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Blurring curriculum boundaries to shape professional identities. (0267)

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Personal identities are often entangled with work identities. Each discipline / profession has a 'habitas', a cultural environment which expresses (internally and externally) interests, values and activities. This paper addresses the experiential aspects of these identities, and questions how students in Higher Education may assume their own disciplinary memberships with varying degrees of independence. The research project focuses on the role of extra and co-curricular locations and activities; as means of developing cultures of independent inquiry and reducing dependency on educational structures. Two projects in the discipline of Landscape Architecture are described which aim to support exploration beyond the university precincts and engagement with places as precedent case studies. These projects emphasise the role of inquiry based learning, facilitate networks of engagement, and integrate domains of practice.

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Personal identities are often entangled with professional identities. Henkel (2005) suggests that professional and social identities develop as a series of orientations, formed and sustained by individual and collective values. These orientations may be initiated or explored at a young age, but the opportunity of the Higher Educational context, particularly in professionally accredited disciplines, is of a community focus, providing both rationale and ritual in shaping a sense of belonging. Reid and Solomonides (2007), in research with design students, addresses how a 'sense of being' (the student's core view of themselves) is afforded different orientations towards their 'sense of artistry' (of being within a profession), 'sense of transformation' (learning) and 'sense of being within a specific context' (becoming). "If you stand every day with a trombone in your hand, eventually you feel like you are a trombonist". (Music student quote, Reid et al., 2008, p.738).

This suggests the underlying importance of a social theory of learning, and of the student experience of 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1998). Wenger defines the 'work of learning' in three dimensions, identifying three important components: engagement, imagination and alignment. These provide a useful framework for examining the interaction between curriculum and extra-curriculum locations and qualities of learning. Jarvis (2006) reminds us of the embedded nature of learning, that the curriculum and locations of education are only one of the means by which students learn. Student identities are fundamentally temporal (Wenger, 1998, p.154), having trajectories both 'into' the academic discipline and 'outward' into professional practice, and sustaining consecutive multi-memberships of communities within and without of the university environment. In what ways do students utilise imaginative thinking to broader inquiries that span outside of the formal curriculum, and allow them to access richer resources for their own development? The potential experimental and self directed aspects of these explorations have potential in making connections and creating meaning. The role of independent inquiry based learning both strengthens and challenges the

'reflective practitioner' model (Schon, 1983): highlighting the importance of self-identification and practice within a discipline but lessening the dependence on role models based on student / tutor dynamics.

This paper explores dimensions of learning which blur the boundaries of the formal curriculum. In particular, I suggest that the physical / spatial qualities of learning should be given attention, the 'where' in addition to the 'what'. This is particularly relevant to my disciplinary / professional area, that of landscape architecture, but is shared by other 'place based' disciplines (architecture, engineering, archaeology, planning, geography), and illuminate more broadly issues of professional identities across diverse fields.

Undoubtedly, students in Landscape Architecture find on-site exploration and discussion essential to development of their professional skills. Traditionally, this has taken place as part of module programmes, visiting local sites of interest, and on large group field trips within the UK and Europe. There are benefits to the focus of these activities, both the connection to assessed projects and the peer group and tutor opportunities for debate and reflection. However, it is important to critically examine also the limitations of these study models. Pedagogically, they can emphasis a dependence on the tutor as 'tour guide' and as provider of expert judgements rather than promoting individual confidence and habits of inquiry. Practically, a context of increasing student numbers and tighter resources has eroded both the quality and quantity of tutor led field trips, needing a more flexible approach to supporting student landscape experiences.

The research methodology is action research conducted by a practitioner in the disciplinary area. Two projects have been developed which aim to support students in independent field based inquiry based learning both within and without of the assessed modules.

The first project addresses the overseas field trips. In our department, these have been provided for both UG and MA students on a staff led group trip, not attached to a module, and taking place outside of university semesters. In research undertaken for a M.Ed study, three framing principles were identified: the benefits of informality, the opportunities of co-learning and the requirement for significance. This has led to development of diverse options at MA level: elective smaller field trips aligned strongly to staff research interests and a resource for student led independent trips focused on five European cities. At UG level the traditional larger group format is retained but moved within a module format to demonstrate more clearly the learning objectives of the trip. A department wide 'forum' allows sharing of stories, experiences and enthusiasms, making public the educational contribution of these activities within the community context.

The second project 'Place as Precedent' is currently being developed, funded by CILASS, a CETL within the University of Sheffield focused on supporting models of Inquiry Based Learning. The project is a resource of 20 sites of 'best practice' local to Sheffield, aiming to support independent student visits. The resource uses web 2.0 media to create an ongoing collaboration of expert and student generated material; combining practical information about visiting, experiential records of seasonal / yearly change, professional documentation (original designs, management plans, historic maps) and expert views, podcast and video casts of practitioners involved in the planning, design and management of the sites. Use of the material will be used by students interested in planning

independent trips out, and also will be gradually be integrated into various modules across the curriculum to expose students to a range of case studies.

I suggest that within place based disciplines, exploration 'outside the classroom' is the equivalent of "standing with a trombone", and that communities of practice need to be mobile enough (temporarily, spatially and conceptually) to allow for learning to be a boundary blurring activity. There are structural challenges, especially within a modularised syllabus, which need to be tackled to give status to activities that 'look and learn' outside of assessed frameworks. Habits of inquiry which encompass daily places and rituals as well as specialised skills will be key to shaping professional identities which integrate transformation, practice and becoming.

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