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Educational development for the public good

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Introduction

In times where conflicting value systems jostle for far-reaching power, it is important that educational developers commit to sound and effective enabling practices. We need to work with our established learning communities to ensure the development of new processes, practices, allegiances and communities that can engage colleagues and students with a positive values-driven agenda. This chapter explores ways in which academic developers, academic colleagues and, as a consequence of our work, our students, can develop and be empowered as active critical professionals, where work and knowledge creation are underpinned by positive values of social justice. What can we *do* in terms of educational development and in our teaching to encourage the research and experience-informed attitudes, behaviour and practices which support and enable staff – and through them students – to ensure that higher education really is effective for social justice and the public good? I explore arguments and some strategic educational activities in a UK university, which could be translated into different contexts. Critical professionalism, a term developed by Melanie Walker, who talks of agentic and purposeful elements where critical professionalism in teaching is ‘about having the courage to put forward alternatives’ (2001:14), underpins Brenda Leibowitz and David Holgate’s chapter in this volume. I use my own academic development interpretation here to indicate engaged, critical, active beliefs and behaviour of academic staff and the palpable influence these have on the perspectives and work of students.

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Internationally, the current context for higher education pressurises us to see knowledge as a commodity, and students as consumers and purchasers of that commodity (Brown *et al*, 2011). The current commodification of and competition for higher education seems to have slipped educationalists, academics and students into a world in which fees dominate and curricula are restricted to the totalitarian notion of the 'strictly useful', according to some highly restricted definition of measurable functionality. In the UK at least, we are also caught in an ironically contradictory situation. On the one hand, there is the removal of central government funding and rising fees, which place the total cost of higher education, educating for all our futures, on individuals, many of whom will not want to risk the loan system which is a form of rental on that future. On the other hand, we hear the discourse of widening participation and access, a gesture towards the social justice of knowledge acquisition and construction, if not to the outcomes of that learning experience. What can get lost in this contradiction are the reasons for higher education in the first place. As Martha Nussbaum argues in defence of the humanities: 'cultivated capacities for critical thinking and reflection are crucial in keeping democracies alive and wide awake' (2010:10).

Nussbaum replaces the often sidelined humanities in a tug of war of values in which an impoverished curriculum sees only one version of higher education, operating on a limited version of the sciences, with economics at the centre. She reminds us that the humanities foster imaginative connections with others:

The ability to think well about a wide range of cultures, groups, and nations in the context of a grasp of the global economy and of the history of many national and group interactions is crucial in order to deal with responsibility with the problems we currently face as members of an interdependent world (2010:10).

These values link social justice directly to the vision and curriculum of higher education, and to the practices of academic/educational developers whose roles with staff facilitate theorised, practical and clear thinking – a vision and facility that colleagues can then nurture in their students.

Social justice informs international declarations and commitments which urge higher education to promote critical thinking, active citizenship and elements of critical professionalism which help achieve sustainable development, well-being, human rights, equality and peace. The Declaration of the World Conference on Higher Education stresses that attention be paid to social justice and social responsibility (1998; 2009); the UN emphasises the importance of a social orientation to curricula in its millennium goals (2010);

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and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation explicitly stresses the importance of incorporating social responsibility into higher education (UNESCO, 1998; 2009).

Barnett and Coate (2005) argue that the university needs to engage with society and non-academic communities. Coate (2009) maintains that civic engagement is a key university role. Civic engagement initiatives fire up people's imaginations and sense of social justice and they also take these attitudes through to sustainable practice in the work of staff and students. In this way, positive developmental change is more than temporary; it is not simply focused on one-off actions. Senior management vision and commitment, curriculum development, social justice attitudes and values outcomes in educational development programmes are essential. So, too, are ongoing opportunities for supported projects to action values, identify their benefits in practice and embed values outcomes in modules to ensure both students' learning and a common discourse of social engagement, social justice, civic and global responsibility.

Berman (1990) sees social responsibility as 'personal investment in the well-being of others and the planet'. Awareness and practice of social responsibility and social justice reflect an understanding that we all belong to a wider social network which both constructs and maintains versions of identity. We co-develop and maintain interpersonal relationships based on ethical considerations of equality, justice and mutual support, and each act ethically and with integrity. In Berman's (1997) terms, these beliefs and behaviours engage the individual with their well-being and values, and with working with others to engage them too. It starts with the individual in context, spreads to others near and far, and is seen in positive social interactions, decision-making, cooperation, participation and altruistic behaviour for the social good. The benefits are both social and personal: engagement with values and critical thinking, cooperation and energised actions.

I am a frequent visitor to South Africa and engage with educational development in that country. Each time I return I am reminded that education for social justice can sit alongside education for a knowledge economy. For us in the UK, grappling with our contradictions, or for me as a travelling academic at least, this reminder is inspiring. It enables me to return with some new hope to the engaged and values-infused work that I and colleagues do in educational development and our teaching. The hope is that values of social justice will infuse planned (and unplanned) activities both in educational development and in the learning contexts for our students. Rapid change and

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challenge to established values can lead to a sense of intellectual impotence, paralysis and silencing. However, educational development, intrinsic motivations as rewards, creativity, exploration, equality, sharing and enrichment are also the longer lasting aims of higher education and the development it fosters. It is in this context that the values of social justice, engagement and a questioning, creative, imaginative and committed response can be revived and nurtured.

For academic or educational developers, the context of contested values of higher education matches the complexities and contradictions we work with in our own practices: 'Academic development is a field in which profound and unrelenting contradiction is not resolvable as a problem of professional practice, but is the lived condition within which the work is carried out on a daily basis' (Lee and McWilliam, 2008:75). The ways we might engage colleagues in the university context will be affected by the local, national and global climate in which we find ourselves.

What values? Whose values?

We need to ask a few questions before committing to social justice development or curriculum change. Misguided work with a values-informed curriculum and practices could lead to actions for social *injustice*. The same kind of enthusiasm and engagement could be harnessed for commitment to inequality, cruelty, social irresponsibility and prejudice. There is enough of that about. It is important that our educational development engagements enable colleagues – and consequently their students – to think through their value systems and discuss how they can implement social justice actions in their own study and practice. Is this brainwashing? Is the engagement with good values something entirely subjective or merely temporary and contextually constructed? Are we proselytising a certain set of values in action, and the opposite could be urged or enforced?

Fundamental questions about the right of education to engage with values and bring them into the open for discussion form an early part of any development which leads to critical thinking, critical professionalism and action for social justice. Changing practice and changing curricula are all modes for engagement explored here and should be effective in a variety of contexts. As David Gosling notes: we are 'living within a contradictory reality' (2009:5). The surfacing of values and engagement with practical implications of development for social justice and a values agenda is an important issue for educational developers to tackle.

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Defining critical professionalism

It is in this spirit of revival and reinvigoration that educational developers can engage with other academic colleagues in the development of our own critical professionalism, and in which we can all engage our students in learning aimed at social justice, empowerment and self-actualisation. 'Critical' implies a developed ability to open up space for new engagement across cultural and other differences, and a new generosity of spirit with regards to the reasons for and modes in action of the contestation, creation and uses of knowledge. 'Professionalism' implies dedication and commitment to values, rigour and management, and ensuring that the fruits of such development are experienced, shared and benefited by more than the individual or the organisation funding the endeavours.

Critical professionals are engaged academics and colleagues concerned about the relationships between education, social justice, knowledge, people and life. They are individuals who see that their involvement in developing their own professional skills over time, consistently and diversely, can lead to nurturing skills and a searching, constructive development of self and others. This should be more than merely exploratory and ambitious or idealistic. It should be planned, practised, shared and disseminated, influential, far-reaching and sustainable. It is underpinned by and leads to change in vision and practice among staff and students to ensure that outcomes are constructive, positive and sustainable. Some of this can be actioned in the university context through ensuring senior management support and buy-in for developments that enable social justice, values and the public good; embedding values through learning opportunities and outcomes in the curriculum; and by enabling staff to develop projects and practices and to disseminate their experiences (sometimes problematic, taxing and troublesome and sometimes inspirational).

Some practical applications

While the transformational nature of the university curriculum is an underlying theme in the South African context (Jansen, 2009; Terwel and Walker, 2004), in UK universities this is less widely asserted. However, I have been involved with local successes in my role as educational developer at the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CLT) in Brighton, UK.

Networking

Networking with communities and organisations who would benefit from the university's input could provide genuine opportunities for student engage-

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ment and jobs after graduation. At the University of Brighton, the CUPP programme (Community University Partnership Programme: <http://www.brighton.ac.uk/cupp/>) exemplifies such community and social justice engagement. The emphasis on volunteering and the theme of sustainable development underlies some curricula and other University practices, whether assessed or additional to the curriculum. Students can become actively involved with social and community organisations, gain transferable skills and enhance their curriculum vitae. They can engage with social and cultural organisations such as the Terence Higgins Trust (for HIV and AIDS), with social action to promote sustainable living in social housing, with projects supporting people with hearing disabilities, with neighbourhood revitalisation schemes and with ageing and well-being projects. CUPP is supported by senior management buy-in and a values-infused vision underpinning the curriculum through a wide range of disciplines.

Engaging colleagues and students in social justice-oriented learning means embracing these values at the curriculum level through course development, learning outcomes, assessment, learning and teaching activities and content. It also means ensuring that aims, targets and goals are embedded in the strategic planning and monitoring processes as recognisable indicators of achievement, and that rewards (intrinsic or extrinsic) are given to ensure achievement of measurable goals and competences of socially responsible behaviour in the disciplines and professional practice. Values-oriented learning is likely to be at a high contextual as well as a practical level if embedded within curriculum development and embraced throughout the institution.

Continuing professional development

CPD activities can ensure that colleagues focus on issues and practices which lead to social justice throughout their careers. Course leadership and curriculum development courses can support the development of social justice-informed curricula. Including an expectation of social justice and critical professionalism in the criteria for teaching excellence awards highlights their importance in underpinning all learning and teaching.

A strategy developed at several international universities (for example, University of Brighton and University of Stellenbosch) concerns 'fellowship' projects. These enable colleagues to take an innovation, a problem to solve or a development into their own practice and research its progress. Learning and teaching fellowships offer a specific opportunity for colleagues to come together to develop research-informed good practice in a range of areas related to issues, problems, innovations, development and challenges in their own work.

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University of Brighton fellowships have included: student empowerment regarding ethnic and gendered identity when about to enter HE; tourism management students' exchange visits to Gambia where they participated in community engagement (Novelli and Burns, 2010); developing IT and blended learning for students with learning disabilities; and refugee education. Not every fellowship relates to social justice, although many do. The ways in which we engage and support their development aim to evolve a shared set of values and methods to underpin work for social justice more broadly. This involves identifying, developing and implementing in their own practice the characteristics of critical professionalism – the questioning, challenging, problematising, engaged attitude which seeks reasons for research, learning and action. Ideas generation, project planning, hard work and meticulous, focused and creative engagement are all essential to the research and professional practice. They ensure that plans are put into practice, that people are engaged and involved and that something of value happens which causes change. Then evaluation and completion-finishes takes place, further plans are developed and the students benefit from the projects.

Dialogues between ideas, values and actions and between colleagues, students and the appropriate professional and practice context lead to knowledge creation and production. The many formal and informal professional educational development activities can engage colleagues in thinking through their values, using research and theory in professional practice to develop supportive communities, contribute to knowledge and create effective change for social justice. In the University of Brighton some of these take place through enquiry group meetings and specific workshops and symposia that enable exchange of ideas, problem-solving and joint working.

Embedding sustainability in the curriculum

A major value to which curriculum is committed in UK higher education and at Brighton is sustainability or sustainable development. This is seen as crucial to the continuity of humanity. It is embedded in a mindset, affecting the way people behave and how they learn and construct knowledge (Sayce, 2010). It is fundamental and applicable across the spectrum of everything we do. One of the challenges for the inclusion of sustainability in the curriculum is that it could be seen as yet another add-on. Some colleagues might say, 'last year we had equality in the curriculum, or e-learning, and now we have to have sustainable development ...' and this can lead to mechanistic compliance rather than action based on values. For a set of beliefs and approaches to be owned, actioned, maintained and sustained in universities

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there needs to be a hierarchy of both strategic commitment from senior management and willingness from the staff and students. Sustainability is enabled by: government imperative (eg Mandelson, 2010; DEFRA, 2010), senior management buy-in and championing and colleagues embracing the commitment throughout their work and embedding it in the curriculum. We also ensure that reports of the effectiveness of sustainability are tabled at faculty board or other middle management discussions and embedded in processes for course validation and annual monitoring. We have found that development opportunities and regular meetings and projects keep the issues in people's minds and practices.

Some of the opportunities within academic development with which I have been involved have included enquiry groups, symposia with national figures and the sharing of local examples in practice, discipline-based project teams and the development of website resources.

Enquiry group

The sustainable development enquiry group meets three times a year for an hour and is open to anyone interested in the values and practice. Sometimes this is a large group committed to exploring, supporting, producing and then disseminating projects engaged with sustainable development. Sometimes it is a small explorative discussion group. The waxing and waning depends on project initiatives, funding and human energies. We cannot all be focused on this all the time but it is an underlying concern all the time, so a regular group meeting keeps the issues to the fore and enables projects to be maintained.

Symposia

Twice yearly we have themed symposia: one-day internal mini-conferences with invited outside keynote speakers – colleagues sharing examples of their own practice. The sustainable development symposium had an uplifting atmosphere of engagement in something to which 60 colleagues from across the full discipline range and our partner colleges were thoroughly committed. It was surprising to see how different subjects could interpret sustainability and sustainable development. For example, colleagues working in fashion focused on enabling students to produce fashion products and designs which emphasis certain fabrics and production processes to minimise the waste, toxins and detritus associated with the practising art world. *Telling* students to work in this sustainable way would have failed to engage their beliefs, attitudes, skills and knowledge construction. *Engaging* them to appreciate the theories and values behind sustainable development through discussion and

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learning about the implications of certain usage and wastage; involving them in small group tasks that explored applicability to their own practice; setting assessments which encouraged critical thinking, imaginative research, practice-informed responses and production – these actions encouraged students to understand, choose, own, theorise, action and explain their work.

A project funded by the higher education academy educational subject centre – ESCALATE – enabled a small development group of staff and a researcher to work with colleagues across the University, exploring their use of sustainable development in their own curricula. We met termly to consider the planning, findings, developments, future dissemination and embedding. The result was a report for ESCALATE and case studies – examples of sustainable development with curriculum, which can be accessed via the websites listed in the references for this chapter.

Action research for change

Because it empowers everyone involved and leads to a sense of shared ownership, action research is frequently used as the prime research mode for social justice. It is generally conducted by professionals who see those with whom they research as subjects rather than objects, thus ensuring a shared research endeavour and effective long-lasting change. An example of action research for emancipatory change that I have been involved in has taken place in Iraq/ Kurdistan. The aims of the work have been to:

- identify key research development and supervisory training needs for female researchers and academics
- develop training programmes and other capacity building initiatives that build research development and supervisory capability
- research the development and unfolding of the project through continuous feedback loops that shape the project's direction.

This action research originated in developmental meetings among interested women academics from various, mostly Arabic and Kurdish speaking, universities who co-developed and took on the research processes and data gathering. We, a group of UK women of diverse ethnic backgrounds, have worked from the start to slowly engage with those who wish to engage, co-develop, share and understand the data. We have done this so it can be jointly owned, rather than its implications merely being fed back to the researchers. But we've also done it so the lead institution – University of Kurdistan-Hawler – can make a change in its practices.

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We are currently engaged in exploring with women academics how, and if, their involvement in the development programme, constructed with their input and advice, can make positive differences in their own sense of agency in a changing context. This is a context fundamentally based on traditional relations of inequality, where higher education itself is attempting to move forward with gender equality and tackle a history of embedded disempowerment.

It is early days, the research is underway, the data emerging, the development meetings inspirational, But the hidden histories of disempowerment and silencing in academic contexts are also being revealed. This is the tip of an iceberg of a culture in which most research into women's experience has so far dealt with honour killings rather than the empowerment of academic women. The action research cycles now underway are emancipatory and agentive – and the large social justice agenda extends beyond the university women into their teaching, their students and, hopefully, social change.

In our final working visit in February 2012, 250 people, mostly women, from seven different universities, were involved in our workshops and action research training. Twenty-four participated in the symposium on women academics and the sharing of the co-developed research. We have worked together at a conference in Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates entitled 'Gender and women's studies in the Arab region' in March 2012 and are beginning to co-write. Undertaking these projects has not always been easy, but it has certainly been fruitful, stimulating and enriching. The research and the ongoing development sessions have uncovered a range of issues hidden from the public face of universities, and show us also that as UK-based women working in a postcolonial context, we have surprisingly more in common in relation to barriers – and the imaginative, cooperative ways of working to overcome them – than was apparent at first.

The research looks particularly at the barriers to development and ways of moving beyond these barriers for women in academic and academic-related posts in Iraq and Kurdistan. The research and overall project provide a space for UK and Iraqi female academics to share experiences in developing their own and other participants' development, management and research capabilities.

Local researchers in the team conducted the initial interviews in local languages with academic women at the University of Kurdistan-Hawler, Salahaddin University, University of Sulaimania and the American University of Iraq Sulaimania, Hewler Medical, Jihan and Duhok Universities .

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The interviews were based on the following research questions:

- What motivated you to pursue a career in higher education?
- Are you happy with your role? Why and how?
- What are your concerns and challenges?
- What are your professional development needs?
- What do you think would encourage other women into higher education?
- Have you ever encountered any gender issues when it comes to promotion?

The findings were transcribed and translated by the Iraqi researchers. The twenty interviews are being collated and analysed so we can publish together.

The circumstances of the women academics' involvement have been sensitive from the start and participants were reticent to speak openly about their concerns and issues. The local researchers successfully employed appropriate trust-building interview techniques. This reticence was explained as stemming from the fear and mistrust that constrains women from discussing issues of gender and power. Women reported receiving support from their families – although heavy duties within the family affected their work. Some offered examples of general undermining of their confidence at work, and they talked about the lack of equal access to good equipment for work and research.

Despite a contradictory context, the women interviewed were mostly positive about tackling issues and succeeding:

Ambition is what motivated me to work in the academic world – you could say some job privilege motivated too. Yes I am happy and very content with my role in the university. From the beginning it was my dream to attain higher education and work through this field. Facing challenges as a woman is not the issue; it is facing challenges as a human being that matters. (Participant K)

What the projects have done is to raise awareness, enable discussion of issues not previously mentioned and facilitate the sharing of experiences. In social justice terms they have brought women's issues to the fore in the lives of the participants and researchers, and through them, the lives of their students. Should the universities buy into supporting the development and progress of their female academic staff, the situation of the women academics might slowly begin to change. To date, nothing of this kind has happened, however, despite institutional proclamations that it would.

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At the individual level the support of the network and development empowers colleagues to take development forward with students. One of the participants notes the changes she feels from being part of the project:

Having participated in the project really was a transformational and empowering experience for me and one that I would like to share with fellow colleagues and students. I sincerely and deeply hope that you do continue conducting these workshops in this region and I will spend more time planning for the next stage ... hopefully brainstorm topics and consider a proposal for a PhD. (Researcher H)

This woman has gone on with a newer colleague to develop a club for women students which enables them to work together and involve new women students so they feel comfortable in the new environment of higher education.

The context is of rapid social change. I see huge new glass buildings every time I return to Iraq/ Kurdistan, while the 8,000-year-old bazaar continues under dubiously safe electric lighting. We hope that involvement in the action research and attendant developments can initiate change for social justice in terms of gender and empowerment, breaking silences without leaving those who break them isolated and vulnerable.

Conclusion

Academic developers are agents for change within higher education. Ironically, given the current pressures and constrictions, there is now a new opportunity to remember that information exchange and the feeding of the knowledge economy is not *all* that higher education is about. In this rather troublesome context, educational development learning dialogues and interactions, colleagues and their students, can lead to engagement with the values of social justice and theorised, well thought-through, well researched action. Critical professionalism unites theory and research with values and professional-practice actions. It does this with the colleagues involved in many of our educational development activities, and with their students who engage with the projects and embody and action the outcomes. Knowledge contestation and creation are recognised as liberating, enabling and empowering those who engage with it for development and social justice.

This work will help make higher education a more comprehensive undertaking, so that professionals, staff and students develop further as persons of integrity who know how to act coherently with values that reflect ethical considerations of justice and care, so that they can invest not only in their own well-being but in the well-being of others and of the planet. They will act, in other words, with social responsibility, for social justice.

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Sites for sustainable development at Brighton:

<http://staffcentral.brighton.ac.uk/clt/ESD/index.html>

http://staffcentral.brighton.ac.uk/clt/ESD/vignette/geology_enviro.html

http://staffcentral.brighton.ac.uk/clt/ESD/vignette/media_studies.html

http://staffcentral.brighton.ac.uk/clt/ESD/vignette/ba_international.html