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Researching practice in higher education

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Abstract

Higher education literature points to ongoing concerns regarding the challenging conditions that academics are encountering in their everyday practice; conditions that affect the efforts of academics to work in ways that are sustainable and oriented towards educational and social-justice goals. Some common global issues that have received much attention include accountability pressures, work intensification, fiscal constraints, 'new public management', de-professionalisation of teaching, commodification of knowledge, and a high rate of institutional change. Many of these issues have been linked to the pervasiveness of neoliberalism, and sometimes to the loss of a moral and civic purpose within the contemporary university.

These issues have been extensively explored in recent decades, but relatively little research has focused on their impact on pedagogy and how academic communities are responding to complex and challenging conditions through their practice/praxis.

In order to research these matters, the facilitators of this workshop have been conducting a cross-institutional, participatory investigation of practices in universities in five different countries using the theory of practice architectures as an analytical lens. This contemporary practice theory is an ontological account of how practices are constituted and mediated by conditions within sites of practice. The theory has specifically been put to work to examine *how practices enacted as praxis are constrained and enabled within particular universities, and how possibilities for transformation are being and can be created*. In this workshop we will invite the participants to a joint exploration of the analytical possibilities of the theory of practice architectures for examining practice in higher education. This will be of relevance to those interested in researching practice and praxis, researching higher education, and/or, conducting analysis using practice theory.

The workshop will consist of three parts: 1) Introduction of the theory of practice architectures and how it is employed in the project, 2) 'hands on' analysis of transcripts (provided by the authors), and 3) critical discussion about the theory of practice architectures as an analytical lens. Together these will facilitate knowledge sharing, generation, and critique about analytical processes, the analytical value of practice theory, and possibilities for researching practice in higher education.

Presentation

Workshop, 90 minutes