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Welcome to the pedagogic borderlands

Jennifer Hill & Harry West

UWE Learning & Teaching Conference, 21 June 2016

An invitation

- we invite you to let go of the familiar
- to consider how spaces in higher education might be used creatively for pedagogic practice as **borderlands**
- encourage you to reconceptualise pedagogic spaces, identities and practices for you and your students

Introductory (re-)conceptualisations



Borderland spaces for learning – intro.

- we should encourage our students towards self-authorship:
the ability to know oneself, to know what one knows, to reflect upon it and to base judgements on it
(developed from Baxter-Magolda 2004)
- we must challenge our students to become border crossers
- offer novel and constructively disruptive spaces and encounters (Glasser & Powers 2011)

Borderland spaces – characteristic 1

- traditional **power hierarchies scrutinized** and destabilized (teacher-student contradiction: Freire 1970)
- students draw from their experiences working with each other / faculty
- prompts construction of new identities (Giroux 1992)
- messy and unpredictable space – but ultimately productive

Borderland spaces – characteristic 1

(Flickr: Robert Donovan)

<http://www.red-thread.com/inspire/education/education-trends/>



Borderland spaces – characteristic 2

- students and faculty must become accustomed to positions of **liminality** and **ambiguity** (Cook-Sather & Alter 2011)
- new ways of thinking and practising are permitted, which are not easily unlearnt (Land et al. 2014)
- initial discomfort and uncertainty but persistence in this space can be transformative

Borderland spaces – characteristic 3

- permissive spaces of the borderland allow **genuine dialogue**
- offering opportunities for co-inquiry and reflection amongst students and between students and faculty (Lodge 2005)
- teacher-student relationship becomes one of mediation and exchange

Borderland spaces – empirical example

Borderland space beyond the curriculum: PAL Leaders

- initial movement beyond ‘comfort zone’, antithetical emotions of insecurity and vulnerability:

*‘I was **very apprehensive**. I probably did not feel that prepared to lead a group of my peers knowing you are slightly superior to them but you’re not, you’re on the same level ...
but it’s exciting as well’*

Borderland spaces – empirical example

- students were re-positioned, progressing from recipients of learning to assume the responsibility of tutors:

‘PAL allows you to become more than a student ... for those sessions you are a member of staff who has the chance to pass on information to an entire class of students ... you view academic work from a more responsible level’

- identities were complicated – emerging multi-dimensional learners, engaging more thoughtfully with their work

Borderland spaces – empirical example

- are perils of grappling with new identities and associated responsibility
- issues of student non-attendance mentioned in particular:

*‘That was the hardest thing, dealing with the **feeling rejected** ... I only had two weeks when very few students came but I felt **heartbroken that was really, really challenging**’*

Borderland spaces – empirical example

- students self-evaluate and exercise judgements they consider to be appropriate to context and audience:

*‘Being a Leader has improved my ability to **judge different people’s learner types**, allowing me to **adapt my teaching to accommodate**’*

*‘I learnt how to **change my style depending on the students that came**. Something that will work with one student won’t work for another ... I learnt that **everyone is different so you have to be flexible as a PAL leader**’*

Borderland spaces – empirical example

- students recognise transferability of knowledge and skills:

‘I now feel confident that ... I could apply presentation and facilitation skills in the right places at the right times’

‘the transferable skills you learn whilst being a PAL leader will help you stand out from the crowd when looking for graduate jobs’

Conclusions

- learning space is not automatically borderland - must be used as such ontologically, epistemologically, practically (Hill et al. 2016)
- lecture theatres and classrooms can be transformed by encouraging students to become partners in SoTL (Cook-Sather et al. 2014, Johansson & Felten 2014)
- students acquire new knowledge, skills and facets to their identity, engaging with aspects of critical pedagogy and developing skills relevant to future employment

Conclusions

- ***But ...*** letting go of familiar ways of learning requires trust in a process that is inherently unpredictable (Healey et al. 2014)
- guidance and training needed to ensure successful navigation into and out of these challenging environments
- we must ensure managers support the movement of students and faculty into and out of such spaces through strategies and policies

A note of caution ...



Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility & Student Choice

Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills
by Command of Her Majesty

May 2016

Questions and Discussion

How have you ... or
how could you ...
take your students
into the
borderlands?



What were/are
the benefits?

What were/are the
challenges?

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