same as finding the ‘right answer’. The aim of the module is not to absorb as much content as possible in order to answer a question, but to gain a better insight into an issue so that you can produce a personal understanding of an issue that you are able to defend and justify through reference to appropriate literature; relevant educational theories, and reflection upon practice. Therefore, course participants are not viewed as consumers of information but as producers of knowledge (e.g. Gamache, 2002; Neary & Winn, 2009).
What does it mean to ‘start and end with disciplinary expertise’?

Most academics working within Higher Education have been drawn into their role through an interest in their particular academic discipline (through studying for their first degree, or through a period of professional practice). This is often where academics feel most comfortable and where they have most knowledge. This is also where their professional allegiances lie and where they have command of the disciplinary jargon (technical terminology). This sense of identity has often been referred to in terms of ‘academic tribes’ (Becher & Trowler, 2001), and the formation of ‘communities of practice’ (Wenger, 1998). Any move away from this professional comfort zone can feel threatening and destabilising. Having established a certain level of expertise and recognition within one field, it can then be challenging to re-assume the role of novice within another. So for a colleague to consider themselves an expert, for example in History, Biochemistry of Management, to then start to consider the scholarship of teaching in these disciplines, requires an acceptance that they simultaneously occupy the roles of disciplinary expert and novice teacher.

The disciplinary expertise of programme participants is recognised and valued. It is also recognised that, for many, the motivation of undertaking an MA in Higher Education is related to the desire to help students to acquire disciplinary expertise, rather than participants necessarily wanting to become ‘educationalists’. The primary focus for these colleagues is therefore the participant’s home discipline. For these participants, the MA can provide an alternative perspective from which to observe that discipline rather than a gateway into a new discipline. Whilst this is a simplification of the complex motivations that lead people to study Higher Education, we recognise that some participants want to study education, whilst others want to develop an additional lens through which to examine understanding of their home discipline. Both of these motives are equally valued starting points for engagement in the programme. We hope this programme provides a mechanism to support colleagues, whatever their motivations. By starting and ending with the familiarity of disciplinary expertise (Figure 2) we hope to support participants as they navigate unfamiliar academic territory so that it may enhance their practice.

When considering the application of digital technologies to teaching, it has been shown that a single perspective on content to be learned can only provide a ‘transient’ or ‘partial’ view of a complex learning environment. Kaipainen at el, (2008) have clearly stated that deeper understanding emerges by exploring data from alternative perspectives, and that those perspectives need then to be integrated to achieve expert understanding. Therefore appreciation of disciplinary expertise can be enhanced from the additional perspective that can be brought from the educational literature, and within this literature, participants will be encouraged to employ a variety of tools, educational theories and models to help explore and articulate their practice. This is summarised in Figure 4. Through a process of self-reflection after each module, programme participants will be encouraged to reconceptualise this journey using their own terminology and theoretical lens, and so develop a personal perspective on the scholarship of teaching as it relates to their practice. This will be one of the ways in which participants will develop coherence between the modules and help to construct a possible framework for the dissertation.
“OTHER” DISCIPLINARY CODES

ALTERNATIVE LENS

SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING

ventures into
to examine & evaluate

for the teaching of disciplinary practice.

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Facilitating access to the educational literature:

The programme will act as an interface between disciplinary and educational literature. We do not assume that participants will become social scientists, but hope to introduce some ideas that may be of value in your disciplinary teaching:

e.g. Specific to Engineering:

“If the epistemic base is a synthesis of separate knowledge forms, then appropriate space and time needs to be accorded in the curriculum for the independent knowledge types, as well as spaces in which the relationships between the different conceptual and contextual forms of knowledge are made explicit. The synthesis does not necessarily emerge after independent exposure to the different types of knowledge, as assumed in a ‘collection-type’ curriculum. It is in itself a third form: a complex and dynamic bi-axial structure requiring a complex praxis capability. Our curricula need to accommodate this complex synthesis.”

Wolff & Luckett (2013: 91)

So to translate a bit:

“If the curriculum requires a synthesis of separate knowledge forms (e.g. scientific theory and practical application), then appropriate space and time needs to be accorded in the curriculum for the independent knowledge types (hierarchical and linear), as well as spaces in which the relationship between the different conceptual (theoretical science) and contextual (practical application) forms of knowledge (hierarchical and linear) are made explicit. The synthesis (through acquisition of disciplinary threshold concepts) does not necessarily emerge after independent exposure to the different types of knowledge (delivered at different times and by different groups of teachers), as assumed in a ‘collection-type’ curriculum (i.e. students don’t simply put it all together because that is what we want them to do). It is in itself a third form: a complex and dynamic bi-axial structure requiring a complex praxis capability (i.e. the praxis of engineering that requires the dual processing of the linear and hierarchical). Our curriculum needs to accommodate this complex synthesis, and our teaching needs to model it.”

In brief:

“Theoretical and practical knowledge have different structures. These need to be highlighted and their integration modelled within the curriculum and its delivery”.

Bibliography


