Leadership from within: Empowering curriculum transformation amongst higher education teaching staff

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Premise

Higher education teaching practice is best conceived, not just as a set of standards but as a dynamic and inherently human practice that is distributed amongst all members of teaching practice communities and curriculum transformation is best achieved by individual teachers.
Outline

Research overview

Inherently human nature of university teaching

Conditions to empower curriculum transformation amongst university teachers.
Research aim and paradigm

Develop deeper and richer understandings of teachers' lived experiences of teaching in a contemporary university context.

A qualitative paradigm using phenomenological strategies framed the research.
Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Teaching experience</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chloe</td>
<td>Environmental Science</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>4 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abby</td>
<td>Creative Arts</td>
<td>&gt;10 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>&gt;10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>18 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>27 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>&gt;30 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data collection/text construction strategies

Semi structured interviews

Photo-elicitation
Text interpretation strategies

All data generated including researchers’ observations, field notes and interview transcripts were coded within a phenomenological tradition including holistic, selective and detailed readings of and reflection on the texts (Van Manen, 2014)
Findings

1. Teaching as an intensely human and personal practice
2. Responsibility and work of teaching
3. Sustaining teaching practices
Teaching is an inherently human, relational and embodied practice that is physically enacted and experienced by teachers with and for students and communities.

"Sometimes, there are difficulties in being a teacher, especially when teaching the first day of the school year. There's always a joy, if you've been teaching a while, and you've had an amazing group of students, there's a great sense of fulfillment. The joy of teaching is sometimes very difficult to maintain. People find it very difficult to detach from that. Even though you want to use that energy... I'm on edge."

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Chloe

"No matter how many years you have teaching... the first day of a new year... If you're not feeling a little bit apprehensive and nervous, something's wrong... the passion's missing..."

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Tom

"Sometimes it is very difficult to not get attached... you want to reach out... it almost hurts you as a human being... you need to learn how to separate your self from that."

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Amy
Responsibility and work of teaching

The participants revealed a strong sense of responsibility to provide students with positive learning experiences leading to heavy workloads and their transition to teaching being experienced as a steep learning curve.
Sustaining teaching practice

Despite teaching being hard work it was also inherently rewarding. Rewarding teaching moments enabled participants to maintain their passion for teaching.
Curriculum transformation empowered by teachers

The dynamic and uniquely experienced nature of teaching revealed by this research supports the argument that curriculum transformation might be best achieved by individual teachers. All members of a teaching community have a right and a responsibility to innovate curricula and teaching practices.
Uplifting leadership

Among people and organisations uplift is the force that raises performances, spirits and communities to attain higher purposes and reach unexpected levels of achievement.

(Hargreaves, Boyle & Harris, 2014)
Innovative and leading teaching practices are best undertaken in an educational ecosystem where:

1. the embodied, fluid and relational aspects of teaching are honoured opening spaces for creativity and spontaneity;

2. a culture of co-operation and partnership is privileged and teaching connections are made;

3. teachers learn to practice by actively doing and own responsibility for innovation;
Innovative and leading teaching practices are best undertaken in an educational ecosystem where:

4. performance measures are personally meaningful, broadly shared and fair;
5. passion for teaching is reignited alongside creativity so that teaching becomes vibrant and meaningful;
6. teachers’ work is sustainable, rewarding and life giving.
Conclusion

Teaching leadership that is authentic, fluid, distributed, inclusive and transformational is required to meet rapidly expanding and complex societal demands as well as teachers’ ethical obligations.
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