

Bridging the gap between academic cultures of teaching: Ethics, Particularity and Interdisciplinarity in Academic Development Programmes

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The purpose of this article is to construct an ethical position of Academic Development Programmes where managerial, top-down principles, are rejected because of the disciplinary resistance such positions bring in the reluctance of recognising existing teaching practices. Instead a focus on particularity through the acceptance of professional difference in an interdisciplinary dialogue is put forward where comparative didactics and interfaith dialogue bring new abilities for university teachers to become better practitioners within their own fields of teaching.

Keywords: academic development programmes, cultures of teaching, ethics, interdisciplinary dialogue, particularity

Introduction

Albeit the ambition of general Academic development programmes (hereafter abbreviated ADP) to enhance the quality of teaching in Higher Edu-

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cation, there is evidence that the ways in which these programmes are performed, little of what is learned, is practiced by university teachers (Healey *et al* 2013; Quinn 2012; Green 2010; Trevit & Perera 2009; Fanghanel 2009a; Fanghanel 2009b). Instead, critique has emerged of what is considered a ‘top-down’ managerial attack on already existing disciplinary cultures of teaching (Nixon 2004). Practicing university teachers feel, that their professionalism is questioned in the light of general instructions of how to teach at Higher Educational level, and therefore tend to either neglect their teacher training at the ADP or developing a bilingual approach to teaching, where the ADP is considered managerial language of teaching is used with the university administration, whereas a discipline based language of teaching is practiced in the actual teaching situation (Nixon 2004). This has particularly been vivid in my own teaching at these ADPs at the University of Gothenburg, where different teachers with different teaching practices have met in interdisciplinary courses.

The opposite, to focus entirely on the different disciplinary cultures individually, however, has proven to encourage fragmentarisation and a lack of interest in other disciplinary approaches to teaching, making dialogue between different disciplines sometimes seems almost impossible (Green 2010; Fanghanel 2009a; Fanghanel 2009b; Rowland 2001). This has particularly been the case between the so called, hard sciences and soft sciences, but also between social sciences (including pedagogy) and the humanities (cf. Fanghanel 2009a; Fanghanel 2009b; Smeby 1996). Ideological concepts perceived by scholars in an academic field, have shown to have major impact on how teaching quality is perceived and practiced (Fanghanel 2009a; Fanghanel 2009b) and should therefore not be disregarded.

Against this background, I will therefore argue for an ethical¹ position of ADP in this article, based on dialogue between the particular and the interdisciplinary where teaching innovation and experience contribution between university teachers can be enhanced, instead of strategies of survival (Aldrin

1 With ‘ethical’ I intend a relational, practice-focused view on ethics is much inspired of Stanley Hauerwas concept of Christian Ethics as being of a practical, service focused nature ‘in service to a community, and it derives its character from the nature of that community’s conviction’, which is in sharp contrast to Immanuel Kant’s view on ethics as something universal and beyond the situated individual, i.e. a ‘categorical imperative’ (Hauerwas 2003, 1-34, 54)

2013). This position can, in my perspective, be established through the use of interfaith dialogue theory with its constructive description of difference and ways to establish dialogue in spite of these differences, and comparative didactics theory pointing towards the cultural differences of teaching and the necessity of interdisciplinary meetings.

ADP as a disciplinary project

The university as a teaching institution has existed for over 1000 years (Rüegg 2003-2010). With it, the different disciplines with independent cultures of teaching has emerged, practiced and transformed of what a teacher in should do in order to teach in the subject (Becher & Trowler 2001; Samuelowicz & Bain 1992). These differences cause complications in ADP where, often a more generalist approach to university teaching has been presented and argued for (Headley *et al* 2013). This is made vivid by Chris Trevitt and Chandim Perera (2009), who argues for a strengthening of disciplinary identity before a more generalist identity and teaching and learning can be constructed. The concept of formalised teaching goals at an institutional level makes, according to the writers, who examined a clinical medical ADP, the actual teaching at the department was negatively inflicted by standardisations (Trevit & Perera 2009). The urge for strict standards of teaching, the authors conclude, comes into conflict with the actual teaching itself. Similar reflections to this study have been made by David A. Green (2010), who draws his conclusions from an online survey examining the use of literature focused on teaching and learning, and literature focused on the contents of the teaching. According to Green (2010), university teachers seldom read literature specifically focused on teaching and learning since they identify a gap between the institutional standards and the disciplinary traditions of teaching. Instead of using general literature for teaching and learning, Green (2010) proposes the idea of encouraging scholars within the different disciplines to write their own literature on the art of teaching.

This reluctance of reading general literature on teaching and learning can lead to resistance in not only to the literature, but also to the ADP courses as exemplified by Lynn Quinn's (2012) who examines the resistance of aca-

demic development at an institutional level. When courses in ADP are being viewed as something not concerning oneself, and its discourse of language as alien to the discipline discourse of language, Quinn argues, academics create a strategy of resistance (Quinn 2012). She argues that disciplinary discourse must be integrated into the institutional courses ADP, in order to construct an inclusive environment for ADP (Quinn 2012). These disciplinary discourses have also been highlighted by Jonathan H. Green (2013), who finds problems with the longstanding relation between Educational Science and Psychology, since many of the learning theories derive from psychological field have been generalised into all disciplines of the university in their cultures of teaching. Green (2013) argues, that this relation is not generally accepted, and for good reasons, since other disciplines have different views on how education is being made and what learning is about. The problematic relation gives way to critique and neglecting of ADP in disciplines other than Psychology and Educational Sciences.² These identified difficulties with ADP can be described as focusing on the difficulties of bringing a general, standardised approach of how teaching and learning is made at a university, where discipline differences are neglected and as a consequence, university teachers fail to listen to what is actually taught at these programmes. A suggested way of solving this issue, has been proposed by Mick Healey, Michael Bradford, Carolyn Roberts and Yolande Knight (2013) who recognise the difficulties of implementing ADP at a departmental level when most such training is made at an institutional level. Instead, Healey *et al.* argues, that this training must be made from ‘bottom-up’, starting at departmental level with focus on discipline differences and identities and then continue up to an institutional level—Otherwise, the training will not have any effect (Healey *et al.* 2013).

ADP as an interdisciplinary project

The view of ADP as something mostly concerning the different disciplines individually—exposes the gap between academic cultures, or ‘tribes’ of teach-

2 Worth, mentioning, in connection to Green’s article, is the critique of Neil McLean (2012), himself a Psychologist, who sees this longstanding relation beginning to fade and that Psychology is much less used today to explain how learning is constructed and maintained.

ing (Becher & Trowler 2001). This is in stark contrast to institutional policy and the strive for creating one unified teaching standard, such as the Bologna regulations (cf. Handal *et al* 2014), and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning idea complex (cf. Trigwell, Martin, Benjamin & Prosser 2000; Trigwell & Shale 2004).

One of the most vivid critics of the policy-approach to ADP is Jon Nixon (2004) who sees ADP as the construction of a bilingualism among academics, implying a theoretical stance on managerialism in Higher Education:

We have all, as intellectual workers, in varying degrees had to learn to be bi-lingual: to utter the standard platitudes of managerialism, while adopting within our own street culture of academic journals and collegial dialogue an older demotic. We cannot afford to ignore the language of managerialism, but nor can we afford to ignore its deep ideological drift. [...] It radically alters what we are talking about. It constitutes a new way of thinking about teaching and learning. Ultimately, it affects how we teach and how we learn (Nixon 2004, 246).

Other scholars argue in the same direction, such as for example Sue Clegg (2008) argues that there is a strong feeling of academic identity among university teachers and that this identity is being complex and diversified by the different disciplines teachers are acting within. This identity is, according to Clegg (2008), understood by teachers interviewed by her, as something positive. Still, the interviewees raise concerns regarding the standardisation of one university identity with focus in performativity, forcing university teachers to construct individual spaces of exercise. These spaces have been in focus by Sandy Schuck's, Sue Gordon's and John Buchanan's (2008) who identify a problem with the institutional policies of the measuring of teaching quality. What is being professionalism and teaching quality is not experienced and articulated in similar terms throughout the different disciplines of the academia, according to a literary review made for the article. Instead, professionalism is often defined as a collegial reflection on practice with regards to ethics and risk-taking in teaching situations. What is labelled as teaching quality at an institutional level, is therefore not always recognised as such at a department level. This is taken even further by Janice Malcolm and Miriam Zukas (2009) who identifies a in connection to what they call the 'official story' of

how teaching is being made and measured—in relation to how it is actually understood by the teachers involved in the teaching. Managerial terms are, according to Malcolm and Zukas (2009) being used to explain the ‘official story’ and the holistic approach of teaching is, according to the authors, being dissected into measurable parts fitting into this story. The teachers themselves experiences the use of these ‘official stories’ as minor and confusing of what can actually be learned from the teaching experience. Further conclusions on this perspective have been made by Christine Teelken (2012) who the author interviewed university teachers in the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom regarding their views on the relation between institutional strategies of teaching and their own teaching experiences. She identified a strategy among the university teachers to comply with the official teaching policies in their reports, but in their actual teaching disassociate themselves from these standard terminologies (Telkeen 2012). This strategy was constructed, according to the author, more often due to pragmatic reasons than for principled reasons. The realisation of managerialism in university teaching by teachers themselves has, according to these articles, constructed what Nixon (2004) described as a bilingual attitude towards teaching in Higher Education. University teachers know what to say and report, albeit often at the cost of their own reflection of teaching. This is dangerous if ADP becomes interpreted as managerialism, since everyone knows what to say, but believes in completely different things (cf. Fanghanel 2009a, Fanghanel 2009b). This is why a ‘top-down’ perspective on ADP might not work effectively. Deep gaps have emerged between different academic cultures of teaching when bringing academics from different fields to study the art of teaching at a university (cf. Lupton 2013). These gaps have shown to lead to frustration and a reluctance of being innovative in exploring different understandings of teaching and learning in higher education, and to try new methods of teaching (Freudenberg & Samarkowski 2014; Gannaway *et al* 2013; Hockings 2005). Teachers do, in my experience as teacher at a Swedish ADP, share experiences of teaching and that an ethical dialogue between university teachers actually can help and aid teachers in their own teaching (Cf. Campbell 2008; Colnerud 2006).

ADP as a particularity project

It is necessary to identify how different disciplines of academia understand themselves and what constitutes good teaching in order to make ADP both relevant and effective. Most disciplines have some kind of, often tacit, practice architectures in the understanding of how good research and teaching should be made (cf. Kemmis *et al.* 2014; Kemmis 2012). This is also seems to be the case with ADP, such as for example the paradigm of ‘deep/surface learning’ (Tormey 2014) and psychological ideas on how learning is established (Malcolm & Zukas 2001). When not identified, these views on dialogue, can cause distress and anger among course participants, and also the educators in ADP (Tormey 2014; Malcolm & Zukas 2001), whereby the goal of becoming good teachers and having a high quality of teaching among university teachers, can hardly be achieved.

In line with the previously cited Nixon’s view on university identity, teachers at the university learn to understand their teaching in two ways—the disciplinary way, based on tradition, and the managerial way, based on what the university administration tells you to do. It is dangerous if ADP becomes interpreted as managerialism, since everyone knows what to say, but believes in completely other things (cf. Fanghanel 2009a; Fanghanel 2009b, Nixon 2004). An ethical approach to university teaching, where university teachers are trained to become better teachers within their own fields, through the meeting of other scholars in other disciplines in ADP needs to be developed. Here, two theoretical fields, within different university disciplines, can bring tools for not only understanding how the gaps between different disciplinary teaching practices can be identified without establishing a general principle of education, as is the case with comparative didactics theory, but also give aid in bridging these gaps through a pragmatic standpoint of particularity in an interdisciplinary dialogue, as interfaith dialogue theory shows.

Introducing comparative didactics theory

The ways in which teaching and education are being performed and understood, are not universal, but regional (Caillot 2007; Hudson 2007). This ‘discovery’ has been the core of the so called comparative didactics theoretic, sometimes also known as the French comparative *didactiques* (Caillot 2007).

The words used for labelling teaching and learning differ between the European countries, and their meanings are not the same according to this view (Caillot 2007). As a result of this differentiation is the re-discovery of what teaching and learning means in different countries and try to see the field of teaching and learning as wider than each individual understanding of the word. This does not, however, lead to a pan-understanding of teaching and learning, but instead a realisation of the contextual and historical implications of the different educational systems and structures in each country to teaching and learning. Comparative didactics, therefore tend to use their own language's word for teaching or didactics regardless of the language of the research in order to indicate the origin of the word (Hudson 2007). Being a Swede, I would therefore use the word *didaktik* (German: *Didaktik*/Anglo-American English: Pedagogy) and *högskolepedagogik* (German: *Universitätspädagogik*/Anglo-American English: Teaching and Learning in Higher Education). This would certainly give my argumentation more specificity, and possibly also the ability of exchange between different disciplines (cf. Caillot 2007). Caillot states his theoretical standpoint of comparative didactics, as such:

Comparative didactics is based on the studies of classroom situations where processes of teaching and learning as such as they are, in other words with a real and ecological validity. [...] The conclusions were that the teacher's actions can never be understood independently of the specific knowledge to be taught and of the teacher's project. Each action includes some generality and some specificity at the same time. In fact it is located on a continuum: generality-specificity. Comparative didactics would like to be able to model the interactions between the teacher and the students during the processes of teaching-learning. (Caillot 2007, 129)

In his definition, Caillot, speaks of ecological validity in the actual classroom situations, where each different subject and teacher constructs actions of teaching in a range of generality and specificity. Without this specific context, the teaching actions cannot be made. Similar arguments to this have been made by Morgens Allan Niss³, stating that comparative didactics can bring

³ Paper given 10 April, 2014, by Professor Morgens Allan Niss (Roskilde University, Denmark) at the National Subject Matter Conference 2014, Gothenburg, Sweden. His results have, presently, not been published and are therefore only referred to in this way.

perspectives of other teachers into one's own situation. This makes, according to Niss, the teacher aware of the complexity of teaching and learning in other practicing teachers, hopefully leading to a humble self-understanding of one's own abilities to teach and the impossibility of over-generalisation of individual experiences into general principles. Niss also argues for the possibility of comparative didactics to make teachers better teachers through the discovery of what is constant and what is transient in one's own discipline by the examination of what is constant and transient in other disciplines. In my own experience from the University of Gothenburg, this feature of ADPs have been the most fruitful for the course participants, and something often unexpected for university teachers having previously only met colleagues from their own discipline.

Comparative didactics theory bring tools for identifying the necessity of understanding the university as a world of different disciplinary practices each with different traditions of how teaching and where each field gains from viewing other teaching practices. Still, a major problem is still not solved—how this interdisciplinary examination of teaching practices can be made. I would therefore like to introduce a field outside Educational Sciences: Interfaith dialogue theory.

Introducing interfaith dialogue theory

Inspiration for such a way of identifying differences and bridging the gaps between these differences can be found in the experiences of interfaith dialogue where religious differences are bridged in order to create something greater than the individual – without ignoring the individual identity (Moyaert 2012).

Each religion and, most often, each confession within each religion, has an exclusive way of understanding faith. It is the specific way a confession and religion understands the meaning of life, death and divinity, that is, the true understanding. Still, in many situations different religions and confessions need to cooperate in order to achieve something of importance. For example, in the case of apartheid in South Africa, Christian confessions (albeit not all of them) worked together to defeat the apartheid system (de Gruchy & de Gruchy 2004; de Gruchy 2006).

In interfaith dialogue, a number of different views are identified in order to

understand how dialogue can be established. Here follows a brief presentation of these, four views.

- The *exclusivist* view withholds, that there is only one ontological truth, and that truth is exactly what the group or individual is arguing for (Moyaert 2012). There can be no other way than this way. An example argument for this in Christianity could be, that only the Catholic understanding of Christianity is true, and that the purpose of Christianity is to make everyone good Catholics.
- The *inclusivist* view concludes, that the ways to ontological truth may be greater than the particular group's or individual's perspective (Moyaert 2012). Still, truth is not far away from the self-understanding. An example of this, could be, that all Christianity is true, but that some other religions also contain grains of truth, and that the purpose of faith is to make everyone a better believer within these 'accepted' similar religions.
- The *pluralist* view means that the ontological truth is greater than all human conception and that all religions have right in their understanding of religion and only together the truth can be seen (Moyaert 2012). An example of this is, John Hick's story of God as an elephant, where different religions regard only different bits of the elephant but that it is still the same elephant they all describe, and therefore the purpose of this perspective is to make everyone acknowledge the original, ultimate truth, beyond the visible truth (Hick 1995, 49, 149).
- The *particularist* view, which is the latest addition to the views of inter-faith dialogue theory, considers all religions both wrong and right in the sense that one's own religion and confession true, but that I must respect that all other religions and confessions regard themselves also as true (Moyaert 2012). This does not lead to a universal understanding of truth, but establishes a tool/platform for communication beyond religious borders. An example of this, is the Scriptural Reasoning programme where practitioners of different faiths meet and discuss holy texts in order to understand one's own tradition and also broaden the knowledge of the other (Ford 2011; Ochs 2006).

Constructing a model of particularity

In terms of academic cultures of teaching, these four approaches of ‘truth’ can be reinterpreted as typologies of ethics in ADP. In contrast to Theology, ‘truth’, has little to do with ontology in Educational Science, but with what is perceived as the ethics of good teaching within a particular academic culture or discipline (cf. Bullough Jr 2011; Campbell 2008; Colnerud 2006). If these differences go unnoticed, they can cause irritation and resistance, as I have experienced in my own teaching at the ADP of the University of Gothenburg. But when identified, strategies can be made for the establishing of dialogue between different academic cultures of teaching. These strategies depend, in my interpretation, on who the dialogue is for and who participates:

- The *exclusive* view on teaching could be the identification of a hegemony of certain theories or practices, understood as the general ‘truth’. When meeting people from other disciplines, the aim is therefore to convince all others of the perfection of this specific educational perspective (cf. Moyaert 2012).
- The *inclusive* view where certain ‘truths’ of teaching can be identified as emanating from a ‘the truth’ of teaching. The similarity of different cultures of teaching can make this perspective positive to changes and alternatives, as long as they are in line with the original perspective (that is, the one oneself considers as truth).
- The *pluralist* view identifies teaching as something beyond all academic cultures of teaching, and where all cultures do clash in their interpretations, but in ‘reality’ talk about the same thing. This perspective can be viewed as an open perspective, but in reality, it denounces all beliefs of differences in how teaching should be practiced (cf. Moyaert 2012).
- The *particularist* view, does not argue for a particular understanding of how teaching should be made, but identifies different cultures of teaching as relevant to scholars of these cultures. This view, is in my perspective, the most fruitful view to establish dialogue between practitioners of different disciplines, and therefore needs further investigation.

The concept of particularism in interfaith dialogue has only recently been

developed in Theology (Moyaert 2012). It is close to both the exclusive and inclusive perspectives in acknowledging both the incomparable absolute truth, and the other as a human being believing the same thing (but with another understanding of what that absolute truth is) (Moyaert 2012). The purpose of this perspective is then, not to convince the other of oneself's truth, but to establish a dialogue between different believers for a common external goal, and not the goal of constructing a new faith or modify the absoluteness of ontological truth. Moyaert (2012), who promotes the concept of particularism in interfaith dialogue, concludes:

Meanings are always acquired through concrete practices and cannot be detached from the context in which they are experienced. If one wants to understand what religion is, one should investigate how religion functions in the lives of religious people. The question then is: What does it mean to be Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, or Hindu? (Moyaert 2012, 35)

In terms of ADP, the concept of particularism brings much needed tools for establishing an interdisciplinary dialogue between these disciplines for the good of training university teachers in the art of teaching. The quote of Moyaert can translate into the world of academia. The first sentence in the quote can even be left as it is. In the second sentence, the words 'religion' and 'religious people' can be altered with 'teaching' and 'university teachers', whereas in the third sentence, the different religions can be altered into the different academic disciplines or cultures. The passage would then be, translated into ADP:

Meanings are always acquired through concrete practices and cannot be detached from the context in which they are experienced. If one wants to understand what *teaching* is, one should investigate how *teaching* functions in the lives of *university teachers*. The question then is: What does it mean to be *a teacher in Natural Science, Education, Arts, Social Sciences or Theology*? (Italics mark my alterations from the original quote).

The list of different academic identities can, of course, be made much longer. But the main point is vivid: teaching is bound to the practiced lives of universities within their different academic disciplines and cultures. Here, interfaith dialogue show similarities with comparative didactics. The roles of the

academic developer (AD) is, in the perspective of particularity, not the role of imposing managerialism (which, in my own experience, is not what an AD really wants to do), but to enhance teaching and inspire university teachers to become better teachers in an ethical dialogue with other university teachers, from other disciplines—all sharing the same feeling of a unique teacher identity through their own disciplines (cf. Debowski 2014; Hanson 2013; Baume & Baume 2013; Bullough Jr 2011). In a Swedish context, this brings hope for university teachers to continue their own established teaching practices, but also to be inspired by a more research focused perspective on teaching such as the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (cf. Healey 2000). In interfaith dialogue, the purpose of dialogue is seldom just because it is fun to meet believers of other faiths and confessions. Meeting the other, and respecting that person as an individual with something important to tell, is tiresome because one's own worldview alters in that meeting (cf. Biesta 2006). There are others, just like myself, but so very different in faith. Still, the most common reason for interfaith dialogue is because it has to be made. If separate, university teachers within different academic cultures of teaching, have difficulties of making themselves heard in the managerial attitudes within Higher Education. If general, institutional levels fail to spot the difference of teaching situations within the different university disciplines, making university teachers forced to become frustrated and confused in what they actually do since it does not fit the managerial standardisations of Higher Education.

Through the view of *particularity* in ADP, I argue, that teaching and learning in Higher Education has much to learn from different approaches to teaching within different cultures of teaching. ADP can, in opinion, be likened with a language—a language consisting of different disciplinary dialects, some larger in population (for example Pedagogy) than others (such as Ethics (Hauerwas 2007)), but none unimportant (Aldrin 2013). Each university teacher is then speaking his or her own teaching dialect, but in the same language as other university teachers regardless of discipline culture. This approach is much similar to Caillot's (2007) definition of comparative didactics, but with a constructive way of overcoming differences between academic cultures of teaching. In ADP this is particularly the case—for example in Sweden, where at the present moment, degrees of teaching excellence are being developed as

a way to promote teaching skills and reflections regarding the art of teaching (Gustafsson 2012).

Conclusions

In my article I have identified two existing approaches to ADP, none of which seem to complete the task of enhancing university teaching. The first approach is to consider ADP a disciplinary project where emphasis is made on the disciplinary differences of academic cultures of teaching. This approach, however, can lead to fragmentarisation and a weakness to tangle the different educational policies that have impact on the actual teaching. The second approach is to understand ADP as an interdisciplinary project with a strive to find the common grounds for what it is to be a university teacher. In the aftermath of centralising policies of education, this has led to a bilingual approach among university teachers to know what to say to the policy makers in terms of managerialism, but to disregard all ADP training in favour of disciplinary traditions, thereby making each university teacher weak through the solving of teaching difficulties individually instead of learning from others. In contrast to these two approaches, I propose a third, ethical perspective where ADP is understood as a particularity project. Instead of viewing disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity as opposing, disciplines can be in an interdisciplinary dialogue of enriching comparison, and nourished by the concept of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. Through a particular interdisciplinary dialogue between university teachers who already are within existing practices of teaching and learning, differences in teaching practices can be identified and similarities found, as was discovered by the course participants at the ADP of the University of Gothenburg. The general aspects of university teaching, such as being a teacher at Higher Educational level (and in Sweden, where most universities are run by the state, what it is to be a government official), can be discussed, but without imposing managerial ideas of linear teaching policies of teaching disregarding the different academic disciplines needs and traditions. Instead, these different didactics can be compared and used to further enhance one's own disciplinary practice of teaching in the Higher Education

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