

The Changing Role of the Teacher in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

How to help students learn academic content? is to be answered by concentrating on the various techniques of instruction lecture, organise a laboratory class & run a small group discussion. 'Gone Are Those Days' when being a teacher was enough to command respect. In higher education, approaches to teaching are becoming more student – centered, which demands different teaching competences. Person as a teacher, expert on content knowledge, facilitator or learning processor, organizer and scholar/ lifelong learner.

1. Introduction

In higher education who claims that he knows how our role as teachers is going to change is obviously deluding himself. The future is not this to know and he would be arrogant to think otherwise. But speculation is still permissible and, if based on an examination of important trends in society and in higher education, may have a certain, general predictive validity. We will have to wait and see. Nevertheless in a spirit of genuine curiosity and purposeful inquiry we think that it may well be useful to examine the issue of the teacher's changing role by considering three major questions:

1. What is the traditional role of the teacher in higher education?
2. What main social trends can we discuss?
3. How will these trends affect or change the role of the teacher in higher education?

Ruth Beard used to offer two main traditional views of the teacher: a 'philosophical view' (or country-house-party model) and a 'scientific view'.

In the first the teacher's role consisted in enlarging the mind of the student through bringing him into contact with scholarly and cultured companions. This approach had some merit for very able students but was obviously inefficient in helping the less able or less well-prepared to develop independent study skills and critical thinking abilities. The second or so-called 'scientific view' of the teacher's role emphasized the need to inculcate a body of knowledge and tended to undervalue, for example, the social and broadly educational purposes of higher education. Neither view of the traditional role of the teacher presented us with an image of a professional teacher committed to examining the purposes of and the methods and content to be used to meet those purposes. The result was (and still is) that 'courses are too often conceived as predetermined paths rather than voyages of exploration'. Traditionally the teachers led the student up a well-worn path and failed to encourage him to think or to solve problems or to participate in research or to express new ideas. Traditionally the teacher was an authority rarely challenged by the student, a corrector of student errors and a talker rather than a listener. This traditional role was further emphasized by

the dominant, traditional teaching method the lecture and the claims lecturers made for its continued use:

- lectures should last an hour. If I can stay awake for an hour, so can they
- it's the only way to make sure the ground is covered
- lectures are the best way to get facts across
- lectures are the best way to get students to think
- lectures are inspirational: they improve students' attitudes towards the subject, and students like them
- lectures make sure that students have a proper set of notes
- students are incapable of, or unwilling to, work alone, so it's good for them to have full timetables
- the criticisms one can make of lecturing only apply to bad lecturing
- the value of lectures can only be judged in the context of other teaching and learning activities which make up the course. Graham Gibbs suggested that as teachers we clung to this traditional method because:
 - we are ignorant: of the evidence about the effectiveness of lectures of alternatives to lectures
 - 'He', 'his', 'him', etc. are used apologetically to avoid/hide a multitude of sins against sex, gender and the English language.
 - assessor (of student work)
 - evaluator (of teaching and courses)
 - administrator (of courses, and sharing in departmental and institutional administration)
 - subject expert (through research and staff development to keep up-to-date, to be flexible, to adapt).

We have traditionally rejected training partly because we believe no-one could tell us how to teach our subject to our students. We have rejected training partly because we have assumed such training would inevitably be didactic in tone. We have rejected training partly also because we have valued the discipline of our subject more than the processes of teaching and learning and partly because we have seen little relevance in pedagogy for the adult learner and we have ignored andragogy because it seems too woolly and too liberal for our more serious and demanding business. In this sense HE

teachers often see teaching as a secondary role subordinate to our primary function as subject-experts, as traditional dispensers of structured knowledge, as engineers, as mathematicians, as planners, as lawyers and as social scientists. In this sense too HE teachers may be similar to technical teachers in non-advanced further education who perceive their teaching role as secondary to their occupational status within their former trades.

Perhaps one of the major changes that will have to take place (in both HE and FE) is that teachers will have to examine and develop far more carefully their roles as teachers rather than continue to rest on their strengths as subject experts or practitioners. Also we will have to analyse and develop a view of teaching as a profession more concerned with developing autonomous learners than with expanding a subject-discipline. This is to regard teaching in as assisting student learning so that students become more capable of dealing with and examining themselves and the world they live in. 'If the purpose of learning is to produce independent learners, then the teacher must be regarded, not as a dispenser of knowledge, but as one who dispenses with knowledge as the major outcome of education'. Overall the approach of staff to teaching in higher education is still very much as it was regarded during the SRHE Leverhulme Seminar in the early 1980s — 'nothing like professional enough'. That attitude will have to change for it is a serious dereliction of duty. And 'the remedy lies in the development of personal relationships and professions

- we are overworked: and alternatives to lectures may appear to involve more work and changes take time to introduce
- there is a shortage particularly of books of resources: and duplicated materials
- our attitudes we lecture as a coping obstruct change: strategy
- institutional con- in the way teaching constraints support hours are counted lecturing: in the relationship between individual courses
- course validation and other external forces often support lecturing
- we design our courses incompetently.

And perhaps it was this lack of knowledge of course design which was the most serious weakness of the traditional teacher who never actually learnt how to design courses even though under CNA validation procedures at least he has had course design thrust upon him. In any role description of the teacher in designing course sought now perhaps to be at the top of the list since it is 'the logical beginning of an educational strategy'. But that is not how we work. Traditionally HE teachers were not trained, we learnt on the job or we didn't learn at all. According to Gibbs we were terrible at course design and didn't know how to describe and define courses adequately: we resisted thinking carefully about our teaching and preferred to avoid adequate course design by lecturing. Generally (there are exceptions) we would argue that as HE teachers we have failed to prepare thoroughly and professionally for our traditional roles as:

- course designer
- course teacher (using a variety of teaching

- strategies which form a repertoire of methods)
- resource-user and finder (materials, a-voids, libraries)
- supervisor (of individual and group dissertations and projects)
- tutor (with skills for coping with student problems) professional techniques . '.

'Above all it is these relationships and the conception of our role that we need to change. To say that we need to be managers of learning is almost a cliché'. Yet, as Gibbs has pointed out, we resist changing to this role even when we accept the arguments for doing so.

What main social trends can we discern?

We are, according to an influential American 'social forecaster' John Naisbitt, living 'in the time of the parenthesis, the time between eras' and it is 'a time of change and questioning'.

Naisbitt offers a new context within which we can try to sort out and assess this era of change. The context he provides consists of ten major social trends. The first two of these trends seem particularly relevant to the changing role of the teacher in . The first and most important trend is the transformation of an Industrial Society into an Information Society, a society where most of us will work with information rather than produce goods. The development of information technology, from micros to communication satellites, is hastening the move towards an Information Society: 'We now mass-produce information the way we used to mass-produce cars'. There are, maintains Naisbitt, five key points about the Information Society: it is already an economic reality; Innovations will accelerate the pace of change with a faster flow of information via, for example, electronic mail and fax; new technology will produce new processes and products. For example it has been predicted that new portable teaching computers will transform the education system. Also we are witnessing the growth of a vast new industry as a result of the so-called computer revolution; the 'education mismatch'. The Information Society is a literacy-intensive society in which we need reading and writing skills more than ever but the educational system (in both the UK and the USA) is producing more functional illiterates. The Information Society requires at least two languages of everyone: English and Computer. (Naisbitt actually maintains that Americans, to be really successful, will have to be trilingual: English, Spanish and computer); the human side of technology. Technology is not absolute: 'it will succeed or fail according to the principles of high tech/high touch'. The introduction of high technology can bring isolation so there is a balancing need for more 'warm interaction 'with fellow workers (and even with students!). A central belief in this trend towards the Information Society is that 'we are moving from the specialist who is soon obsolete to the generalist who can adapt'. The second of Naisbitt's trends is a discernible movement away from what he calls Forced Technology to High Tech/High Touch. He argues that whenever new technology is introduced there must be a counterbalancing human response — what he calls 'high touch' — otherwise the technology is rejected: 'The more high tech, the more high touch'.

Even if more of us work with information at home we won't always want to work and study in our electronic cottages: we will still seek the 'high touch' of being with people, of rejecting the teleconference for the 'high touch' of a meeting. The issue of 'high touch' obviously has deep implications for the future role of the teacher. If Naisbitt is right and these underlying movements in social, political and economic life do continue then they will invariably have an impact on us as both citizens and teachers. How will these trends affect or change the role of the teacher in higher education? If the world is changing in the directions identified by Naisbitt then those of us in it will have to 'reconceptualise' our role as teachers. We will have to examine the question 'What business are we really in?' The most obvious answer, the educational cliché, is that in an age of information technology, in an Information Society, we should become managers of learning rather than dispensers of knowledge. As more and more sophisticated computers are developed they, rather than teachers, will become the expert repositories of subject wisdom. Computers, according to Christopher Evans, will overtake us: their role as teachers in that central traditional sense discussed earlier will be unequalled. It will, he maintains, be like having Einstein to teach us physics, Russell to teach us philosophy, Freud to teach us psychology. And with the home computer the teaching and learning can be done at home or in a resource centre rather than at an institution of higher education. It is not as subject specialists that most teachers will have roles to play but as flexible generalists who can help others to cope with the complexity of learning in an Information Society. As managers of learning teachers will also have to become more aware of how learners learn. There is plenty of evidence for example to show how institutional and departmental ethos affects the way students learn. Often the primary influence is the course design itself which can help students to develop approaches to the processing of information which demonstrate deep approaches (i.e. the use of evidence, problem-solving, the ability to read around the subject etc.) or it can encourage surface approaches (namely to develop skills in rote learning, memorization, and over-reliance on the teacher's ability to specify learning tasks). If teachers believe that deep approaches seem to be preferable to surface approaches, they can encourage learners to develop deep approaches to learning by:

- reviewing, and if necessary, redesigning assessment regimes to emphasize those procedures which allow learners to demonstrate higher-level intellectual and problem-solving skills and creativity
- designing courses in a way that makes clear to learners that they will be rewarded for their use of higher-level intellectual skills, such as problem-solving and critical thinking, and the demonstration of appropriate attitudes, rather than simply the acquisition of facts and technical skills
- increasing the use of teaching methods which require students to demonstrate a deep understanding of the relevant material rather than simply to reproduce factual information
- reducing the amount of didactic teaching in order to allow more time for group-based and self-directed learning

- decreasing the amount of factual material that has to be memorised
- teaching students how to learn, understand and use the basic principles of the discipline. In effect teachers as managers of learning should encourage students to appropriate learning as follows:
 - by making their objectives explicit
 - by stating these objectives clearly
 - by justifying them and explaining their relevance
 - by knowing and explaining their own progress
 - by demonstrating and evaluating their achievement
 - by valuing themselves as active learners.

The tutor's task is to provide an atmosphere of rigour and support to assist the learner to succeed in these tasks. The business or role of managing learning in an Information Society requires a variety of sub-roles. Obviously the teacher or learning manager has to become computer literate himself; he has to have some understanding of the new technology not in a technical sense but as someone who will be able to manage it comfortably as a resource for learning and teaching. As a manager of learning the HE teacher will have to be a flexible, general educator, committed to a multi-discipline approach to learning, to lifelong education and training both for himself and for those who will rely upon his guidance for their learning. The HE teacher as learning manager will also have to refine his role as course designer for we formalise changes in our strategies for teaching and learning most evidently in our course design procedures. Course design reveals the ideology and philosophy (whether acknowledged or not) of the course designers. Through competent course design we can achieve many things. However many of our courses are designed incompetently. We build requirements about aims and objectives, content, methodology and assessment into them, requirements which are often difficult to achieve, sometimes self-defeating and occasionally impossible. Stopping doing this is part of the anticipated cultural change and reconceptualisation of the teacher's role. All other things being equal, our courses will be more worthwhile if activities are designed into them which:

- permit learners to make informed choices in their work and encourage them to reflect on the consequences of their choices
- assign active rather than passive roles to learners
- ask learners to engage in inquiry into ideas, applications of intellectual processes, or current personal and/or social problems,
- can be accomplished successfully by learners of different levels of ability
- expect learners to examine in new settings applications of an, intellectual process, or a current problem which has been previously
- Studied
- require learners to examine topics or issues that ordinary members of the society do not normally examine, or that are typically ignored by them
- involve learners and teachers in activities in which success and failure are possible, but not predetermined, i.e. which contain an element of risk
- require learners to rewrite, rehearse and polish their initial efforts

- involve learners in the acquisition, mastery and application of meaningful rules, standards and disciplines
- give learners a chance to share in the planning, the carrying out of a plan, the discussion of the results of an activity with others
- are relevant to the expressed purposes of the learners
- challenge learners intellectually rather than physically irrespective of the level of work.

If the main implication for an HE teacher of the development of an Information Society is that he should become a computer literate manager of learning then, according to Naisbitt's principle of high-tech/high touch, he should also become more aware of and adept in interpersonal skills. If computers take over the function of conveying knowledge then HE teachers will have to become more skilled at helping individuals and small groups to examine that knowledge, their understanding of it, their feelings towards it, and the values it embodies or hides. A large number of skills and abilities is called for in this role including: an understanding of the processes of adult learning, organizing and conducting small group meetings and activities (and hence knowing more about group dynamics), using varied group learning processes (such as role-play, games, simulations, case-studies), listening, counseling, guiding, and facilitating. If the HE teacher does not become skilful at managing group and individual interactions then why should students continue to attend an institution of when the trend towards multiple options will, eventually, permit them to do all their HE studying at home? If the teacher does not become 'high touch' himself then what function will he serve in a new age when information will be and is more accessible? As a learning manager who is both 'high tech' and 'high touch' the HE teacher may also have to develop his role as a participative democrat. To an extent, following the student movements of the '60s and '70s, participative democracy is already a feature of HE institutions with our paraphernalia of academic boards and boards of studies. There is however in many cases a kind of weary cynicism about the whole process as if we are none too convinced of the value of meeting regularly to discuss issues and arrive at decisions which we can then follow through. More often than not we believe that our discussions and decisions may be (and usually are) either ignored or overruled. Nevertheless as teachers and as members of an institution of higher education we will be expected to act as participant democrats in helping to reach decisions about educational issues through a process of consultation. This will require us more and more to design courses and programmes and individual learning experiences having taken student and community views into account over objectives, content, process and evaluation. This is not to surrender academic freedom necessarily but it does involve a kind of educational power sharing. Perhaps it also requires us to take and express some sort of joy in the fraternal process of participating in a

local democratic institution. The teacher as democrat will also develop more easily into a 'networker'. According to Naisbitt and other such luminaries as Tom Peters, the old top-down, hierarchical power structures (in politics, in government, in industry, in society generally) have failed to solve the main social problems. The hierarchies still exist but our belief in their efficiency has evaporated. Networks, on the other hand, foster self-help, high touch, interaction, horizontal links, and a cross-disciplinary approach. They are segmented and polycephalic: 'Networks are people talking to each other, sharing ideas, information, and resources'. The important points not the existence of networks as such however but the process of 'networking', of being a 'networker', of developing the communication that creates links between people for specific purposes.' Institutions will be organised according to a management system based on the networking model' a new management style will emerge which will be based on networking: it will value informality and equality and will encourage lateral, diagonal and bottom-up communication styles and will be structurally cross-disciplinary. HE teachers are already involved in a variety of networks both inside and outside their own institutions. We will have to decide how many and what sorts of networks we should be in and how we can involve 216 students in our networks. We should also examine what it takes to be a good networker. If the HE teacher does change towards an overall role as a manager of student learning, computer literate himself, skilled in inter-personal relationships, a democrat and networker, does this imply that he will completely reject such traditional role as course designer, teacher, supervisor, assessor, evaluator and subject expert? Obviously not. The teacher will still have to know his subject, particularly its main principles, concepts, its nature and structure. But he will have to know it so that he can help others learn and develop through it. His main function as a teacher will not be to dispense information as such but to co-design programmes and courses and especially to select and propose stimulating and appropriate learning tasks and course assignments. The importance of practical research into effective course design, teaching and learning (as well as subject discipline research) is obviously crucial and the HE teacher as practical researcher is another, growing, aspect of his role. Altogether the HE teacher's role is expanding and changing to meet the demands of a new era. It is a challenge that the HE teacher will meet more successfully if he overcomes a traditional dependence on his mastery of a discipline and a reluctance to consider some sort of initial preparation (other than studying and researching his own subject) for his role as manager of learning. And having agreed to some form of initial preparation he will then be better able to develop and evolve as a teacher (as a self-developer) to meet ever-changing social and educational circumstances. He might even strive to meet new standards of quality, to become a superior teacher or even an excellent teacher. Either way subject-matter competence will have to be combined with both 'high tech' and 'high touch' skills if he hopes to meet the increased demand of his changing role.

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