**Teaching in Higher Education as a Collective Endeavour**

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**Introduction**

Many of the tasks entailed in university teaching are characteristically performed by an individual, whether giving a lecture or convening a seminar. A lecturer usually stands in front of a class of students on his or her own, or a single technician will explain to a group of students how to operate a piece of equipment. The collective dimension to teaching is muted at best. If teaching is stereotypically seen as involving actions of individual, then we should not be surprised that the dominant theories used to frame how to teach in higher education are focused on individual competence. Indeed, Boud (1999) suggested that programmes of professional development for teaching in higher education typically focus on training and developing individual members of staff as resource for their institutions, on the lines of human capital theory (Lepak & Snell 1999).

Peseta and Kandlbinder (2009) identified a set of theoretical perspectives that were particularly likely to be adopted on such programmes, including reflective practice (Schön 1983), constructive alignment (Biggs & Tang 1999) and the scholarship of teaching (Boyer 1990). Such perspectives typically promote an individual framing of teaching in higher education. For instance, Kahn, Goodhew, Murphy and Walsh (2013) argued that the original model of the scholarship of teaching offered by Boyer concentrates on the practice of individuals. The influence of such theories is also apparent in the emphasis on individual competence that is evident in professional standards frameworks such as the UK Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education (Higher Education Academy 2011). It is to be expected, furthermore, that development programmes will not only promote these theories to participants, but will themselves be influenced by them.

Is this framing of what it means to teach and to learn to teach one that is fully adequate? Are there core aspects of the teaching role that go beyond one’s own individual expertise as a practitioner? If so, what would the implications be for the process of learning to teach in higher education? There is significant scope for social theory to underpin investigation of these questions. One of the advantages of a critical realist theorisation is the scope it offers for critique, as Clegg (2014) argued. Indeed, the early work by Bhaskar (1979) that helped to establish critical realism as a field was itself focused as a critique of the contemporary human sciences. However, the emphasis within critical realism on developing comprehensive and non-reductive explanations for social phenomena also means that the paradigm is well suited to a theorisation that takes in a wider basis than the theoretical perspectives currently in possession within the field of academic development.

Critical realism is also closely associated with the pursuit of social justice, as Clegg observed in the previous chapter. Bhaskar (1986) argued that theories in the social sciences are not neutral, but are both ridden with values and impregnate commitments. He suggested that an understanding of the causal mechanisms in play within social reality should engender a commitment to emancipatory action. If education is understood and unfolds in particular ways then, according to Bhaskar (1986), there will be ethical implications for the way that lecturers both teach and learn to teach. He principally understood emancipation as a form of self determination, in which the lives of subjects are determined by sources that are desired rather than undesired by them. However, Bhaskar (1986) also recognized a shared dimension in that emancipatory action requires solidarity with others if a transformation of social structures is to occur. If we ignore the collective dimension to university teaching, it is likely that scope for the advancement of social justice will narrow.

Such perspectives inform the analysis in this chapter of what is entailed in learning to teach, although the argument also addresses some limitations in the approach to emancipation advocated by Bhaskar (1986). It is clear that individually-focused capacities are still required to teach well. This chapter, though, seeks to employ critical realist perspectives to understand the collective dimension to teaching in higher education, and the means that might be employed to help those who are teaching as they learn to undertake their varied roles.

**Teaching as a disciplinary practice**

Teaching in higher education is characteristically undertaken within disciplinary settings or in settings with a scholarly focus for cross-disciplinary engagement. Each discipline has its own language, knowledge base and ways of perceiving the world, as Becher and Trowler (2001) argued. Entry into a given academic tribe primarily rests on the acquisition of specialist disciplinary knowledge and expertise, as acquired when securing a doctorate. The command of one’s subject matter is central to participation in the tribe, and it is this command that a teacher seeks to help his or her students to acquire. It is intriguing, though, as Shulman (1986) pointed out, that our current processes to examine doctoral students remain closely related to the forms of teaching in evidence within medieval universities: oral exposition (lecture) and defense of a thesis (disputation). The mastery of the lecture and the disputation have historically been acquired on a tacit rather than an explicit basis (Eraut 2000), on the basis of experience rather than formal instruction. Until relatively recently, lecturers typically have been expected to replicate the modes of instruction that they experienced when they themselves studied as students. Knight and Trowler (2000), furthermore, have argued that colleagues in a given department maintain common working practices when teaching. There are advantages in maintaining common teaching practices within a department. Students benefit from receiving a consistent educational experience. The capacity to adopt practices that are acceptable and meaningful to one’s colleagues represents an important baseline for learning to teach. Kahn and Walsh (2006), for instance, argued that it is reasonable for lecturers to justify their teaching in part through an appeal to established practice within their immediate setting.

The term ‘morphostasis’ refers to those processes that tend to preserve the existing structural aspects of a system, with ‘morphogenesis’ referring to those processes which tend over time to transform the structural aspects of a system (Archer 1995). At least until somewhat recent times, teaching in higher education has been characterized by morphostasis. Clegg explored in the previous chapter how interaction between the agents operating within a system either leads to structural elaboration or reproduction. One might argue for using terms such as ‘change’ and ‘stability’ rather than ‘morphogenesis’ and ‘morphostasis’ when seeking to make sense of teaching. However, at least for the purposes of theorising in this chapter, the use of these latter terms helps us to draw attention to the processes in play, and assists in connecting our argument to critical realist theorising.

Archer (1995), however, claimed that morphostatic scenarios become increasingly untenable as pressures for change mount. The extent to which the world of higher education is now characterised by change rather than stability is a central issue, one that has a significant influence on what is entailed in learning to teach. Archer (2007) held that social change is now endemic in today’s morphogenetic society, while Barnett (1999) suggested that our world is characterised by supercomplexity, in which the means that we use to understand the world and our place within it are themselves contested. One’s view of what it means to learn to teach depends in significant part on the extent to which one acknowledges change as an integral feature of higher education today.

**Transformation and the Capacity to Teach**

It is important to understand the nature of the pressures for change before considering the implications for the process of learning to teach. If a department perceives that its existence is under threat, then new teaching practices may be required to attract students or to convince managers of the viability of the department. Gibbs, Knapper and Picinnin (2008) identified a set of departments in research intensive institutions that could objectively be characterised as manifesting excellent teaching. In each case he was able to identify an external threat to the future of the department as a significant factor in realising that excellence. However, the range of pressures for change in teaching that now operate within higher education is genuinely wide. Regulatory changes provide a particularly compelling motive for change – as has occurred in many European countries as a result of the Bologna process to integrate higher education (Keeling 2006). Drives for greater accountability have been particularly powerful in the UK, with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2014) requiring institutions to specify the outcomes, and methods of teaching, learning and assessment that are employed in programmes. The use of learning technology constitutes a particularly widespread driver for change in teaching (Laurillard 2013). Indeed, technological pedagogical content knowledge (Mishra & Koehler 2006) has been added as a specific sub-domain to pedagogical content knowledge. In addition to these drivers, Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley (2009) cite global shifts that relate to the massification of higher education, growth in transnational education, moves towards widening access, the advance of private higher education, partnerships with industry, and so on. Other shifts in society at large have also impacted on higher education, whether the growing recognition of the need for sustainable education or the value of addressing historic inequalities in participation in higher education.

Critical realist perspectives would suggest, though, that such pressures do not operate on those teaching in higher education in some automatic fashion; just as social justice is not an inevitable outcome of change. Archer (1995) argued that while pressures may exist for change, individuals and groups need to act together if morphogenesis is to result. Archer (1995) used the term ‘corporate agency’ to refer to the way that individual agents join together in order to formulate and advance mutual interests. Corporate agency is focused on systemic change, whereby corporate groups change the structure of the system. Archer (1995) contrasted this form of agency with primary agency, whereby agents work within existing systems. Primary agents are those who act within a system that is shaped by others, even in cases where they act together. A department or institution in which no change has occurred in teaching over an extended period can be characterized as a morphostatic scenario. By contrast, the pursuit of changes in teaching necessitates the capacity to act together with others as a corporate agent. If excellent teaching involves responding constructively to pressures for change, then the capacity to teach is closely related to the capacity to act as a corporate agent.

***Learning to pursue change with others***

It is important to understand how lecturers and others engaged in teaching can respond creatively and wisely to pressures for change. This depends upon an appreciation of the ways in which a group of people collectively act so rather than otherwise in the pursuit of mutual interests. One key lesson from Archer (2003) is that reflexivity plays an important role in mediating the influence of structure on the agency of individuals. Reflexivity as a term refers to the ordinary mental capacity to consider oneself in relation to the social contexts that one encounters. Archer (2003) argued that the agency of individuals becomes increasingly concrete as concerns lead to action, under the influence of reflexivity and within given structural settings that constrain and influence that action. We have already seen in Chapter 10 that Archer (2003) identified a set of characteristic modes of reflexivity. Variation in the way that structure impacts on agency results in part from differences in the way that individuals engage in reflexivity. It is reasonable to consider the possibility that similar principles operate in relation to corporate agency.

Archer (2013) used the term ‘collective reflexivity’ to denote the reflexivity that subjects employ with regard to their social relationships in particular. Donati (2011) referred to ‘we-reflexivity’ as the means by which agents employ (internal) reflexivity in order to guide their (external) relations with others. However, the focus on joint action is not to the fore in this description of we-reflexivity, with Kahn (2014) using the term co-reflexivity to refer to this more specifically. Archer (2013) suggested that social theorists have barely begun to address ways in which collective reflexivity shapes and influences our interpersonal relations.

***Teaching as a priority***

It is clear, in the first instance, that the exercise of corporate agency needs to be supported by reflexivity. In a morphostatic scenario where corporate agency for the development of teaching is highly restricted, one might possibly expect to see the restricted reflexivity that Donati (2011) called ‘we-reflexivity close to zero’ or the near non-reflexivity of Archer (2012). Kahn (2014) argued that extended forms of reflexivity are a central feature of learning, and this would be true as much for the learning of teachers as for students. Where change is involved, it is clear that the interests that are at stake in teaching span efficient processes, social relations, whose interests are served, and other areas. These interests relate to each of the three main characteristics modes of constructive reflexivity identified by Archer (2003), namely autonomous reflexivity, communicative reflexivity and meta-reflexivity. As Clegg noted in the previous chapter, these different forms of reflexivity are shaped in significant part by social influences. The complexity of the interests that are entailed in corporate agency around teaching favour extended expressions of reflexivity.

Possibilities for extended reflexivity, though, depend to the extent to which teaching, and need to adapt teaching to a changing world, is considered a priority by lecturers themselves. There is a significantly greater chance of teaching being accorded a priority by a group of members of staff if there is a connection with a genuinely significant issue at stake for the discipline, department or institution, as Kahn et al. (2013) contended. This is evident also in many professional disciplines in which a commitment to the future of the profession underpins the readiness to change. It is, however, relatively difficult for programmes of education focused on personal competence to connect to such compelling reasons for action – such programmes should look to outcomes for the work group as much as to outcomes for the individual. Any outcomes for the work group would need to be negotiated on an ongoing basis, and could not be determined in advance by a programme team. Boud (1999), indeed, argued that there is good reason to situate academic development within sites of academic practice.

There is also an inherent dominance from research that needs to be taken into account. Bernstein (2000) argued that several different fields of activity are in play, in which separate discourses take place with their own rules and patterns of language use. Teaching is constituted as a field of reproduction, with its own discourse and patterns of language use. It depends on an earlier reconstitution of knowledge, which also forms part of a wider pedagogic discourse. Such pedagogic discourse, though, contrasts with the discourse associated with research. Bernstein (2000) referred to research as a field of production, in which new knowledge is created. Bernstein (2000) argued that contestation occurs between these fields for control of educational activity, but that research as a discourse is typically more dominant. It is generally recognised that higher levels of prestige are associated with research as opposed to teaching. Chalmers (2006), indeed, reported widespread agreement in the research literature on the low status which universities give to teaching, even if progress has been made in recent years.

One’s configuration of concerns forms an important part of personal identity for Archer (2007). According to this view, learning to teach within a changing environment entails learning to give at least some priority to teaching-related concerns. The readiness to exercise corporate agency represents a key threshold in the process of learning to teach. Otherwise lecturers can remain as primary agents, swept along by an agenda that is set by others. However, Reed (2005) noted that corporate agency does not, of itself, confer strict social identity. He pointed out that the model offered by Archer (1995) is only completed by the articulation of roles that the ‘You’ can occupy; and through which individuals gain social identity. Morphogenesis is particularly associated by Archer (1995) with the establishment of new roles. The success of corporate agency is manifest when the interests are embodied in the social order through a new configuration of roles, given that roles represent a key means by which the social order is constituted.

***Sustaining collective reflexivity***

Given the importance of collective reflexivity to responding to change, it is important to consider what sustains such reflexivity. Corporate agency entails a communicative dimension that ensures an awareness of the interests of colleagues. Dialogue is particularly needed when seeking to agree on novel purposes or practices. Roxå and Mårtensson (2008) suggested that most teachers rely on a small number of significant others for conversations that are characterised by their privacy, by mutual trust and by their intellectual intrigue. The data that they presented suggested that university teachers rely on a limited number of individuals to test ideas or solve problems related to teaching and learning. Individual teachers were seen to have small ‘significant networks’, where private discussions provided a basis for conceptual development and learning in ways that were quite different to ‘front stage’ public debate about teaching in committees. Individual teachers seemed to have more significant conversations and larger networks where the local culture was perceived to be supportive of such conversations. Learning to teach in contexts where change is endemic involves learning to value such conversations.

Dialogue, can however, serve as a focus for inaction. Where reflexivity is marked by an absence of agency on the part of individuals, Archer employed the term ‘fractured reflexivity’. Kahn (2015) suggested that there is scope for co-reflexivity to fracture in relation to learning. If one experiences frustrations with the collective aspirations that are in possession, then a fractured response could result. It may be the case that reflexivity around teaching degenerate, we can say, into a series of complaints. Dialogue would then simply amplify the overall volume of complaints, directly serving a morphostatic purpose. Dialogue can support the status quo in other ways, whether in talking down prospects for change or in focusing on the most satisfactory aspects of current provision.

Archer and Donati (2015) further highlighted the relational basis for collective reflexivity. Gustavsen (2001) similarly suggested that the capacity for new forms of action is closely affected by the extent to which a rich and diverse network of professional relationships is present. The nature of the social relations that are in place has a significant influence on the capacity of those involved to undertake the collective reflexivity that supports corporate agency. Donati (2011) specifically highlighted reciprocity in social relations as a central feature of what humanises these relations. Boud (1999) argued that reciprocal peer relations are particularly likely to lead to learning amongst academics. By contrast, relations that are constituted by processes of domination and competition are harder to combine with extended reflexivity that is directed at constructive action. Flann (2010) argued that where an individual is subject to domination by others, then reflexivity can be suppressed. The social relations one maintains closely influence one’s capacity to act as a corporate agent. On this count, learning to teach in a changing world involves building reciprocal relations with others.

**Teaching as Emergent Co-action**

Learning to teach involves growth in one’s capacity to act as a corporate agent in order to meet new aspirations and needs as they arise in a changing world. However, even beyond change in practices and structures, teaching involves a range of further demanding forms of co-action. Walsh and Kahn (2009) argued that teaching is an inherently troublesome activity that involves emergent working. It is not possible to pre-determine from the outset those actions that will be required when teaching. This is especially so given the challenges of working with students, for whom learning incorporates an inherent dimension of uncertainty and struggle. Interaction with students and colleagues places significant demands on one’s social relations, reflexivity and capacity to engage in dialogue.

***A collective endeavour with students***

Teaching involves developing an understanding of one’s students, and the challenges that they face as learners. If one does not understand what will inspire or intrigue one’s students, then one’s teaching will be lacklustre. Palmer (2009) argued that it is essential to develop good rapport with students, both to find inspiration for the dedication that is required as a teacher and to catalyse the interest and engagement of students. Lecturers will always need to come to understand the capacities and experiences that students bring with them to their studies. Constructive forms of collective reflexivity are needed for members of staff to appreciate their students. Clearly it is possible to respond to perceived inadequacies in the student body with a fractured reflexivity that does not manifest itself in constructive action − in time-honoured fashion­. Even without change in society, the interests and capacities of students are inherently different from those of their teachers. It is easy, for instance, for lecturers to forget the uncertainties and challenges that mark out learning as a difficult. Work on threshold concepts has been helpful in drawing close attention to these challenges (Meyer & Land 2006). Learning to teach should incorporate an explicit engagement with understanding the challenges that students face in developing mastery within their subjects. Shulman (1986), indeed, highlighted this as a central aspect of pedagogical content knowledge.

Social relations between staff and students are thus an essential consideration in what constitutes excellent teaching. The quality of the social relations that are maintained through different modes of teaching is important to consider – doubling the size of a seminar group or cutting out personal tutorials affect the nature of the social relations in place. Different teaching methods affect the scope for dialogue with students as an integral feature of learning. There may be scope for a shared determination of what is entailed in learning, as is often the case in enquiry-based learning or when students undertake research as a part of their studies (Kahn & O’Rourke, 2004). Kahn (2014) suggested that such modes of learning may result in students exercising higher levels of agency in relation to their own learning. Similarly, the organisation of university life beyond the classroom has a significant impact on the extent to which social relations are realistic between staff and students. Tutors historically maintained relatively close personal relations with their students, although clearly there will have been extensive variation. John Henry Newman (2008) observed that he would rather dispense with examinations rather than with the requirement to live as a resident in a college. A clear rationale exists for the make up of the academic staff to reflect the student body, as Astin (1993) argued. The relational goods that are present within an ethnic community convey a significant advantage in establishing relations between staff and students from that community, providing a basis for communicative reflexivity and for the establishment of trust. New public management has gained extensive ground in universities in recent years (De Boer, Enders, & Schimank 2007), but this approach to management tends to neglect the relevance of social relations in a search for efficiency gains. A focus on social relations between staff and students is similarly absent from the perspectives noted earlier in the chapter that are typically promoted in programmes of professional development on teaching. If education in universities is conceived to be mutually determined, then the possibilities of emancipation for students are significantly enhanced.

***Teaching together***

Some aspects of teaching are constituted on an overtly collective basis. Team teaching offers particular possibilities for learning to teach. Archer (2000, pp. 182–184) argued that a sharing of practice is essential for new forms of discursive knowledge to impact on practice. There is similarly scope for shared practice to ground the process of learning for inexperienced members of staff. When someone new to teaching is first faced with the uncertainties of their professional environment, there is scope for a collective reflexivity that helps them to chart their own way forward, on a similar basis to communicative reflexivity. Shulman (2005) argued that many settings for professional education incorporate signature pedagogies, characteristic forms of teaching and learning. There is significant overlap between signature pedagogies offered by Shulman (2005) and the presence of distinctive professional environments. Signature pedagogies are closely grounded in particular sociomaterial settings, whether studios, fields, stages, operating theatres, laboratories and so on. Such settings provide extensive opportunities for shared practice and for collective reflexivity, whether resulting from interactions around equipment, common tasks, residency and so on. In order to teach together in these settings one needs to acquire a familiarity and attentiveness that takes in the social and material dimensions. In relation to learning within an operating theatre in medical education, for instance, Lyon and Brew (2003) argued that the most successful students were able to attend to the immediate physical environment and the social relations that were present, and they were able to relate the emotional impact of the surgery to their work and education.

***Collective responsibility for higher education***

Curricula are established as result of collective endeavour. A curriculum represents a plan for learning (Taba & Spalding 1962). More specifically, we can view a curriculum as an ordered series of foci for learning. It would in principle be possible to envisage an apprenticeship model of higher education, in which a master passes on his or her expertise to one or more apprentices (Lane 2005). The master might determine the focus for learning on the basis of his or her own acquired expertise. Higher education, however, almost from its very beginnings developed as a communal form of education in which the foci for learning were established on a collective basis. Ridder-Symoens (2003), indeed, demonstrated that shared responsibility for determining the organisation of the studies to be pursued in universities was established during medieval times. Learning to teach involves learning to act as a member of an institution. If a lecturer or tutor comes to a teaching role with the expectation of being able to frame a course of study as he or she sees fit, then disappointment is likely to abound. An emergent form of co-action is again entailed in this aspect of teaching, one that also depends upon collective reflexivity. If a departmental or faculty committee has a role to approve the specification for a module or programme, then in order to teach well one needs to recognise the legitimacy of this situation. Discussions with committee members prior to the meeting at which a decision is to be made will seem entirely reasonable if the determination of the curriculum is seen as a collective responsibility. In the face of differences with colleagues, it can be only too easy to revert to criticism, complaint and anxiety – to fractured reflexivity.

Collective responsibility for higher education is also in evidence in relation to the quality assurance and enhancement that institutions maintain, whether programme approval, monitoring of programmes, periodic review of programmes. It is important to develop the capacity to offer constructive peer review when learning to teach, as well as the capacity to respond well to the critique of others. Some institutions have begun to exercise more direct forms of control over teaching – but there is clearly a danger that imposing particular modes of teaching or the use of specific resources will undercut scope for corporate agency and other forms of emergent co-action that is more attuned to the needs and aspirations of students.

**Beyond One’s Immediate Context for Teaching**

Different settings for teaching do, indeed, incorporate varying scope to work collectively with others. The systems that are in place or the number of students that one is teaching may make it difficult to develop social relations with colleagues or one’s students. Colleagues may be unwilling to engage in curricular change that responds to one’s own deeply-held concerns. The increasingly dominant focus on preparing students for the labour market (Bok 2009) may make it difficult to respond to other agendas. It remains the case that the practice of teaching is constrained in a range of ways. The sociomaterial perspectives that have been advanced within this book highlight these constraints in helpful ways, Gourlay and Oliver in Chapter 2, for instance, argued that an emphasis on reflective practice may inculcate in lecturers a positive orientation to active learning, and a readiness to use assessment to ensure students act in desired ways. Richards and Fenwick in Chapter 4 argued that technology serves to reconfigure practice.

The analysis of this chapter would suggest, however, that a space still remains for the intentional action of individual tutors and groups of tutors to shape practice. Smith (2010), indeed, has argued that systems involving persons are *proactively* emergent, with human intentional action both occurring within the system and influencing the emergence that results. It is clear that the capacity to re-frame existing forms and structure, and to evade constraints, constitutes an integral aspect of what it means to teach well. The capacity to think imaginatively in dialogue with others in relation to the constraints that one faces is a feature of an excellent teacher. This essentially represents a meta-reflexive response to the social contexts within which one finds oneself, enabling a tenacious pursuit of social ideals. For instance, regulations constrain the actions that are possible within universities, but it may be possible to argue for an interpretation of the regulations that fits with one’s intended course of action. Barnett (2013) has suggested that there is scope to broaden the ways in which we imagine life within universities. It may be that a work group or institution can be helped to acquire a wider breadth of vision in order to be ready to consider new forms of education. Markus and Nurius (1986) argued that each person has the capacity to represent possible futures for itself, giving expression to their ideals and hopes. The self-knowledge that is developed through formulating such representations has been employed in a range of ways to support individual growth. There is scope for a similar formulation of possible collectives, future collectives, whereby a group engages in dialogue and actions designed to formulate possible futures for itself.

There will be a role for paradigms such as critical realism in helping to establish forms and systems of education that enhance the possibilities for emancipation. The capacity for critique is an essential feature of an excellent teacher. Lacey (1997), however, argued that the move from holding a theory to becoming committed to a value is less straightforward than Bhaskar (1986) suggested. Lacey (1997, p. 236) argued: ‘The promise of Bhaskar’s argument is that there is a quick rational move from coming to accept theories in the social sciences to adopting value judgments partial to emancipation.’ He suggested that further value judgements are entailed in this transition. Lacey (1997) pointed out that a commitment to emancipation requires both appreciating the actual limits of current structures and developing forms of organisation that could provide a basis for new social structures. Only if a theory is developed or understood from within an emancipatory movement did Lacey suggest that Bhaskar’s argument is fully applicable. Learning to teach can be regarded as learning to engage in activism, even if this is not taken as far as the approach advocated by critical pedagogy (McLean 2006).

The setting within which one practices education is important. The pursuit of social justice within higher education is the work of a lifetime. One might take up roles and positions partly on the basis of the scope for shared emancipatory commitments, particularly in settings where emancipation is an urgent concern. It is also important to recognise that one’s reflexivity is influenced by the context within which one exercises agency, as Kahn (2014) argued in relation to student learning. Learning to teach should involve learning to take care over the choice of context within which one teaches. One might even actively search out an institutional or departmental setting where others manifest compatible commitments to education or where scope for good scope is present for corporate agency. Learning to teach is not simply about learning to perform in a seminar room or to design a course, even if it might be most straightforward for programmes of professional development to concentrate on such issues.

**Conclusion**

Teaching in higher education *is* a collective endeavour. It requires the commitment and agency of teachers, learners and others in order to be undertaken well. Excellent teaching is determined on a wider basis than simply the individual competence of lecturers. An awareness of these wider underpinnings is important for anyone to learn to teach or to improve their teaching. One does not necessarily need to employ theoretical viewpoint offered in this chapter in order to teach well, but it remains the case that an appreciation of the generative mechanisms that shape teaching and learning is of value. One of the purposes of this present book is to extend the range of theoretical perspectives that are employed to make sense of both teaching in higher education and the field of academic development. This chapter has been able to provide an explanation for a range of issues that are not normally addressed when considering the process of learning to teach in higher education, taking in the role that both change and uncertainty play in relation to collective activity. On this view, learning to teach in the shared and changing world that is higher education involves acquiring the capacity to undertake corporate agency. It involves learning to engage in constructive and extended forms of collective reflexivity, and to maintain capacity for critique, dialogue, collective practice and social relations.

The account in this chapter is offered as a resource on which to enhance the development of teaching in higher education. Those seeking to develop teaching either as individuals or on behalf of disciplines and institutions should pay explicit attention to the collective dimension to teaching. Consideration of these issues could play an important role in the design of academic development programmes and in the way that faculty seek to develop their own capacities for teaching. It could assist in the design of professional standards frameworks or the development of new signature pedagogies. There is scope to illuminate the pursuit of social justice within higher education as a result of the theoretical perspectives outlined in this chapter.

There is value in acquiring a breadth of vision when teaching in higher education. Learning to teach should involve coming to recognise the full range of influences on one’s teaching. There are many advantages from viewing teaching as a collective endeavour. By contrast, a focus on individual competence leaves one ill-equipped to deal with shifts in the higher education sector that work against emancipation. A theoretical lens that is grounded in comprehensive forms of explanation constitutes a valuable asset in coming to understand what is entailed in learning to teach.

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