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Navigating the Neoliberal University: Reflecting on Teaching Practice as a Teacher-Researcher-Trade Unionist

Abstract:

This article reflects upon the neoliberalisation of higher education and its effects on teaching practice. It is argued that a neoliberal discourse of teaching excellence has the effect of working against, and potentially undermining, the emancipatory potential of higher education. The article reflects upon attempts to navigate disciplinary power in the neoliberal university and considers whether critical, emancipatory praxis is possible or if complicity in, and co-option by, neoliberalism is inevitable. Ultimately, it is concluded that individual teachers have some scope to pursue approaches which counter neoliberal dominance but that this is heavily constrained. A broader, collective, project will therefore be necessary if alternative (critical, emancipatory) visions of teaching and learning in higher education are to successfully challenge neoliberal hegemony and the negative effects of this in the academy.

Keywords:

Higher education; trade unionism; teaching; neoliberalism; disciplinary power; resistance

Biography:

Dr Matthew Evans is a Lecturer in Law, Politics and Sociology at the University of Sussex and Visiting Researcher in Political Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand. He completed a Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education at Sussex in 2018 and is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. He is the author of *Transformative Justice: Remediating Human Rights Violations Beyond Transition* (Routledge, 2018) and editor of *Transitional and Transformative Justice: Critical and International Perspectives* (Routledge, 2019).

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Abstract

This article reflects upon the neoliberalisation of higher education and its effects on teaching practice. It is argued that a neoliberal discourse of teaching excellence has the effect of working against, and potentially undermining, the emancipatory potential of higher education. The article reflects upon attempts to navigate disciplinary power in the neoliberal university and considers whether critical, emancipatory praxis is possible or if complicity in, and co-option by, neoliberalism is inevitable. Ultimately, it is concluded that individual teachers have some scope to pursue approaches which counter neoliberal dominance but that this is heavily constrained. A broader, collective, project will therefore be necessary if alternative (critical, emancipatory) visions of teaching and learning in higher education are to successfully challenge neoliberal hegemony and the negative effects of this in the academy.

Introduction

Despite the claim that neoliberalism is so nebulous a concept as to be analytically useless (Dunn 2017), key elements can be discerned and interrogated (Hall 2011; Gilbert 2013; Davies 2014). Neoliberalism, of course, is ‘not *one* thing’ (Hall 2011, 12; Davies 2014). Broadly, however, neoliberal processes encourage (including by state intervention) ‘individualistic, competitive, acquisitive and entrepreneurial behaviour’ (Gilbert 2013, 9), through, for example, privatisation and marketisation.¹ Neoliberalisation of higher education has received widespread attention (and criticism) in recent years (see Parfitt 2018; Cruickshank 2016; Soo Tian 2018). Considering the ways neoliberalism manifests in universities, here I reflect on the interrelationship of different scholarly identities and practices – as a researcher, teacher and trade unionist.

The next section discusses background and methodology. I then consider the purpose of education, arguing for a critical, emancipatory vision, in contrast with neoliberal approaches. Next, I explore neoliberal processes in universities, focusing on credentialisation, marketisation and audit culture – arguing that a neoliberal discourse of teaching excellence works against the emancipatory potential of higher education (Soo Tian 2018, 33-34; Moore et al. 2017; Wood and Su 2017; Collini 2012). I then link this to the experience of studying for a Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (PGCertHE). Following this, I reflect on how identities and practices as a researcher, teacher and trade

¹ The (self-described ‘neoliberal’) Adam Smith Institute, for instance, highlights its work on ‘privatization, deregulation, and... advocacy of internal markets in healthcare and education’ (Adam Smith Institute 2019; see also Gilbert 2013: 11-12; Davies 2014, 310; Bulpitt 1986; Hall 2011).

unionist overlap and influence one another in navigating neoliberal processes, focussing especially on taking strike action and the influence this had on my teaching. I conclude with implications for practice, suggesting that whilst individual teachers have some scope to pursue approaches which counter neoliberalisation, they are heavily constrained in this regard, and that a broader, collective, project is necessary to promote critical, emancipatory education.

Background and methods

This began as an essay submitted for the PGCertHE at the University of Sussex (a research-intensive university in the south of England, founded in the 1960s). The issues explored, and approach taken, are shaped by this. For instance, the article is reflective – not entirely by choice: the assessment required reflection. This inspired reflection upon the experience of taking the course itself. This, in turn, led to reflection upon the ways such courses, and experiences of participants, link to wider (neoliberal) processes in the university, and in society. In providing this reflection on reflection, my aims are severalfold but related: to provide an account of the lived experience of a teacher, researcher and trade unionist in the neoliberal university; to link this to a critique of neoliberal processes and explore ways of responding to these; to problematise and disrupt the notion of teaching excellence, and the favoured ways of pursuing this promoted in the university.

Considerable attention has been paid in recent years to the potential benefits of reflection (and reflective writing), including for university teachers (see, e.g., Gibbons 2018; Miettinen 2000). Furthermore, reflection on personal experiences and narration of these has increasingly been developed as the research method of autoethnography, with advocates pointing to many

potential benefits (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011; Méndez 2013). Nevertheless, I am cognizant of the tensions, contradictions and problems which come with these approaches. Criticism of the use of reflective writing in assessment, and criticism of autoethnography, has emerged on methodological and ethical grounds (Hobbs 2007; Gibbons 2018; Méndez 2013; Denshire 2013; Wall 2008; Delamont 2007). Many of these stem from difficulty in reaching consensus over the meaning of reflective practices or autoethnography (Gibbons 2018; Wall 2008; Denshire 2013). Still others might reasonably be extended to other methods. Many of the ethical questions which autoethnography raises surrounding informed consent and representation of those researched are similar to questions which can (and should) be applied to ethnography – and other social research – more broadly.² Whilst it is not the purpose of this article to explore these dilemmas in detail, in taking this approach these issues necessarily permeate the article and are worth keeping in mind in relation to the debates in which it intervenes – not only regarding neoliberal processes in higher education but also regarding the methods by which research, and assessment, is pursued.

In addition to reflection and (arguably) autoethnography, I draw on critical theory (particularly Marxist and Foucauldian analyses) and critical pedagogy (especially Freirean and anarchist pedagogies) as lenses through which to understand and provide a critique of manifestations of neoliberalism in higher education, how these relate to wider social and political processes, and my experience of these as a teacher, researcher and trade unionist. I draw on analysis of theoretical and empirical works in the sociology of education and related areas, as well as university- and government-level policy documents and statements in addition to my own

² On autoethnography see, e.g., Delamont (2007). More broadly see, e.g., Anne Campbell (2013), Kouritzin and Nakagawa (2018), Gaudry (2011) and Pittaway, Bartolomei and Hugman (2010).

experiences, from which the reflective elements are primarily built. The next section begins this by asking what education is for.

What is education for?

There are multiple, contradictory, notions of what education is (or should be) for (Soo Tian 2018; Morrissey 2015, 624; Collini 2012). This article focuses on neoliberal conceptions, in contrast with critical, emancipatory aims. There was never a ‘golden age’ of the university and many of the negative aspects of neoliberalisation are rooted in previous configurations of the capitalist (and earlier) university (Soo Tian 2018, 31-32, 61-70). Nevertheless, the present state of things emerges from neoliberalism (Cruickshank 2016; Hall 2011). This makes a difference to the aims pursued by universities – and those within them – as compared to possible alternatives (Enright, Alfrey and Rynne 2017).

Critical, emancipatory education aims to make ‘oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed’, facilitate students’ ‘engagement in the struggle for their liberation’ (Freire 2000, 48), or aims ‘to advance... the cause of total human liberation from oppression and inequality’ (Jun 2012, 297). Neoliberal approaches prioritise ‘produc[ing] the highly educated technical-managerial-professional class that is necessary to administer capitalist society’ (Jun 2012, 293). Supporters of neoliberal approaches promote individual ‘succe[ss] in the economy’ and possession of ‘the character and sense of moral purpose to succeed’ in society (Gibb 2015), emphasising ‘making sure students get what they pay for’ (Gyimah 2018). Under neoliberalism, students are (partly) customers purchasing products which are expected to return an individual (primarily economic) benefit (Gyimah 2018; Bunce, Baird and Jones 2017).

Rather than thinking critically, students are encouraged to be ‘competitive, self-interested, and self-reliant’ consumers (Raimondi 2012, 45). This is promoted, with emphasis on ‘value for money’ for student-consumers (Gyimah 2018), despite evidence that ‘the more that students [express] a consumer orientation, the poorer their academic performance’ (Bunce, Baird and Jones 2017, 1958).

Neoliberal processes

Credentialisation, marketisation and audit culture are (among others) overlapping processes in the neoliberalisation of higher education. These are experienced as forms of disciplinary power shaping what can and cannot be done (and in what ways) to survive in the university.³ Whilst it may appear hyperbolic to refer to *survival* there is good reason for doing so. Failure (or refusal) to conform to the expectations of the university may lead to unemployment. In the context of an increasingly hollowed-out welfare state, falling real wages and a wide-reaching crisis in mental health (Shaheen 2017; Chu 2018; D. Campbell 2018), meeting the neoliberal university’s expectations is linked, not only to employment, but also to health, wellbeing and – in extremis – *survival* (Morrish 2018; Calquhoun 2014; Flaherty 2017; Shaw and Ward 2014; Walker 2015; Kinman 2001; Grollman 2013). Regardless of the differences between universities and widget factories, academic labour *is* labour (Winn 2015; Jun 2012, 287). It takes place within (and contributes towards) a wider capitalist mode of production (Jun 2012, 288), and academic workers are faced with the same double freedom as widget factory workers:

³ Disciplinary power is ‘a mechanism of power which permits time and labour, rather than wealth and commodities, to be extracted from bodies’ and ‘is constantly exercised by means of surveillance’ (Foucault 1980, 104).

‘free’ to sell their labour or, lacking another commodity to sell, ‘free’ to choose destitution (Marx 1976, 272-273).

UK universities increasingly require teachers to attain Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA) status, usually through a PGCertHE or similar course (University of Sussex Academic Development and Quality Enhancement, 2018; Peat 2015; Hibbert and Semler 2016). As attainment of FHEA status is frequently necessary to pass probation reviews, failure to comply can mean unemployment (see, e.g., University of Sussex 2016, 9). Precarity, through short-term contracts or the delay in secure employment necessitated by probation requirements, is one way disciplinary power is exercised over (especially early-career) academics (Anda and Edwards 2018; Kalfa, Wilkinson and Gollan 2018a, 2018b).

Above I asked what education is for. One might also wonder what the PGCertHE and FHEA accreditation is for. In promoting teacher credentialisation ‘there is an implicit assumption that gaining accreditation leads to improvement in teacher performance, and therefore on the students’ experience of learning’ (Spowart et al. 2016, 207). There is, however, ‘a dearth of research to examine this, and no definition of what “good teaching” actually looks like’ (Spowart et al. 2016, 207; Reimann and Allin 2017; Wood and Su 2017). There is also evidence that ‘whilst such schemes may be an acceptable form of retrospective benchmarking, the ongoing developmental impact may be limited’ (Shaw 2018, 145).

It does not matter whether (credentialed) teaching is *good* or *bad*, only whether audit criteria are met. The usefulness of these criteria is not engaged with in the process of measurement

(see, e.g., Soo Tian 2018, 33-34). Once credentials are delivered, deviation from the university's preferred behaviour can be ascribed to individual teachers.⁴ If this can be posited as negatively affecting metrics by which teachers and universities are measured, audit outcomes can be *blamed on* individual teachers.⁵ Regarding the related phenomenon of research metrics, Peter Dahler-Larsen (2017), for instance, notes the implication that academics 'can be penalised more or less randomly for personal or political reasons' (also Kalfa, Wilkinson and Gollan 2018a, 2018b).

This relates to wider issues emerging from the emphasis placed upon a neoliberal discourse of excellence, including teaching excellence, in universities (Moore et al. 2017; Morrissey 2015). The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and the National Student Survey (NSS) are two ways teaching excellence is defined and used in the marketisation and auditing of UK higher education, through (for example) league tables and performance management. The TEF is 'a dubiously derived metric of teaching quality and impact, originally attached to a policy to permit universities that perform particularly well to increase their tuition fees beyond the ordinary limit' (Soo Tian 2018, 17; London School of Economics and Political Science 2017; Scalisi 2018). The methodology, original purposes and actual uses of NSS scores (recording students' views of their courses and universities) have also been robustly criticised

⁴ Even individualised performance recognition such as teaching prizes can be mobilised by the university as indicators of the institution's success as a whole, whilst also contributing to division and competition (rather than solidaristic collegiality) between academics (Warren and Plumb 1999; Kalfa, Wilkinson and Gollan 2018a).

⁵ This can usefully be considered in relation to wider trends of neoliberalisation through marketisation, privatisation, depoliticisation and peripheralisation of public services (including primary and secondary education) (Clarke 2004; Bulpitt 1986).

(Cruickshank 2016). Nevertheless, these measures are used, and contribute to universities' audit culture (Cruickshank 2016; Morrish and The Analogue University Writing Collective 2017). This negatively affects teachers as they are encouraged (even *required*) to perform as 'units of productivity, profit or consumption' (Morrish and The Analogue University Writing Collective 2017, 24). As an anonymous academic quoted by Liz Morrish puts it, 'the institution's demands for compliance wreck our intellects (and our resolve and resilience), while stamping on us with disciplinary power whenever we point this out' (Morrish 2017).

The neoliberal discourse of teaching excellence works against the emancipatory potential of education. As Margaret Wood and Feng Su argue (2017, 452), 'the underlying authoritarian assumptions about competition and performativity inherent in neoliberal ideology' should be rejected. Instead, 'understandings which displace the dominant shallow polemics and "vacuity of excellence" with a more expansive view... which sees academic practices of teaching, scholarly activity and research as inter-connected' should be pursued (Wood and Su 2017, 452). This is worth considering in relation to teacher credentialisation.

Reflecting upon the PGCertHE

From my perspective, taking the PGCertHE was first and foremost instrumental – to achieve credentials required for secure employment. Whilst this is not unusual (Spowart et al. 2016; Thornton 2014; van der Sluis, Burden and Huet 2017, 132), it is not a critical, emancipatory purpose, and as such my experience is coloured by affective cynicism, anxiety and

disappointment.⁶ Indeed, this experience is indicative of the ways in which teaching practice, including pursuing credentialisation, is alienated labour (Marx 2005; Hall 2014).

It is also worth critically interrogating the assessment for which this was first produced (University of Sussex 2018a, 5) considering good practice guidelines for reflective assignments (e.g. Gibbons 2018, 25), which the course did not appear to follow.⁷ By extension, questions are raised about the purposes and effects of credentialising courses in general. Despite ‘considerable rhetoric on the value of reflective practice in higher education’ (Gibbons 2018, 15),⁸ there is evidence that ‘summative assessment of reflection [might] contribute to a distortion of the practice itself’ (Gibbons 2018, 15). There is also ‘a lack of agreement... on both how to assess the quality of reflection in students [sic] work, and what quality looks like’ (Gibbons 2018, 17).⁹ Jenny Gibbons (2018, 16) argues that when ‘assessment of the process of learning takes the form of a summative piece of written work’ then ‘the outcome can be more akin to “refraction” than genuine reflection. Students may resort to ‘strategic deception’ in order to pass (Gibbons 2018, 17, citing Hobbs 2007, 414). The requirement to reflect for the PGCertHE assessment did, indeed, produce ‘a feeling of resentment towards a stipulation that

⁶ On affective cynicism, see, e.g., Kim et al. 2009; Mete 2013.

⁷ Further clarity may have been provided in sessions dedicated to the assessment, but I could not attend these due to clashes with other workshops. This reinforced the perception that the course was not primarily (or at least not sufficiently) oriented around assisting participants.

⁸ Gibbons (2018) and Hobbs (2007) cite this literature extensively. See also Schön (1983).

⁹ See also Miettinen (2000, 61), highlighting ‘the theoretical and epistemological inadequacy of the concept of immediate personal experience which is meant to form the basis of reflection’.

asks one to be open and honest about one's beliefs and experiences whilst implying that a certain response is preferable' (Gibbons 2018, 18; also van der Sluis, Burden and Huet 2017, 128).¹⁰ Moreover, informal discussions and conversations with colleagues who have completed such courses frequently include accounts of 'the creation of content "manufactured for assessment"' and 'reflective platitudes' in order to meet assessment requirements (Gibbons 2018, 21).

Suspicion of, and disappointment with, the course increased as it became evident that even the recommendations and good practice guidelines it promotes were not always followed in delivery of the course. In one workshop,¹¹ asking students to state their preferred pronouns was encouraged.¹² In this session one of the facilitators repeatedly misgendered another facilitator.¹³ In the study materials for another workshop, neither recommendations on how to make material available online to students (University of Sussex 2018b), nor guidelines on use of creative

¹⁰ The expectations of reflective writing as a genre, including first-person writing, can also be irritating (Rai 2006, 792).

¹¹ Teaching and Learning in Higher Education Workshop 7: 'Inclusive teaching – Supporting engagement of diverse students in higher education', 9 May 2018 (hereafter 'Workshop 7').

¹² Though this was not critically discussed in any depth. Questions were not discussed around, for example, whether demanding students declare pronouns might under some circumstances amount to forcible outing of trans or nonbinary students, or might be difficult, embarrassing or traumatic for students questioning their gender identity or presentation, or experiencing gender dysphoria (Workshop 7).

¹³ Workshop 7. The session did not increase my confidence in this area, and to some degree discouraged me from asking students to state preferred pronouns. Informal discussion with colleagues (including nonbinary colleagues) has been much more helpful (on the importance of informal discussions, see Mewburn [2011]).

commons images were followed (University of Sussex 2018c, 13). There was also no discussion of critiques of copyright, such as the notion that copyright and intellectual property law have tended to produce and maintain inequalities, reinforcing racism and sexism (see Greene 2008). The session was, rather, a guide on conforming with the university's rules.¹⁴

It frequently appeared that the purpose of the course was not primarily to assist participants, but had the effect (and, perhaps, the intent) of delivering the university's line (policies and favoured approaches). The presence (or at least the perception) of this line contributes to the disciplining of teachers' behaviours in a Foucauldian sense. The PGCertHE contributes to governing the *right* and *wrong* ways of 'doing' teaching – and 'doing' learning on the course itself (Foucault 1980; Graham, Treharne and Nairn 2017, 1-2; Morrissey 2015). Facilitators frequently claimed discussions were not searching for 'right answers', but also sometimes closed discussions by delivering positions participants 'just have to take [facilitators'] word for'.¹⁵ Similarly, the suspicion that the primary purpose is not to help teachers was raised when in answering a question from a participant, facilitators revealed that not only does their service not cater for staff in supporting mental health and wellbeing but also that services which previously existed with this purpose had been closed.¹⁶

¹⁴ See Teaching and Learning in Higher Education Workshop 4: 'Supporting students – career development, library and study skills', 16 May 2018 (hereafter 'Workshop 4'); University of Sussex (2018e).

¹⁵ Workshop 7.

¹⁶ Workshop 4. This is not to suggest facilitators were at fault, but rather to highlight that issues raised by participants were not addressed in course content.

Taking the PGCertHE coincided with the 2018 University and College Union (UCU) dispute – and strike – over proposed changes to pensions. UCU’s concerns – about pensions and more broadly – stood in stark contrast to those of the course. Unions, after all, are intended to cater to their members’ needs, whereas the course (seemingly) catered to the university’s (employer’s) needs – rather than those of participants (workers). Teaching (and its credentialisation) does not exist in a vacuum. Consideration of disciplinary power in the university more broadly – and how this might be navigated – is therefore invited. I now turn to this.

Navigating and resisting disciplinary power

Four approaches to navigating disciplinary power are set out here. These are: (1) instrumental compliance; (2) participation in and pedagogic reflection upon mobilisations such as strikes when they emerge; (3) incorporation of critical and emancipatory themes and approaches into teaching; (4) reflection upon the ways scholarly identities overlap and inform one another, and small targeted acts of resistance. These – at times overlapping, at times contradictory – approaches are explained and explored below.

First, one approach to navigating disciplinary power is compliance (Kalfa, Wilkinson and Gollan 2018b; Grollman 2013). This is often easiest, and has often been the approach taken. In taking the PGCertHE (rather than refusing the push to credentialisation), using Lecture Capture (rather than actively opposing the university’s ownership and use of this academic labour) (see Warwick Anti-Casualisation 2017), and submitting works for consideration for the Research Excellence Framework (REF) (even whilst on a teaching-only contract), the difficulties which

might be encountered in active resistance are avoided, and some instrumental gains might be achieved (Kalfa, Wilkinson and Gollan 2018b; Grollman 2013). Perhaps there will be personal and professional benefits from completing the PGCertHE (Thornton 2014). Maybe the benefits of Lecture Capture to students outweigh its (unresolved) negative implications (Witthaus and Robinson 2015; Warwick Anti-Casualisation 2017). Perhaps submitting research for REF consideration might lead to promotion – or contractual recognition of research. Piecemeal instrumental benefits and avoidance of punitive sanctions (either formally, through – for example – failing probationary requirements, or informally, such as through missing out on promotion) should not, however, be the main motivation for, and means of, navigating the university, at least not for those with some kind of commitment to education as critical and emancipatory (Kalfa, Wilkinson and Gollan 2018a, 2018b).

The second and third approaches, involving more resistance, relate to the interrelationship of multiple scholarly identities. What does it mean in practice to be a teacher, researcher and trade unionist in the neoliberal university? In grappling with this question, I have recently taken several related approaches. One is the strike. The 2018 UCU strike, in particular, relates to my recent teaching. The strike is not simply an absence. There is an active – and pedagogic – element (De Smet 2012; Noterman and Pusey 2012, 186-191). The strike is not simply a refusal to undertake work, it is in itself a form of teaching practice (Noterman and Pusey 2012, 186-191).¹⁷ Students asked and were told about the reasons for and practicalities of the strike. They also learn through the absence of formal teaching, through the autoreply which responded to emails during the strike and – for those who participated in such activities – ‘learn through

¹⁷ Refusal is also, potentially, a methodological approach (Zahara 2016).

doing' practical solidarity (Knight and Yorke 2003; Parfitt 2018; Times Higher Education 2018; Satow 2018; De Smet 2012; Heenan 2014; Hall 2014).

As a scholar of social movements (including trade unions), students' experience of the strike is part of teaching practice. The pedagogy of the strike contributes to students' understandings of what trade unions and social movements are and what they do, and, in the context of actions such as the 2018 UCU strike, how this relates to the neoliberalisation of higher education (see, e.g., Noterman and Pusey 2012, 186-191). This is an important counterbalance to other resources students frequently rely upon. I often encounter students who know little about trade unions, and inaccuracies, myths and misconceptions about trade unions. These are frequently reproduced in the media (for discussion of this, see Language Unlocked [2012]; Unions21 [2013]; Red Pepper [2011]) and in textbooks.¹⁸ There is a critical (in both senses) imperative to improve students' understandings in this area, including through the pedagogy of the strike. Furthermore, the strike, its effects on students, and reflection upon this and on misconceptions about trade unionism led me to pursue the third approach.

The third approach is incorporation of multiple scholarly identities into formal teaching practice. For instance, in a lecture for foundation-year students (on social movements and contentious politics), I discussed UCU industrial action as a case study. The lecture related

¹⁸ For example, a chapter (Jones 2014), which was required reading on a first-year undergraduate module at Sussex (University of Sussex 2017), makes demonstrably misleading claims about strikes in 1978/9 (see Thomas 2007, 270-271).

research to the strike.¹⁹ My experience of the strike was that of a striking trade unionist (and teacher, and researcher), but this was brought into dialogue with experiences of students whose learning was disrupted and – potentially – enhanced, through the strike (Miliband 1990; Oyler 2012; Noterman and Pusey 2012, 186-191). Whilst metrics such as the NSS – measuring student ‘satisfaction’ – are unlikely to be positively affected, the strike offers students an opportunity to reflect upon the intersections of politics, education and work in the ‘swamp’ of practice (Schön 1983, 42), and to experience productive dissatisfaction through ‘mov[ing] out of their “comfort zone”’ (Cruickshank 2016, 9).

This lecture also included some ‘flipped learning’ elements (Flipped Learning Network 2014).²⁰ These were promoted in the PGCertHE.²¹ Indeed, the degree to which ‘flipped learning’ is promoted – in courses such as the PGCertHE, and by (frequently for-profit) enterprises outside the university – relates to processes of neoliberalisation and the exercise of disciplinary power.²² At times, it is promoted as the *best* approach to teaching or the *only* (acceptable) solution to educators’ dilemmas (Berrett 2016; McKenzie 2018). There are, nevertheless, good reasons for not moving entirely to ‘flipped learning’. This is due to both evidence that flipped learning ‘offers no additional benefits to student learning over a

¹⁹ University of Sussex 2018d; Unpublished observation reports, University of Sussex, 2018.

²⁰ For instance, students applied analytical tools from the week’s readings during the lecture (readings and key questions were provided in advance via the Moodle virtual learning environment).

²¹ See, e.g., Teaching and Learning in Higher Education Workshop 5: ‘Technology in teaching’, 25 April 2018 (hereafter ‘Workshop 5’).

²² See, e.g., Workshop 5; Berrett 2016; McKenzie 2018; Dreon 2018.

nonflipped, active-learning approach' (Jensen, Kummer and Godoy 2015, 11; Dreon 2018) and potential benefits of traditional lecturing (French and Kennedy 2016; Tokumitsu 2017).²³ Contrary to the assumption that lectures are necessarily passive and flipped learning necessarily active,²⁴ lectures involve activity: 'attendees... take notes, they react, they scan the room for reactions, and... they *listen*'; furthermore, 'lectures are a social occasion' (not 'one-sided') (Tokumitsu 2017; also French and Kennedy 2016).²⁵ Indeed, this lecture was well-received by students (who applauded) and observers.²⁶ This suggests incorporation of multiple scholarly identities – including that of a trade unionist – into formal teaching practice can be effective even within the university's expected frames of reference without requiring (full) capitulation to neoliberal demands.

A final approach is reflection upon, and talking and writing about, the issues and dynamics discussed above. This has several aspects, which taken together might be considered small, targeted acts of resistance (STARs) (Bosanquet 2017). This article is one of them. Writing a reflective piece (initially) as an assignment which is critical of both the course it is produced

²³ Potentially enormous time and resource requirements also discourage pursuit of fully flipped approaches (Workshop 5).

²⁴ Jensen, Kummer and Godoy (2015) tested this claim. See also Dreon's critique of for-profit promotion of flipped learning rather than focusing on 'evidence-based teaching' regardless of how it is branded (Dreon 2018).

²⁵ Lectures' sociality potentially has further benefits. Students who feel isolated, or suffer from symptoms of depression might be assisted in combatting this in part through the routine which comes with lectures' requirements that attendees 'get dressed, leave the house, and participate in a shared experience' (Tokumitsu 2017; also Shiner 2013).

²⁶ Unpublished observation reports, University of Sussex, 2018.

for and the (specific and general) university is in a sense a form of subversive play (Creme and Hunt 2002, 159-161). Writing this has had some positive and cathartic effect similar to that experienced by doctoral students engaging in ‘troubles talk’ (Mewburn 2011).²⁷ Indeed, experience as a teacher and researcher (and PGCertHE candidate) is permeated by (and these identities formed, developed and questioned through) troubles talk – academics frequently ‘gather to tell stories of situations that have caused some kind of discomfort or disruption’ (Mewburn 2011, 321). These (and other) ‘non-formal’ interactions have had a greater influence on shaping my teaching than the PGCertHE (Knight, Tait and Yorke 2006; Hibbert and Semler 2016, 587-589; Leigh 2017, 36). This raises the question of whether non-formal interaction between colleagues might be preferable to schemes such as the PGCertHE more generally. Universities, and those within them involved in the credentialisation of teachers, should give this serious consideration if they hold a genuine commitment to critical analysis of their own practices or the potential scrutiny of hegemonic neoliberal processes.

This article expresses frustrations, dilemmas and reflections of the sort aired frequently in troubles talk. Expressing these here is a STAR because, in initially producing this for assessment, I gave little regard to performing in the manner (at least perceived as being) expected – by, for instance, openly recognising the existence of (and refusing to engage in) the manufacture of strategically deceptive content for assessment purposes (Gibbons 2018, 21; Hobbs 2007). This was possible, in part, due to passing probationary requirements before finishing the PGCertHE.²⁸ There was, therefore, comparatively little risk in taking this

²⁷ See also Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) on the potential for writing to be therapeutic.

²⁸ Letter from Human Resources Manager, 8 May 2018.

approach (Bosanquet 2017); with the instrumental gain of secure employment achieved, and the consequent evaporation of fear of failing probationary requirements, a more honest and critical engagement with the manifestations of disciplinary power in the university – including relating to the PGCertHE – feels more possible (see Grollman 2013). Implications of these approaches and conclusions are set out below.

Conclusion

A key implication of the reflections presented here is the importance of critically challenging and (as much as possible) seeking to ‘reject the false distinction between academia and wider society in conceptualisations of valid sites of struggle and knowledge production’ (Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010, 245). Neoliberal processes in the university frequently work against critical, emancipatory education. Moreover, compliance – perhaps, co-option – is often the easiest route for teachers navigating the neoliberal university. Alternative, more emancipatory, approaches – or at least mitigation of the negative impacts of compliance – require purposive action. This means recognising the ways different aspects of academic identity overlap and how these can productively be brought into teaching practice. It also means recognising the structural limitations of individual action. This, in turn, requires consideration of the necessity of broader collective struggles, reflection upon the degree to which it is possible to pursue these and upon the relationships these might have with practices as an individual academic.

To be a teacher, researcher and trade unionist is not to be three things. Rather, practice as each of these should recognise (and will benefit from recognising) their interrelationship in the

combined status of teacher-researcher-trade unionist. Having, at times, successfully brought this triple identity into productive focus in teaching practice, I will pursue this further in the future. This means thinking about the ways in which the critical questions which motivate my research and trade unionism, as well as engagement with research and reflection upon trade union action, could be (further) incorporated – and recognised – in teaching, from the point of curriculum-design through to responses to and prompts for participation in classroom-delivery. This, furthermore, could be applied more widely as an approach to be taken by others concerned with the potential of education as a critical, emancipatory project – or grappling with the (on the face of it, potentially contradictory) relationships between scholarly identities as teachers, researchers and trade unionists (among others).

Experience – and literature – suggests that some resistance to the effects of neoliberalism can be pursued through academics’ autonomy as teachers (Noterman and Pusey 2012). Nevertheless, ‘[a]cademics... are challenged by the fact that they are involved in the reproduction of capital, regardless of the content of their lectures’ (Noterman and Pusey 2012, 178). Attempting to transcend the division between identities and challenge the neoliberalisation of education in teaching practice also means considering whether and how it is possible to counter neoliberal imperatives in forms of and approaches to teaching and assessment (rather than only subject content). This is more difficult (especially as an early-career teacher) than including researcher- and trade unionist-inspired content in already existing programmes. Individual autonomy exists, but is heavily structurally constrained:

The university as it currently exists, is clearly not an institution of our own making. When we work within it, as students and academics, we are grappling with it as a messy and contested space of, often contradictory, values and ethics. On the one hand the role

of the university is (increasingly) about social reproduction: creating docile, debt-ridden workers for capital. On the other hand, the university is a potential space of community and commons (Noterman and Pusey 2012, 180).

Some scope exists to resist neoliberalism in teaching practice. Some attempts at this are reflected upon above – as is the decision to (at times) acquiesce in the face of disciplinary power. Scope for individual teachers to resist neoliberalisation is structurally limited. Consequently, for an emancipatory, critical vision of education to be pursued most fully and most effectively, a broad collective struggle is necessary. Collective mobilisation by academics and wider constituencies of support has taken place at times and has yielded some successes in slowing, reducing or reversing neoliberal processes (see, e.g., Morrish and The Analogue University Writing Collective 2017). These mobilisations have even sometimes been linked to struggles beyond the academy (see, e.g., Noterman and Pusey 2012).

Day-to-day practice, however, cannot be based around the assumption that a wider, collective struggle will emerge or be successful. As such, the main responses likely to be carried forward are those identified above: instrumental compliance; participation in and pedagogic reflection upon mobilisations such as strikes when they emerge; incorporation of critical and emancipatory themes and approaches into teaching; reflection upon the ways scholarly identities overlap and inform one another; small targeted acts of resistance.

These, in turn, have potential implications and raise further questions which warrant further exploration and research. There is, first, the potential for other teachers (and researchers and

trade unionists) to engage with and reflect upon the approaches set out above. Secondly, there is the potential for questions raised here to be explored by those involved in the formulation and delivery of universities' pedagogic-cum-political directions, for instance with regard to whether and how to credentialise teachers. Despite the widely evident disciplinary power of neoliberal processes in education, universities are not entirely hopeless places. My hope for this article is that it provokes (in myself and others) further fostering of critical, emancipatory approaches to education and resistance to the negative effects of neoliberalisation.

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