

introduction

THE CHALLENGE OF PROFESSIONALISM

This introduction situates the development of teaching and learning practice within the social and economic forces shaping higher education. We describe how these forces have produced a new challenge, based on a discourse of excellence imported from industry and shaped by persistent calls for accountability. This discourse has dramatically increased the demands and transformed the nature of academic work, especially the specification of broader and higher-order student learning outcomes. We conclude by proposing a new professional framework and language – to be elaborated over the rest of the book – for addressing the challenge.

THE ACADEMIC STORM

A post-millennium storm is sweeping higher education. It is a storm fed by increasing calls for accountability and excellence, fuelled by globalization, and accelerated by the forces of commercial exchange. For academics', working in higher education today often feels like a pervasive onslaught that must be constantly weathered. The demands on their time and the complexity of those demands are changing and escalating almost exponentially. Academics have been overwhelmed with a rapid expansion in both the number and diversity of students, without a corresponding boost in staff or resources. The burden in terms of faculty-student ratios, teaching time, advisory provision, assessment responsibilities, evaluation and feedback has

LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

swelled enormously. Pressures to increase research and scholarship activities have mushroomed as they have taken unprecedented priority in university preoccupations, while research funds have become more fiercely contested, more difficult to attain and often the realm of already powerful departments. New academic practices and consultancy activities have grown, often demanding more time and attention in the competition for new income streams. At the same time, the relationship of these activities in terms of academic career progress and status has become murkier, with many academic activities (although expected and required) not counting at all. At the same time, mounting criticism of the quality and efficiency of the twin pillars of academic practice – research and teaching – has increased the proportion of time spent on what has now become the third pillar of practice: academic administration and service.

Like all storms, this academic storm is the result of changes in powerful and prevailing systems. It is the result of changing relationships among higher education, knowledge (its primary material) and society. Historically, higher education has been an institution in society, privileged and governed by an almost linear relationship through which academics defined and produced knowledge, which was then imparted and infused within society through its graduates and the dissemination of its research (Barnett, 2003; Thelin, 2004). This relationship characterized the university's separation and freedom, and gave rise to its description as an 'ivory tower' in a 'real' world. The one-way nature of this relationship may be exemplified by the phrase 'academic freedom', a concept central to the fabric of academic life, but rarely accompanied by its customary social counterpart, responsibility. 'Academic freedom', as Donald Kennedy, the past president of Stanford University, notes: 'is a widely shared value; academic duty, which ought to count for as much, is mysterious' (1997: 2). This mystery, he suggests, is due to a dissonance in the way in which society and higher education see their relationship. It is a dissonance, moreover, which has recently seen an escalation of public criticism and policy concern over the issue of the accountability of higher education (Geiger, 2005).

This concern for accountability represents the wider change in the complex relationship between higher education and society. Higher education no longer simply resides in society; it is of society, increasingly subject to society's prevailing ideologies, ways of viewing the world, its transitions and upheavals. Higher education no longer simply shapes society through its knowledge contributions; it is rather shaped by society through the knowledge specification – both in terms of students and research – which the latter contracts with higher education to deliver (Light, 2000).

Current social and economic transitions, particularly those associated with the concepts of globalization, the shift to a knowledge-based economy and lifelong learning, characterize this specification. Given the nature of these social changes – converging on knowledge and the lifelong education of the workforce – higher education has become a key recipient of society’s focus and demands, fixed firmly within society’s gaze. Society has also concluded that the traditional structures of higher education are not adequate to deliver effectively the requirements of the specification. Higher education, society insists, must transform itself, and remake itself in the new social mould.

THE DISCOURSE OF EXCELLENCE

The new social mould expected of higher education has been wrought and shaped by a ‘discourse of excellence’ (Readings, 1996). This discourse, imported from industry, focuses on ‘excellent’ delivery and ‘excellent’ performance, and presumes a new way of thinking and talking about higher education. Within a relatively short space of time, the idea of excellence has come to dominate higher education (Bok, 2003; Ramsden, 1992/2003). This is no accident. Universities trumpet the term in their mission statements, in their websites and in their public relations materials. Indeed, very few university mission statements risk omitting the term. Its very universality makes its absence more telling than its presence. Not pursuing excellence is tantamount to an admission of failure. In respect of the values and ideals of higher education, excellence has been criticized as having ‘no content’ and as marking ‘the fact that there is no longer any idea of the University’ (Readings, 1996: 39) – and mission statements as being ‘ubiquitous, vacuous and inter-changeable’ (Coffield and Williamson, 1997: 1). Indeed, a university may exude ‘excellence’ but, as Harry Lewis, a former dean of Harvard College, has noted, still lack a soul (Lewis, 2006).

On the other hand, the idea of excellence does function extremely well as the torch-bearer of the structural revolution that has embraced higher education as a whole. Because excellence is less concerned with *what* than *how*, higher education can be conceived anew. Excellence measures how the university performs its social role, by measuring its inputs and outputs; it does not measure the role itself. The notion of excellence, thus, is a means for making the university accountable, using externally agreed marks of itself within the knowledge specification that society contracts with higher education to provide. A new bargain is thus struck, between society and the university, which is based on the elusive quality of excellence (Kirp, 2003). This specification defines excellence in terms of performance indicators of

LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

both the efficiency with which higher education delivers the product and the quality of product. It is less encumbered by issues of cultural significance or educational value, as by issues of social and economic effectiveness and efficiency. Drawn up under a social and economic agenda characterized by such issues as globalization, a knowledge-based economy and lifelong learning, the specification is replete with notions of competitiveness in terms of number, expansion and retention of student numbers, expansion of knowledge base, competitive advantage, efficiency gains, employee productivity and so on. It is a conception of accountability in which 'the quite proper demand that universities be *accountable* gets translated into the reductionist idea that everything is simply a matter of *accounting*' (Harvey, 1998: 115). This is clearly light years from how the university understands academic duty, however mysterious it might be.

The insistent call for excellence has serious repercussions for the day-to-day affairs of academic practice. Indeed, a profound change in the very language framing higher education exemplifies the challenge of professionalism facing the academy today. The successful colonization by terms such as excellence, competition and efficiency has been accompanied by an attendant 'industrialization of the language' (Coffield and Williamson, 1997: 1). Higher education is business. It is big business, international business, part of the burgeoning global service sector. This commercial language, drawn from the corporate world, has infiltrated most, if not all, of the features of higher education, sitting uncomfortably alongside older terms it augments or even replaces. Higher education now speaks of 'customers', 'sales', 'branding' and 'products', jostling with banks and travel agents, films and restaurants, hairdressers and accountants to retail its wares, consciously competing for a limited sum of expendable income with a wide range of other services and products (Kirp, 2003). The essence of that product is knowledge, a commodity bought or consumed by customers to suit their needs, and valued as an investment in time and money. Indeed, the current generation of college students, often referred to as the 'millennials', along with their parents, increasingly view themselves as consumers (Howe and Strauss, 2003; DeBard, 2004).

In making its pitch, higher education focuses on the specialized skills it possesses in the generation and dissemination of that knowledge: research and teaching. Within this language, research and teaching are not distinguished so much by their activity as by the nature of their customers and the description of the financial relationship with those customers, be that through block grants, research contracts or student fees. For example, the allocation of university funding based on the research assessment exercise

(RAE, n.d.) scores – a measure used in the UK to assess the quality of research in institutions of higher education – says as much about how the UK government perceives the status of the constituencies it serves, as it does about productivity and performance within the university sector. In the USA, the National Science Foundation (NSF) report on *Rising above the Gathering Storm* is couched in similar terms of economic performance and competition (COSEPUP, 2007). This academic product is increasingly marketed and delivered in accordance with the perceived needs and trends of the market. The whole operation is managed by line managers (course leaders, heads of departments, deans, etc.) who are responsible to senior management teams and chief executives for meeting ‘targets’ who, in turn, are looking for both increases in efficiency gains and product quality.

Within the discourse of excellence, efficiency gains and, to a large degree, product quality, are accompanied and driven by a culture of competition. Higher education institutions not only compete generally for expendable income within the national economy; within their own knowledge sphere they are competing ever more aggressively with other national and regional universities and colleges for research, students, consultancy and status. With the globalization of the economy, competition has extended into a race to develop foreign markets, while simultaneously defending home markets. As if this competition were not enough, universities have seen escalating direct competition for their products from non-academic sources, including ‘commercial laboratories, government research centres, think tanks and consultancies’ (Robertson, 1997: 91). In addition, institutions of higher education are nationally measured, scored and rewarded for their competitive success (Meredith, 2004). In the UK, for example, college and university rankings, such as *The Times University League Table*, provide measurements of quality and excellence across a range of institutional criteria, including research and teaching. In the USA, national scores of university excellence have been published for decades, led by the popular *US News and World Report College Rankings*, despite criticism of the measures behind such rankings (Ehrenberg, 2000; Holub, 2002). More recently, scores of excellence have gone international with separated rankings of the top universities in the world assembled and published by both *The Times Higher Education Supplement* in the UK and Shanghai-Jiaotong University in China.

The impact of excellence, in the guise of both increasing efficiency and competition and ever more intrusive measurements of quality, is extensive and pervades all aspects of an individual academic’s work. Efficiency and competition have meant that the activities of faculty and academic staff

LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

have been scrutinized more minutely for efficiency gains and tied more directly to their personal role in income generation. Concerns about having fixed staff in areas of declining customer base, whether this be due to changing market trends or the result of poor competitive operations, have led to management looking to use more flexible arrangements and patterns of academic staff or faculty deployment. This has resulted in a vast increase in part-time and short-term contracts and more non-tenured faculty in the USA (Ehrenberg and Zhang, 2004), and includes the outsourcing of faculty to agencies with all the insecurities that such policies engender. Pressures have subsequently increased on staff to become flexible, both in terms of the kinds of duties and the range of subject areas in which they are engaged. The ability to teach, for example, in subject areas progressively more distant to one's areas of subject expertise and to engage in work developing new income streams – such as consultancy – for which one has little or no training, is becoming more common.

There is also a growing focus on the development of abilities more akin to the modern entrepreneur than the traditional academic. These include the talent for marketing oneself, one's teaching, one's research and one's institution. They encompass a diverse range of skills from media presentation to brochure and leaflet design, from product development (research, scholarship, courses) to product design (more accessible and customer-friendly modular programmes) and product packaging (online courses delivered to the home). In more extreme cases, it may even require academics to become direct sales people: universities have sometimes acted like call centres, providing faculty members and their students with lists of potential students whom they were required to 'cold call' to inform them of the advantages of their various 'products': courses and programmes.

Where the impact of competition and efficiency on individual academics leads, the impact of intrusive systems of quality assessment and assurance follows. The recent intense focus on academic accountability in terms of quality has had significant repercussions on the nature of the academic's changing role. For many academics, research and scholarship activity is increasingly perceived and conceived within the scaffolding of numbers: numbers of published articles, numbers of citations, quantity of research funding and, in the USA, Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores of admitted graduate students and so on. There is, moreover, a gallows silhouette to this scaffolding – 'publish or perish' – as academics are reminded that their probation, employment contracts, tenure and promotional prospects are directly linked to their ability to scramble and clamber within it, the dark image of a noose ever present and threatening. While productivity may have

increased, it has not done so without significant repercussions on the process and nature of research and scholarship. This includes, for example, uncomfortable trends towards more hurried work published before it is ready, towards work which is more practical or applied, less theoretical or pure, more trivial work and/or work which is increasingly felt to be isolated and irrelevant. An explosion of journals accompanies these trends, with ever more specialized articles read by fewer and fewer readers. In addition, academics spend more time developing, writing and submitting research proposals that may be rejected as funds are more hotly contested.

Growing expectations for accountability in teaching have further pressured academic time. The USA has seen an increased focus on the assessment of student learning outcomes during institutional accreditation (HLC, 2007; CHEA, 2008), while in the UK the institutional audits by the Quality Assurance Agency have institutionalized society's interest and oversight of academic standards (QAA, 2008), although political and market forces are putting increasing, if yet to be fully determined, pressures on both systems of accountability (Aldermann and Brown, 2005). Quality assurance, quality assessment, quality audit, quality enhancement and quality transformation (Middlehurst, 1997) have not only introduced a new, often confusing vocabulary, they have also added a multitude of more formal and systematic administrative practices to the academic workload. New and changing institutional quality assurance and assessment systems, for example, require academic staff to spend additional time complying with and contributing to institutional policies, strategies and paperwork, increasing considerably as external audit and assessment exercises approach. In addition, academics' relationships with their students have been characterized by increased paperwork, as well as by more formal and comprehensive systems of monitoring student assessment, evaluations, support, completion rates, post-undergraduate destinations, etc., coupled with developing strategies to learn and improve from such monitoring. Finally, academics are increasingly expected to engage in a wide and diverse set of personal development activities, ranging from occasional lunchtime brown-bag discussions with colleagues on issues of mutual relevance and importance, to ongoing, long-term professional development programmes. Such activities are frequently accompanied by formal systems of appraisal, peer observation and, particularly for new staff, mandatory programmes in teacher training.

In the UK, the Dearing Committee report (NCIHE, 1997) recommended that all 'institutions of higher education begin immediately to develop or seek access to programmes for teacher training of their staff, if

they do not have them, and that all institutions seek national accreditation of such programmes' (1997: Recommendation 13). While not yet mandatory, such accreditation has become widespread in the UK (HEA, 2007), and increasingly so in the USA. In the latter many faculty have voluntarily undergone accreditation and review (Lubinescu et al., 2001), often with the help of institutional self-study assessment tools such as those offered by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC, 2007). Nevertheless, although some faculty have found ways to work collaboratively within their institutions to alleviate the work (Morse and Santiago, 2000; Sorcinelli, 2006) for many academics, faculty development and accreditation of teaching is yet another substantial time commitment without a substantial increase in resources.

Working in a culture of 'excellence' – with its industrial vocabulary manifested in the twin guises of competition/efficiency and quality/accountability – has undeniably presented a substantial test for academic life. This test has been exemplified by changes in the nature of academic roles and the pressures associated with these changes. As we will discuss in the next section, 'excellence' challenges academics to think about their role in relation to both knowledge and the student. The disposition of this challenge both announces the new call for academic professionalism in teaching and learning and supports the nature of its response.

THE CHALLENGE OF EXCELLENCE

The challenge of excellence presents higher education with opportunities for substantive, meaningful and positive change. The shift towards professionalism in teaching and learning is a natural manifestation of the discourse of excellence. In terms of the social and economic accountability of higher education to society, it is long overdue. While the challenge – immersed as it is in an accounting mode – is deeply suspect, it provides a necessary jolt to critical thought and reflection. This does not mean, however, that the challenge of excellence should be passively accepted or, for that matter, that academics should rage blindly like modern King Lear within their towers, as the storm strips off the last remnants of ivory veneer. It is vitally important that academics take up this challenge and think. What, for example, does this new focus on excellence mean for how academics relate to their students? To student learning? To their own learning? What is the impact on the edifice of knowledge which surrounds these relationships?

As we have seen, in a knowledge-based economy, knowledge is the product of modern society and subject to its market structures: it is traded as is any other commodity or service. It is increasingly traded on

global communication and information systems that, by virtue of their growing impact, have themselves become a serious component of the knowledge market. In this model, universities no longer sustain the monopoly they once enjoyed. They are simply one of many social and corporate organizations developing, managing, disseminating and competing with knowledge. Indeed, they are often in partnership with corporate organizations that by virtue of financial muscle demand and are given the control of knowledge (Chomsky, 1998; Press and Washburn, 2000). The academic relationship with knowledge is increasingly dominated by competitive economic structures which any dominant and powerful product ('knowledge is power') engenders.

Within such a framework, the nature of knowledge and our perception of what it entails inevitably change. Traditional elitist distinctions between 'high' or 'elite' knowledge and 'mass' or 'popular' knowledge, for example, begin to dissolve (Usher et al., 1997). Produced, moreover, within new sites with different priorities and a wider set of organizational and technical goals, knowledge has mutated and increasingly taken on an active voice. Active forms of knowledge that can be employed to increase economic competitiveness and personal effectiveness are increasingly displacing the passive knowledge of truth, contemplation and personal awareness. Gibbons et al. (1994) have described this change in terms of a move from disciplinary-based knowledge situated in an academic context (in which experts construct knowledge), towards trans-disciplinary knowledge located in a context of application (in which students construct knowledge for themselves). Echoing this distinction, Barnett (2003) describes the university as a site of rival versions of what it is to know the world, embodied in the distinction between academic and operational competence. Academic competence is, for example, described as having a focus on *knowing that* and stressing propositions evaluated by criteria of truth. Operational competence, in contrast, focuses on *knowing how* and stressing outcomes evaluated by criteria focused on their economic impact. The pressures in the direction of operational competence are, he suggests, changing our very epistemological existence (Barnett, 2003).

The challenge of excellence not only interrogates our traditional ways of conceiving and using knowledge but also contests the academic relationship to the student. In particular, academics feel pressured to recognize a professional responsibility to students in terms of the quality of their knowledge and learning. While providing knowledge has always been a role of the academy, within the terms of the knowledge specification presented to higher education, however, students have themselves now

LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

become more firmly regarded as product for whom the university is accountable to society (Kirp, 2003). In the language of excellence, and the ironic paradoxes that such language raises, students have become consumers of higher education's product, in order to become productive within our society. As such, it is precisely the nature of student-as-product which has recently become the focus of social and economic concern. Collectively, the student-product needs to be larger in number and more diverse. Individually, students need to have developed a range of key transferable and higher-order thinking skills, including meta-learning, the ability to learn from learning.

Over the last few decades, the student body which higher education serves has radically changed from an 'elite' to a 'mass' system (Trow, 2001; Thelin, 2004), with student participation rates in the UK, for example, more than trebling and the number of institutions called universities more than doubling. Accompanying this enormous rise in student numbers has been an increase in the diversity of students, including growth in the participation of women, mature students, ethnic and minority students, students from less privileged classes and overseas students (DeBard, 2004). Underlying both the increase in numbers and in diversity has been the focus on widening access, again primarily 'to contribute to improved economic competitiveness and to local economic success' (Robertson, 1997: 88).

At the same time, the entrance en masse of the millennials - students born between 1982 and 2002 - into higher education has raised new concerns about consumer demands and the perceived educational values and expectations of those students and their parents (Howe and Strauss, 2003). Millennial students tend to have lived more sheltered and protected lives and, as such, to be more rule-abiding and conventional, and more likely to expect authorities to intervene when problems arise. They look for structure and answers, and expect the terms of their learning to be clearly defined. Although team-oriented they also feel pressured to perform individually to succeed. Moreover, they are more technologically literate than any generation that has preceded them, and expect to be able to connect virtually with others at any time. Finally, they are more likely to be socially aware of diversity and the importance of social and civic engagement, and expect a college to provide them with a sense of purpose (Howe and Strauss, 2003; DeBard, 2004; Shapiro, 2005).

This socioeconomic imperative is also manifested in the individual features specified by society. A recent report generated by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), and put out by the LEAP

National Leadership Council, has pointed out that the usual metrics as enrolment, persistence and degree attainment, while important, are insufficient in determining if students 'are actually achieving the kind of learning they need for a complex and volatile world' (NLC LEAP, 2007). The learning described in the report focuses on critical inquiry, engaging students in 'real world' problems, fostering civic, intercultural and ethical learning, and helping students find ways to apply learning and knowledge to new problems. Higher education should be providing society with educated individuals who have developed a range of higher-level transferable skills, along with the more general ability and willingness to 'learn to learn' (also called meta-learning or lifelong learning). Transferable skills – which include communication, teamwork, leadership, ethics, problem-solving and information technology, etc. – support the economic requirement of flexibility and adaptability which graduates expect to use in their future employment and careers, as well as in their life practices and activities. Meta-learning characterizes individual lifelong learning: the graduate's ability to continue to learn new knowledge, skills and practices. Rather than having a core subject curriculum, this points to a set of 'core characteristics, qualities and kinds of outcomes for all who enter and re-enter higher education' (Duke, 1997: 67).

Five terms thus epitomize the nature of the challenge of professionalism to teaching and learning in higher education:

- The increasing numbers of students in our classrooms.
- The increasing diversity of background, experience, and needs and expectations which our students present.
- The emerging curriculum of transferability, which includes acquiring new global competencies.
- The insistent pervasiveness of technology, and expectations for its use in academic practice, including electronic learning opportunities for distance learners.
- The conceptual shift in our thinking about our practice from teaching to learning, from delivering knowledge to developing and fostering independence of learning in which students develop the ability to discover and reconstruct knowledge (and their lives) for themselves.

These terms, very roughly, outline the shape of the professional challenge. In response to this challenge, a new professional paradigm realizing learning and teaching expertise in higher education has emerged, contesting two earlier paradigms of teaching development (see Figure I.1) (Light, 2000).

LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

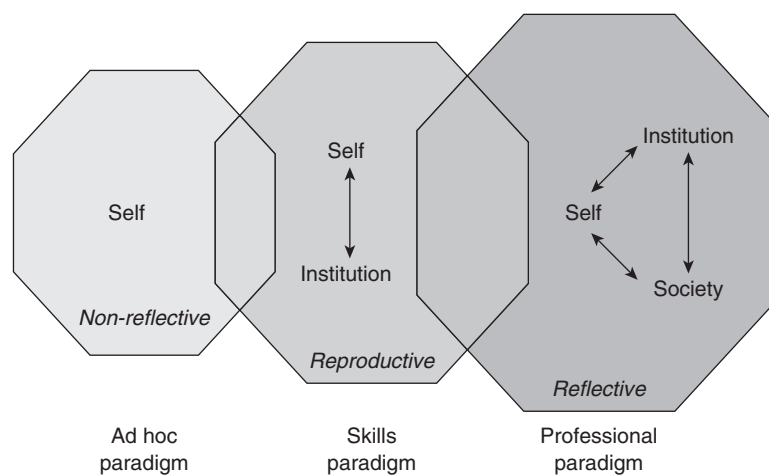


Figure I.1 *Paradigms of the academic development of teaching*

The first paradigm, which we refer to as the *ad hoc* paradigm, is located primarily within the individual teacher, and essentially asserts that a good teacher is born, not made. Associated with 'elite' systems of student participation and prevalent until the late 1960s and early 1970s (although still prevalent in much of higher education), its underlying assumption is that teaching is something one picks up and grasps informally and individually. It is non-reflective in the broader sense. The teacher is left to her own devices and draws upon past experience of being taught, trial and error, help from sympathetic colleagues when available, and her own natural affinities for teaching. The second paradigm – expanding more or less in tandem with the growth of student numbers from the 1970s onwards – we call the *skills* paradigm. Its basic assumption is that the development of teaching is an add-on process and rests in the accumulation and reproduction of performance and communication skills, competencies and tips. These skills are generic and provided by trainers and consultants who often have no formal experience of the discipline in which the teachers are working or even of higher education teaching. The provision of training has generally been located within the institution's support services, and separated from its core academic activities.

Ironically, the very teaching and learning challenge which excellence has articulated has often failed to address the substance and complexity of the challenge itself. While demanding higher education to go beyond the *ad hoc* first-paradigm solutions to the challenge, it has confined its own general response to the narrowly prescribed *skills*-centred approaches of the second paradigm. 'Excellence' has often elicited approaches for developing expertise

in teaching and learning, which address the new state of complexity by imposing a reductionist (and 'accounting') framework to simplify it. Curiously, the discourse of excellence engages the uncertain by assuming a known context with clearly understood attributes (Barnett, 2003). The result is an approach that specifies increasingly narrow outcomes and competencies of expertise, establishes behavioural standards for them and insists on compliance with these standards irrespective of the professional, disciplinary and institutional context.

The third paradigm – the *professional* – is the focus of this book. It is a relatively recent development and is only beginning to overlap with and compete with the first two paradigms. Like most professions, the location of the professional paradigm goes beyond the practitioner's self and institution to embrace wider issues raised by society. As Bennett (1998) suggests, professional status derives from the value that society places on higher education, the inclusion of specialized knowledge and the reliance on higher-order abilities critically to acquire, apply, reflect on and elaborate that knowledge. As such it is essentially a reflective paradigm. It is not detached from the core academic and professional activities of the academy, but integrated within it and subject to the same critical requirements and standards with respect to knowledge, theory, values and practice. In the next section we shall begin to examine a third-paradigm approach that we believe more adequately addresses the challenge of excellence; indeed which challenges excellence to a qualitatively higher-order excellence.

THE REFLECTIVE PROFESSIONAL

The different responses elicited by the challenge of professionalism in learning and teaching may be illustrated by an important distinction between the call *for* professionalism and the call *to* professionalism. The former is primarily a call from the discourse of excellence for accountability, an external call for standardized professional organization, practice and evaluation procedures. It reflects the overall desire for increased efficiency and competitiveness within an accounting framework of quality. The latter, on the other hand, is a call to defend academic values and practices from the worst excesses of externally imposed frameworks of excellence, but also to acknowledge the challenge, to take possession of and transform it. The call to professionalism is a call towards a new way of thinking about learning and teaching which neither falls back on traditional *laissez-faire* academic versions of the benign amateur (Ramsden, 1992/2003) nor succumbs to newer versions of behavioural competence. It is a call to change, but it is also a call to ongoing reflection and change, to an ongoing transformation

LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

centred in the learning situation and reflecting the changing nature of that situation as characterized in the four features described above. It is a call to professionalism.

This call requires a model of practice that must account not only for the events and situations that arise in practice but also for the changing social context of that practice. Here, the model of practice most commonly advocated in opposition to the narrow competence model – the reflective practitioner (Schon, 1983, 1987) – is not sufficient. Reflective practice has been successful in articulating a conception of professional practice that goes beyond the application of previously mastered competencies which are then rather mechanistically applied to events. Stressing the conception of *reflecting-in-action*, this model describes the practitioner's ability to employ professional knowledge during practice in such a manner as to devise, choose and apply appropriate responses to unexpected and complex events and situations. Nevertheless, the model of reflective practice is primarily located in and bounded by those events and situations.

Extending the concept of the reflective practitioner to the reflective professional embraces not only the locus of practice but also the sphere of the professional. It encompasses what Barnett (2003) refers to as *professing-in-action*, which includes an understanding of the wider professional and academic context. If the former reflects on practice, the latter critically reflects on multiple and diverse discourses, on practice within the broader contexts and critical frameworks of his or her professional situation, however situated, constituted or clustered: teaching–research–administration; discipline–department–institution; ethical–social–economic–political; and local–national–international. These provide a changing set of multiple discourses in which the reflective professional works. Both the competence model and the reflective practitioner model describe two very different ways of responding to the multitude of situations and events describing practice, but they both essentially assume a relatively static environment in which these situations and events take place. As Barnett suggests:

The key challenge of modern professionalism is just this, of trying to make sense of disparate discourses in one's professional actions. It may be that, on occasions, the discourses collide such that one cannot act under them coherently ... The challenge, then, that faces the modern professional is the management of incoherence. (1997b: 141)

Working as a reflective professional means managing the incoherence brought about by changing:

- academic roles;
- knowledge bases;
- ways of knowing;
- the nature of the student body;
- student needs;
- departmental requirements;
- institutional demands;
- external agency demands; and
- professional accreditation demands.

Being a reflective professional rests in the ability to situate oneself and one's practice critically within an environment of substantial uncertainty and change, and, to manage that change, academic faculty need to make sense of, and work within, these widespread changes. But, as Barnett (2000) suggests, this is precisely the problem. Living as we do in age of supercomplexity, we lack a cohesive conceptual framework for making the world intelligible (Barnett, 2000: 75). We must find a new conceptual framework to ride out these changes, by finding an 'appropriate language linked to theoretical ideas' (Entwistle, 1998: 1). The language we develop must be critical and open and, as Kuhn (1970) suggested in his now classic work on paradigm shifts in academia, must allow for concrete problem-solutions that can be devised, implemented, evaluated, negotiated, modified and/or set aside in an ongoing cycle of critical performance. Such a language must be suitably open and elastic to accommodate diverse personal circumstances within rapidly shifting curriculum expansion and development, over a wide range of disciplines (and their escalating disciplinary and interdisciplinary contours), and set within a diverse cluster of higher education departments and institutions.

THE NOVICE TEACHER

Developing this language and conceptual framework may be a particularly important challenge for novice teachers. Whether they are new faculty, post-docs, adjunct or part-time lecturers, postgraduate students or from the professional fields, new teachers are seeking to understand and negotiate their new roles and identities at university. While they will bring a wide range of background, skills and experience to their new positions, they may know very little about what teaching in higher education entails beyond knowledge of their own content area. Their prior opportunities to engage in teaching may have been very limited. As postgraduate or graduate students, they

LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

may have served as teaching assistants, supporting a faculty member. Those in the professional schools, such as journalists, doctors, engineers and artists, will have been immersed in what they do, but may not have done much teaching except in a very *ad hoc* way.

At the same time, novice teachers are beset by the same pressures that plague other teachers in higher education: poor teacher–student ratios, declining resources and competing demands of research, teaching, service, administration and, for those in the professional fields, clinical expectations as well. As perceptions of teaching quality are increasingly linked to personnel decisions and job security (hiring, retention, promotion, tenure, salary increases, etc.), teachers may feel increasingly pressured about their performance in the classroom (Oppenheimer, 2008). Wrestling to meet these competing demands, new teachers may look informally to senior colleagues for feedback and advice, solace and comfort, information and wisdom (Mullen and Forbes, 2000). Yet even such experienced teachers may not have all the answers. Indeed, many are likely to be struggling themselves to meet and balance their numerous professional obligations. The professional language and conceptual frameworks described in this book can provide a useful structure for helping new teachers negotiate their new academic identities, especially as it helps them integrate their own learning and domain expertise with the demands of student learning and teaching.

CONCLUSIONS

In this Introduction we have addressed the challenges which teaching in higher education faces, describing the theoretical issues surrounding the changing nature of higher education, the changing role of the teacher within higher education, and the development of the teacher as both professional and reflective practitioner. In response to the challenge, we have proposed the concept of the reflective professional. We aim, in the rest of this book, to describe the nature of a professional language of academic development and how it might be used in practice. There are three inter-related components to the language: a critical conceptual framework, relevant and appropriate genres, and a general performance strategy (see Figure I.2).

In Part 1, we explore the first component of this language in three conceptual locations: 1) a general theoretical framework of language and knowledge; 2) a model of the reflective professional within academic practice; and 3) a critical matrix of learning in higher education. In Chapter 1, we consider the first two of these, looking at the relationship of language and

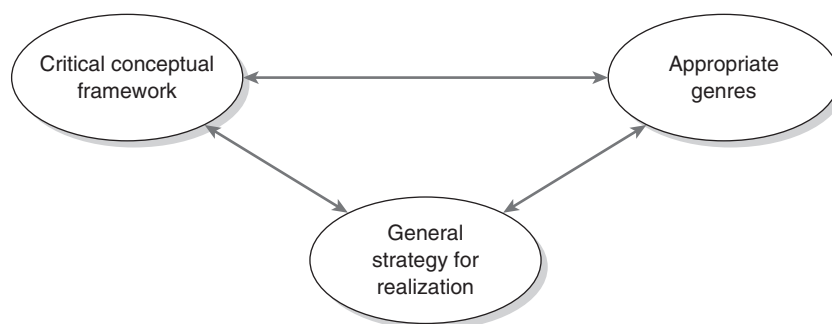


Figure 1.2 *The language of learning and teaching*

knowledge to academic practice. We argue that the academic relationships between knowledge, student, teacher and researcher converge in one model focused on learning. In Chapter 2, we examine the character of learning in higher education. Specifically, we develop a critical matrix of learning, providing teachers with a conceptual tool for designing, developing and implementing their teaching across the various genres of teaching practice outlined in the second part of the book.

In Part 2, we consider the different genres of teaching practice. Although we recognize that teaching is a holistic practice not comfortably divided into different sections, we accept that teaching in higher education has come to recognize certain distinctive core genres of teaching, which may be addressed separately. Thus, the genres of teaching respectively addressed in Chapters 3–9 include: Designing, Lecturing, Facilitating, Supervising, Innovating, Assessing and Evaluating. Within each chapter, we address key practical teaching issues and activities related to that genre, connecting it to relevant theory and recent research. While these genres focus on a variety of learning and teaching activities in which academics engage, they are not presented as an exhaustive list, nor are they intended as closed systems within themselves. They may be separated and combined in a wide array of sub-genres.

Finally, in Part 3, we address the third component, which focuses on the development and improvement of the learning and teaching. In Chapter 10, we propose and describe a general strategy of professional realization: a strategy for engaging and mastering the critical language of the reflective professional. The essence of this component is 1) to locate the development of teaching and learning within the concrete disciplinary and departmental situation; and 2) to link this development with the ongoing improvement of practice.

LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Final questions: These three components are not intended as a prescriptive generic programme but, rather, to provide a structure for designing a wide range of individual teaching and learning strategies. The model of practice proposed here does not ask academics to submit to a barrage of techniques, tips and prescribed practices but, rather, to engage in a critical way of thinking about their own practice. This involves asking critical questions about their wider disciplinary and professional roles and responsibilities in higher education: how important is teaching to my discipline and/or profession? What professional responsibilities do I have for student learning? How, or in what ways, am I accountable for my teaching? What standards of excellence do I hold myself and my colleagues to with respect to my students and profession? What responsibility do I have for my growth as a teacher? What are the critical challenges of learning in my discipline – for both my students and myself? At the very least, the model of practice proposed here is intended to be mildly subversive and liberating, providing space for the development of critical being in the world (Barnett, 2003). This, we contend, is the essence of the reflective professional.

NOTE

¹There are different terms for ‘academics’. In the US, academics who teach in a higher education setting are referred to as ‘faculty’, ‘instructor’, or ‘professor’, while in the UK the terms ‘staff’ or ‘lecturer’ are more common. We have used the terms interchangeable throughout the book.