



UNIVERSITY
OF WOLLONGONG
AUSTRALIA

University of Wollongong
Research Online

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) - Papers

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)

2008

The casualisation of teaching and the subject at risk

Alisa Percy

University of Wollongong, alisa@uow.edu.au

Rosemary Beaumont

University of Wollongong, beaumont@uow.edu.au

Recommended Citation

Percy, Alisa and Beaumont, Rosemary: The casualisation of teaching and the subject at risk, *Studies in Continuing Education*: 30(2) 2008, 145-157.

<http://ro.uow.edu.au/asdpapers/139>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library:
research-pubs@uow.edu.au

The casualisation of teaching and the subject at risk

Abstract

The casualisation of teaching in Australian higher education has come to be problematised as a risk to the quality of teaching and learning. However, the potential and location of risk, and therefore what constitutes an appropriate institutional intervention, requires interrogation as universities comply with the various regulations that, on the one hand, legitimise further casualisation in the name of flexibility, and on the other, insist on institutional responsibilities in the performance of quality. Taking a critical approach to risk consciousness, this paper examines the way casualisation is produced through workplace reform and problematised as a danger to the student learning experience through the quality agenda in Australian higher education. By examining the tensions between the discourses of flexibility and quality, the authors argue that casualisation should not simply be understood as a problem with individual teaching expertise that can be overcome through formal training of the individual. The neoliberal political rationality that seeks to individuate responsibility and locate 'risk' in this way masks the broader systemic tensions within the culture of the university which the authors argue have increasingly profound consequences for the quality of university education. Arguing that professional learning and quality enhancement are the product of open collaborative and collegial social practice, the authors conclude that addressing casualisation only in terms of systematic teacher training is a politically expedient response to a highly complex political issue facing Australian universities. Drawing on professional learning literature, the authors argue for a shift in policy and practice within the university to recognise, value and integrate the expertise and potential quality contribution of casual teaching staff at a micro-level with a particular focus on the teaching team.

Keywords

casualisation, professional learning, higher education, teaching team, quality, risk

Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | Social and Behavioral Sciences

Percy, A. & Beaumont, R. (2008). The casualisation of teaching and the subject at risk. *Studies in Continuing Education*. 30 (2), 145-157.

The casualisation of teaching and the subject at risk

Alisa Percy* and Rosemary Beaumont

Sessional Teaching Staff Project, University of Wollongong, Australia

The casualisation of teaching in Australian higher education has come to be problematised as a risk to the quality of teaching and learning. However, the potential and location of risk, and therefore what constitutes an appropriate institutional intervention, requires interrogation as universities comply with the various regulations that, on the one hand, legitimise further casualisation in the name of flexibility, and on the other, insist on institutional responsibilities in the performance of quality. Taking a critical approach to risk consciousness, this paper examines the way casualisation is produced through workplace reform and problematised as a danger to the student learning experience through the quality agenda in Australian higher education. By examining the tensions between the discourses of flexibility and quality, the authors argue that casualisation should not simply be understood as a problem with individual teaching expertise that can be overcome through formal training of the individual. The neoliberal political rationality that seeks to individuate responsibility and locate 'risk' in this way masks the broader systemic tensions within the culture of the university which the authors argue have increasingly profound consequences for the quality of university education. Arguing that professional learning and quality enhancement are the product of open collaborative and collegial social practice, the authors conclude that addressing casualisation only in terms of systematic teacher training is a politically expedient response to a highly complex political issue facing Australian universities. Drawing on professional learning literature, the authors argue for a shift in policy and practice within the university to recognise, value and integrate the expertise and potential quality contribution of casual teaching staff at a micro-level with a particular focus on the teaching team.

Keywords: casual teaching, risk consciousness, quality, professional development, casualisation

Casual teachers - their professionalism and expertise – have become a sector of significant interest in the quality-driven and risk conscious Australian university where the casualisation of teaching is a contemporary institutional fact. Despite, or perhaps because of, their importance, they have also become increasingly problematised as 'dangerous' to the quality of teaching and learning. This article begins by illustrating how the growing phenomenon of casual teaching has been materially produced as a cost-effective device for fiscally constrained universities,

* Corresponding author. Centre for Educational and Interactive Resources (CEDIR) University of Wollongong, Northfields Ave, Gwynneville, 2522, Australia. Email: alisa@uow.edu.au

and symbolically produced as key indicator of flexibility and productivity through the Australian Government's recent workplace reforms. The paper then discusses the way the casual teacher is problematised as a risk to the student learning experience. This discussion attempts to unsettle organisational truths about the risk of casual teaching in order to think differently about the solutions to the perceived problem. The authors attempt to decentre traditional notions of professional development that frame the problem of casual teaching as a risk the individual's lack of training places on the organisation, arguing that this simply perpetuates the issue as a problem with a deficit in the individual's expertise and professionalism. This is not to deride the importance of training and certification where it is both necessary and useful, but rather, we attempt to consider how we might shift our focus from the individual's expertise to the field of practice where professional learning and quality enhancement might be more profoundly influenced. Drawing on professional learning literature, the authors encourage a revisioning of the professional relationship with casual teaching staff that recognises the profound potential of professional learning and the quality contribution of casual teachers where they are valued and appropriately integrated at the teaching team level.

The casualisation of teaching as a growing phenomenon

The casualisation of teaching has been a growing phenomenon in the higher education sector since the mid 1990s (Junor, 2004): the gradual increase in casual teaching that characterised the decade between 1980 and 1990 provides a useful contrast to the accelerated expansion of the sector post-1990. To illustrate, at one regional Australian university in 1980, casual teaching staff constituted approximately 10% of all teaching staff (calculated as Full Time Equivalent or FTE). Between 1980 and 1990, a full decade characterised by the expansion, diversification, and rationalisation of higher education still only resulted in a marginal increase to 12.5%. This increase, however, grew exponentially during the 1990s; for example, at this particular University the decade from 1990 to 2001 saw a 44% increase to 18% casual FTE of teaching staff (ARD, 2004), marginally higher than the 15% cited as representative of the sector at that time (DEST, 2000). In less than half a decade later, by 2005 casual teaching staff came to represent 28% FTE of teaching staff: a further increase of 55% in less than half a decade. These figures, or more precisely the patterns of growth, are fairly representative of the casual teaching sector across all Australian universities.

It is widely recognised that the gross casualisation of teaching in higher education has been materially produced as a cost-saving device for fiscally constrained and reform-ridden universities since the 1990s (Brown, Goodman, & Yasukawa, 2006; Junor, 2004). It also represents a type of 'industrial revolution', an historic and cultural shift in employment practices and workplace relations that have become an entrenched part of the current 'flexible' human resources model in the 'corporate' university (Bassett, 1998; DEST, 2000). To illustrate in the Australian higher education sector, the former federal government's *Higher Education Workplace Relations Requirements* (HEWRRs), which were introduced in 2003 to 'encourage a commitment to workplace reform and reflect the government's focus on workplace flexibility, direct relationships with employees and individual relationships' (DEST, 2003, p. 4), symbolically produced the casual teacher as an important device for demonstrating 'workplace flexibility': indeed, one of the key indicators for this was the removal of

'limitations or restrictions on the forms and mix of employment types, for example, limiting casual employment levels' (DEST, 2003, p. 4). Full compliance to this reform has been assured through its direct link to future increases in Government funding (DEST, 2007). In this particular political environment, the casualisation of teaching is not about to dissipate, and as growing attention is paid to this sector in the name of 'quality', there is a need to ask how we understand the problem of casual teaching and what action is both desirable and possible?

Casual teachers as risky subjects

Casual teaching as a concept is neither new nor necessarily negative. Casual teaching work does suit the professional pathways of many individuals, and many faculties rely on industry professionals to ensure the quality of specialised aspects of their programs. The 'problem' of casualisation and what constitutes appropriate action, however, might be understood in terms of competing truths about the location and potential of the 'risk'. An analysis of competing notions of risk is useful in illustrating the 'games of truth' played out in the higher education environment, and helps to unsettle organisational truths that might constrain alternative ways of thinking about the issue. Critical accounts of the discourse of 'risk minimisation' in contemporary organisations highlight its contested meaning and illustrate how it is deployed as a 'powerful organisational logic' that produces rather than merely reflects any given reality (eg. E McWilliam & Jones, 2007). In their work on the sociology of risk, Bessant, Hill & Watts (2003, p.14) argue that it would be naïve to think that risk talk refers to some actuality when 'there are complex social and intellectual processes at work that enable some ideas to fill up the discursive space available'. Within a regulatory environment, the organisational 'truths' of what counts as 'risk' will naturally be derived from those powerful agendas that dominate its immediate policy and legislative concerns.

It is not surprising then, that the risk casualisation poses to the individual worker barely rates a mention in government and university policy and guidelines, as the neo-liberal political rationality on which these (de)regulations are based are designed precisely to transfer risk and cost from the organisation to the individual (Davies, Gottsche, & Bansell, 2006). Ironically, in a kind of double move, the casual teacher is then produced as a 'risk' to the organisation where their performance has been tied in a regulatory way to the ongoing survival of the university, particularly in relation to government funding around quality and performance management.

Flexibility and the individual at risk

As discussed above, the university's compliance with the imperative to cut budgets and remain flexible has produced a growing class of casual teachers. A sociological perspective would highlight the risks posed to the individuals caught in the cycle of casualisation (Brown et al., 2006; Junor, 2004). Along these lines, several studies have highlighted their marginal status (Bassett, 1998), their average to poor working and employment conditions (Watters & Weeks, 1998), the lack of recognition and opportunity (Barrington, 1999; Kimber, 2003) and the challenges they face as marginal employees but significant 'front-end' workers (Barrett, 2004; Blanchard & Smith, 2001; Rice, 2004). The 'industrial' concern about the increase in casual

teaching is that the sector is increasingly characterised by ‘career casuals’; casual academics who continue to work in the system because, in a reciprocal way, the University requires their expertise, and their connection to the University is fundamental to their professional identity and growth, but who may never have the opportunity to experience the privilege of permanent work. Politicised accounts of the growing phenomenon of casualisation highlight the ‘marginalised, exploited and expendable’ nature of the casual workforce (Bassett, 1998), describing them as the ‘tenuous periphery’ maintaining the working conditions of the ‘tenured core’ (Kimber, 2003).

Junor (2004), in her paper, *Casual University Work: choice, risk, inequity and the case for regulation* provides a comprehensive discussion of the ‘industrial revolution’ mentioned above, arguing that ‘University casualisation...[is more] a creature of political regulation than market freedom’ (p. 277). She highlights three discourses that characterise the ‘problem’ of casualisation: flexibility, insecurity and inequity. Despite the dominating discourse of flexibility and individual choice that characterises the push for casualisation, her study indicates that long-term casual employment is indeed a ‘minority choice’ (p. 277). She contrasts this with two inter-related discourses that underpin the arguments for industrial regulation: the first is insecurity, discussed in terms of the absence of protection, the prevalence of social risk, and the experience of exclusion, which leads directly into the discourse of inequity. This latter discourse, the discourse of inequity she argues, has a direct relationship to the ‘polarisation thesis’, that is, the creation of a fragmented and polarised labour market. In the university sector, this thesis might be understood in the following terms: long-term casual employment in the University sector, working across several ‘teaching-only’ positions to maintain an average income, exclusion from the privilege of permanency and the professional growth the entitlements and security of permanency provide (for example, paid time for research and governance), has the potential to disable long-term casual staff and decrease their competitive stance.

Ethics and the professional relationship at risk

In a similar vein, Barrett (2004) draws attention to the ethical integrity of the employer/employee relationship in the current political climate. He argues that there is increasing evidence of a violation of the psychological contract between universities and casual teaching staff as a result of the ‘hard Human Resources Management’ approach being taken up by universities, an approach that we would argue is further encouraged by the HEWRs. This hard HRM approach he refers to ‘violate[s] the psychological contract by emphasising the transactional aspect and downplaying the relational aspect [of the relationship]’ (Barrett, 2004, p. 96). However, it is not just the integrity of the relationship that is at risk. Barrett takes us one step further to consider the nature of the casual contract, stating

Local managers take extraordinary steps to avoid their financial obligations to casual employees... Two common strategies are to require tutors to attend lectures for which they are not paid, or to undertake marking duties that extend beyond the scope of the conditions of the EBA. Hence, these strategies essentially reduce the hourly pay rate for teaching below what many tutors feel reflects their true worth. (Barrett, 2004p. 96).

Here Barret highlights the ‘downward flexibility of pay and conditions’ for the work that is absorbed by casual teaching staff, and although he does not state this directly, we must see that this has clear implications for notions of quality in university teaching and learning. Meetings, attendance at lectures, appropriate time for preparation and consultation and appropriate allocation for marking are all being eliminated from the casual contract. It has been evidenced and is widely understood that casual teachers spend more time on the job than is covered in their pay (Junor, 2004).

Quality and the organisation at risk

A more organisationally intelligible risk has come from the quality agenda, in particular the teaching and learning perspective, where the risk of a lack of training and support for casual teaching staff is considered a risk to the quality of learning and teaching in Universities (Kift, 2003). For example, Barrington (1999, p. 2) states

As a larger number of undergraduate students are being exposed to ever increasing numbers of part-time academics and postgraduate teaching assistants, there is a belated concern about the quality of educational experience that they might be receiving. As a result there has been recognition that these teachers might need to be trained!

And in 2002 the Australian Universities Teaching Committee (AUTC) commissioned a Project on Sessional Teaching Staff (AUTC, 2003) went a long way to reviewing the state of casualisation and making recommendations for improvement. But while we could argue that the impetus to act is driven largely by a concern with the quality of the student learning experience, another interpretation might be that had the Australian Government’s Teaching and Learning Performance Fund and indirectly, the funding associated with student satisfaction, not become key drivers for change, a fundamental neglect of this sector’s professional needs might persist. The DEST (2004) *Learning and Teaching Performance Fund: Issues Paper* states specifically that:

In order to meet the requirements for Stage 1 of the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund it is proposed that institutions be required to submit the following documentation to the Department...

2. Evidence of systematic support for professional development in learning and teaching for sessional and full-time academic staff.

- Documentation on professional development policies and practices for sessional and full-time academic staff; and
- Documentation showing staff development opportunities (eg. on-campus and external programmes, staff placements or exchanges etc.) provided for sessional and full-time academic staff in the preceding year. (p. 46)

While this is of course important, it is also politically expedient to problematise casualisation as a ‘risk’ posed to quality teaching and learning whereby the solution becomes one of improved induction, training and teaching development for the individual. The doubt expressed here is not one that should negate the importance of providing relevant teaching development opportunities for casual teaching staff.

Indeed, such regulatory technologies as this are essential catalysts for Universities to attend to their obligations, but the discourse of ‘quality’ as it relates to casual teaching staff is disingenuous in that it embodies a systemic and political failure to own the tension inherent in workplace reform and the quality agenda.

The tension between workplace reform and the quality agenda

Casualisation as a political and industrial manoeuvre can be understood as a contributing factor in the risk to teaching and learning quality. The risk, however, is not necessarily posed by a lack of expertise and commitment on behalf of the casual teacher, but by the ‘downward flexibility’ as discussed by Barrett in terms of pay allocation for quality outcomes, compounded by the pressure their growing number places on a system that is not geared to support them or their supervisors adequately. Writing from the UK perspective, Knight & Trowler (2000) suggested:

Students may benefit from the commitment of sessional staff, but departments have difficulty integrating them into a seamless web of quality. Permanent staff are left with a disproportionate amount of design, administrative and service work to do (p. 109).

More recently in the Australian context, Keogh and Garrick (2005 cited in Barber, 2006) have confirmed Knight and Trowler’s observations:

Neoliberal workplace reform has resulted in a reduction in the employment of a core of permanent, tenured staff and an increase in the employment of many part-time staff in universities, putting additional pressure on that core of tenured staff, and impoverishing the working conditions of part-time staff. (p. 15).

Brown et al (2006) argue that as a result of the financial crisis in Australian Universities caused by massive Government funding cuts over the past decade, Universities have cut employment costs, increased teaching loads, increased the student-staff ratio and casualised the teaching of its courses. Concurrently, there has also been a move to greater Government regulation of the performative requirements of Universities (Ball, 2003). Universities and their permanent staff are under enormous pressure to meet the performance criteria across all aspects of academic work, and the commentary on the intensification of academic work has been significant (Allport, 2000; Coaldrake & Stedman, 1999; McInnes, 2000).

Knight & Trowler’s ‘seamless web of quality’ is one worth taking up here. Attempting to define ‘quality’ is possibly as difficult and multi-faceted as attempting to define ‘learning’. So what is this seamless web of quality that they are referring to? Harvey and Knight (1996), taking a holistic approach to the quality agenda, argue that ‘quality needs to be understood as a transformative process’ (p. vii), enabling transformative learning for students, staff and the organisation. This, they argue, requires ‘a transparent process that provides a coherent and integrated learning experience based on dialogue between participants and providers’ (p. 40); that includes conversations between students and staff, but also conversations between staff regarding teaching and learning issues that are ‘open and responsive to new ideas and external pressures, not secretive and defensive’ (p. 41).

But with the intensification of the workload of full-time staff and the consequent fragmentation in the learning community between full-time and part-time staff, the 'seamless web of quality' is fractured to the point that 'transformation' reads more as a myth of the quality agenda. As McInnes (2000, p. 143) argues

Changes to the everyday work realities of academics are a challenge to everyone concerned with promoting notions of quality as transformation. Failure to understand the factors influencing the outlooks of academics is likely to lead to a widening gap between the rhetoric and reality of quality in teaching and learning.

In their study of Universities across several countries, Knight and Trowler (2000, p. 110) found evidence that the academic environment was increasingly characterised by an erosion of trust, an intensification of academic work, a decline in collegiality, threats to self-identity and feelings of alienation and stress. This, they argue, is the real threat to quality. An environment that fails to foster a culture of collegiality, trust and the opportunities for diverse interactions also shuts down its capacity to foster the professional learning and the motivation of all staff.

From this perspective, taking action on the issue of casualisation only in terms of the provision of adequate training is politically expedient: it addresses the criteria for teaching and learning funding, but it is unlikely to have a significant impact on 'quality' or the lived experience of all academic staff and students in real terms. It is arguable that universities have an obligation to enable the professional growth of all members participating in its learning communities, and this can only be achieved by interrogating the broader system in which learning and teaching practices occur.

Professional development and the quality agenda

Various universities have published their initiatives in investigating the needs of sessional staff (eg. Abbas & McLean, 2001; Bassett, 1998; Blanchard & Smith, 2001) and addressing their needs (Barrington, 1999; Hall & Parker, 1996; McKenzie, 1996; Watters & Weeks, 1998). There is no one single approach that claims greatest efficacy, but those which show the greatest promise have taken a strategic, institutional approach to the issue and have facilitated discussion among the many stakeholders in order to reach adequate solutions (Hall & Parker, 1996; Herbert, Hannan, & Chalmers, 2002; UNSW, 2004). The most important factor is that whatever design is developed, it should be embedded in Faculty process and instigate a cultural and systemic shift in the way sessional teaching staff are engaged, supported and invited to participate in the workplace.

Despite the rhetoric, however, there continues to be a focus on formal provision of both situated and generic teacher training. We might explain this as the application of an old solution to a new problem. The traditional or received view of professional development which emerged during the 1970s with the professionalisation of teaching in higher education and the privileging of 'formal' over 'non-formal' learning is based on research largely driven by central teaching and learning units (Akerlind, 1999; Boud, 1999; Hager, 2004). Taking some issue with this, Erica McWilliam (2002) argues that the imperative for staff to engage in all forms of 'professional development' is based on the assumption that 'academics are deficient as teachers and that professional development can deal with that deficiency' where 'local academic

enactments of pedagogical work can come to be framed as a form of ignorance, to be overcome with the application of new techniques' (p. 295). Further to this, she recognises the imperative is driven by the Universities' regulated requirement to 'perform quality': it must be demonstrated, so it must be performed in ways that can be measured...evidence of attendance and bureaucratic attentiveness is presumed to be evidence of new learning (p. 296).

Having said this, it is now widely recognised that the traditional notion of professional development as 'teaching development', formal workshops and a focus on the individual academic's teaching expertise have only limited efficacy (Boud, 1999; Knight, 2006; Osborn, 1999; Visovic, 2006), and that broader notions of professional formation are required (Akerlind, 1999). This is not to say that formal certification does not have an important place in the professional pathways of casual teachers, but rather a focus on fostering peer learning opportunities in situated teaching communities (Boud, 1999) is more likely to result in powerful professional learning for the individual and greater quality enhancement for the organisation. It is also far more difficult to establish, maintain and 'measure'.

Research into professional formation, much of which currently draws on social learning, social constructivist and socio-cultural theory to understand professional learning largely as engagement or co-participation in non-formal workplace affordances, has emphasised the situated and social nature of learning as occurring through collegial, collaborative, supportive communities of practice (Boud, 1999; Eib & Miller, 2006; Knight, Tait, & Yorke, 2006; Mittendorff, Geijssels, Hoeve, de Laat, & Nieuwenhuis, 2006; Visovic, 2006). Knight et al (2007) argue for the need to view 'professional formation' as an holistic and 'ecological' process that can and should be supported within the learning communities where casual teaching staff are engaged. As Boud (1999, p. 3) argues, 'it is in these sites [of academic practice] that academic identity is formed and is most powerfully influenced'. This is supported by Visovic (2006) who also argues 'tertiary teachers belong to groupings such as their institution, discipline, department or teaching team that can be seen as communities of practice, and it is in those contexts that their working knowledge and identities as teachers develop' (p. 323).

Taking this view, it is the professional learning of teaching staff that takes place in disciplinary and departmental contexts that should be supported. Such an approach would involve enhancing faculty policy and practice that respects and supports the professionalism of casual teaching staff and engages them in diverse forms of participation that foster meaningful, situated and authentic learning and development. It would appear that rather than taking a 'macro' or centralised approach to training and development – even where that is embedded at the faculty, school or program level - it is arguably more important to focus on the micro-level practices that facilitate diverse opportunities for learning at the Program and teaching team level. Currently, however, marginalisation (Bassett, 1998), isolation (Watters & Weeks, 1998), an increasingly 'transactional' approach to the engagement of sessional teaching staff (Barrett, 2004), leaner budgets, and the intensification of academic work in general, currently work against the diverse forms of interaction that are most likely to foster a sense of belonging and provide the means for learning as a process of 'guided participation' and 'participatory appropriation' (Rogoff, 1995).

The teaching team as a key site for professional learning and quality enhancement

Despite the inhibiting factors mentioned above, we argue that the teaching team is the most logical and powerful site for addressing both the imperative for supporting the professional learning of casual teaching staff and the concern for enhancing quality teaching and learning. For a relatively contingent workforce, and from a situated learning perspective, we would argue the most immediate and significant learning opportunities for casual teaching staff occur through collegial activities within the teaching team. It is at the subject level that the teaching staff and students come together in a highly situated learning experience. And given that the teaching team has also been identified as the site where the scholarship of teaching and learning can prevail (Benjamin, 2000), quality initiatives would do well to build a 'seamless web of quality' right here. Both the professional learning of staff, the quality of student learning and the scholarship of teaching are placed 'at risk' where there is a systemic failure to acknowledge the importance of the learning experience of all inside this micro-community.

At the Open University in the UK, Jo Tait's (2002) study of professional teaching staff working at a distance demonstrated the historically-derived and unwanted fragmentation in the teaching team between the full-time staff who developed the subjects and the part-time staff who delivered them. Her conclusion pointed to the improved use of educational technologies to facilitate learning conversations among the distributed teaching team that connect the permanent and part-time staff and integrate part-timers perspectives into the design of the course. For a highly contingent sector of the workforce, this focus on micro-level strategies at the teaching team level that support sophisticated but non-formal learning among the entire team would be a strategy worth fostering, but it would require a significant influence on institutional practices.

In order to produce this kind of systemic change, Knight, Baume, Tait and Yorke (2007) argue that there are leadership implications for department Heads, educational development and human resource units. A key shift in thinking, we argue, needs to occur around the way the subject coordinator's role is understood and supported as a leadership position as they represent the fulcrum of the student/staff learning community within a subject, and are in a position to, and often find themselves responsible for, leading the more situated professional learning of casual teaching staff. Recognition and better resourcing of their role as a leader of a teaching team is one key to better quality teaching and learning.

The discussion presented in this paper leads us to the three questions that we begin to address below, but would like to leave open for further dialogue: How do we understand the role of the subject coordinator and the casual teacher in delivering the best outcomes for students? How might the casual teacher be integrated and valued as mainstream? And how is the scholarship of teaching made possible with a core staff of casual teachers?

How do we understand the role of the subject coordinator and the casual teacher in delivering the best outcomes for students?

Jo Tait's (2002) research shines a light on the hierarchical nature of the relationship between the subject coordinator and tutor, and the risks posed to all aspects of the quality of teaching and learning by the fragmentation in what must be understood to be a vital learning community for its participants: permanent staff, casual staff and the students. She argues there is a tendency to operate as though teaching and learning are embedded in the design of the curriculum – that it is 'teacher-proof' – which legitimates the downgrading of the tutor's role as 're-mediator': she says 'the course tutor may seem to become a re-mediator—fixing gaps in students' knowledge, skill and understanding' (p. 156). It is this perception that also justifies the downward flexibility in pay allocation mentioned earlier by Barrett (2004). Operating according to this perception is a key to the fragmentation of the teaching team and requires a shift in thinking about the 'authority' of members of the learning community, including the students.

Countering the common understanding of Lave and Wenger's (1991) 'legitimate peripheral participation', and the notion that novices come to be assimilated through the process, Fuller et al (2005) emphasise the significant contribution that can be made by experienced newcomers. We have a particular affinity with this argument, as many reflective and transformative professional moments have arisen from the curiosity and insights of newcomers who have forced us to articulate our understandings as well as see them through different lenses. The importance of all members of the learning community, be that of newcomers or veterans, have an important role to play in individual and cultural transformation; we all have a key part to play in the learning process. In her study, Tait (2002) identified the marginality that both casually employed newcomers and veterans represent - lamenting that:

As long as tutors are undervalued...it will be difficult to develop effective channels of communication between their experiences of teaching and the design of courses (p. 156).

Again, this is key quality issue – where the insights of those engaging with students in the most meaningful interactions for learning fail to contribute to their colleagues learning and be integrated into future design and delivery of our courses, how can we talk about quality enhancement of teaching and learning seriously? Expediently, we count the students' feedback as an important indicator of quality and continue to neglect that of the tutor. These ideas have clear implications for the way subject coordinators are supported in their role as leaders of teaching teams.

How might the casual teacher be integrated and valued as mainstream?

Knight et al (2007) assist in this by offering as a starting point for analysis four 'trajectories' or ways of understanding how casual teaching staff are integrated into a workgroup: 'slotting in' where the casual teacher is filling a teaching slot and tends to be isolated from colleagues; 'assimilation' where the casual teacher is welcome to participate but is required to adopt team practices; 'accommodation' where the team incorporates the casual teacher's expertise; and 'reciprocity' where there is the contribution and support available for the casual teacher is negotiated. They argue that 'those wishing to influence professional formation and secure greatest benefit for the

university have an interest in considering how environments can favour the third and fourth trajectories' (p. 432). The work that needs to be done is on environments, systems and culture, perhaps more than individuals. A further complicating factor is the continued devaluing of teaching and learning in higher education despite university rhetoric and government regulation: this compelling truth is revealed by the commonly heard phrases 'buying in' casual teaching staff for 'teaching relief' or 'marking relief'. The challenge will always be successful subversion of the notion of casual teaching as 'low cost - high relief' functions in low status work, and this is a far broader systemic issue.

How is the scholarship of teaching made possible with a core staff of casual teachers?

Benjamin's (2000) study of scholarship within teaching teams, one can only assume, involves the collaboration between permanent members of staff: her work does not address in the slightest the complexities of the dominant model of the casualised teaching team. However, in reading Benjamin's study, we feel the need to pull gently on her work and wisdom and contextualise them in the context of which we speak. Benjamin begins by telling us that 'Teachers are increasingly required to have a knowledge of teaching and learning in the discipline and be student focused. They are also required to work effectively and collaboratively with their colleagues' (p. 191). Benjamin then goes on to say

In theory, the teaching team provides an opportunity for teachers to experience the advantages of teamwork and to use the opportunity to work collaboratively to improve student learning and to develop a scholarly discourse on teaching and student learning.

She continues,

Collaborative efforts by members of organisations are essential to solve the complexities of a constantly changing environment. .. qualitative improvements in outcomes result when practitioners are able to focus, reflect and evaluate their practice jointly. (p. 192)

So how do we promote and support our casualised teams as a 'community of scholars' engaged in scholarly and reflective practice? Leaving the burden of this to the permanent staff is not simply short-sighted and leaving the responsibility to a team of one, in most cases: it fails to engage the vital contributions of those professionals we engage to work in the most important sites of learning - for the organisation and the individual. In a quality sense – it makes non-sense.

One final note

In the writing of this article, a paper appeared in the University of Sydney's scholarship of teaching and learning publication rather aptly entitled *Synergy*. The article was written by a teaching team in Geopolitics at the University. Their article resonates with our argument here as they point out that while much attention has been paid to the issue of casualisation in terms of professional development, they argue that 'there is a gap when it comes to examining the relationship between the lecturer and casual tutors and much less material which positions tutors as an important variable within the teaching process' (Chan et al., 2007, p. 19). Their work goes some way

towards addressing the nature of this gap. Their initiative brought the teaching team together to engage in a scholarly collaboration in the design and delivery of a subject against the odds - the tutors were eventually paid for this quality enhancement initiative out of the subject coordinator's research budget. Their experience and their paper highlight the fact that quality enhancement initiatives such as this are largely the product of extraordinary individuals in fairly ordinary circumstances. Universities need to begin asking how they might move quality enhancement initiatives out of the domain of the extraordinary and into mainstream academic practice.

Conclusion

The authors take the view that transformative professional learning and quality enhancement are the product of open collaborative and collegial social practice, and therefore, promoting the quality of teaching and learning is not simply a matter of skills or individual expertise, but a systemic issue that needs to be addressed at all levels of the University. In relation to casual teaching staff then, Universities might (re)vision the professional relationship in a way that recognises the potential quality contribution of casual teachers and engages them in meaningful opportunities for professional learning and enhancement. It also requires a public dialogue about the industrial issues that surround the complications of ensuring a quality experience for all members of the teaching and learning community in an era of leaner budgets, intensified academic work for supervisors and workplace reform that creates multiple tensions in the drive for quality outcomes.

Reference List

- Abbas, A., & McLean, M. (2001). Becoming sociologists: professional identity for part-time teachers of university sociology. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 22(3), 339-352.
- Akerlind, G. (1999). *Growing and developing as an academic: what does it mean?* : Proceedings of the 1999 HERDSA Conference, Melbourne.
- Allport, C. (2000). Thinking globally, acting locally: lifelong learning and the implications for university staff. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 22(1), 37 - 46.
- ARD. (2004). Casual Teaching Staff 2001 - 2005: University of Wollongong: (Academic Registrars Division: University of Wollongong).
- AUTC. (2003). *Guidelines for managing, supporting and training sessional teaching staff at university*. Retrieved September, 2006, from <http://www.tedi.uq.edu.au/sessionalteaching/>
- Ball, S. J. (2003). The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity. *Journal of Education Policy*, 18(2), 215-228.
- Barber, T. (2006). UNSW Compendium of Good Practice in Learning and Teaching. 4, 5-25.
- Barrett, S. (2004). Emotional Labour and the Permanent Casual Lecturer: Ideas for a Research Project. *International Education Journal: Educational Research Conference* 4(4), 92-101.

- Barrington, E. (1999). *Catching academic staff at the start: professional development for university tutors*: Proceedings of the 1999 HERDSA Conference, Melbourne.
- Bassett, P. (1998). *Sessional academics: A marginalised workforce*: Proceedings of the 1998 HERDSA Conference, Auckland.
- Benjamin, J. (2000). The Scholarship of Teaching in Teams: what does it look like in practice? *Higher Education Research and Development*, 19(2), 191-204.
- Bessant, J., Hill, R., & Watts, R. (2003). *Discovering Risk: Social research and policy making* (Vol. 18). New York: Peter Lang.
- Blanchard, T., & Smith, K. (2001). *Challenges and rewards of being a sessional tutor in a university setting*. Paper presented at the Expanding Horizons in Teaching and Learning. Proceedings of the 10th Annual Teaching Learning Forum, Perth.
- Boud, B. (1999). Situating academic development in professional work: using peer learning. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 4(1), 3-10.
- Brown, T., Goodman, J., & Yasukawa, K. (2006). *'Getting the best of you for nothing': casual voices in the Australian academy* Sydney: National Tertiary Education Union.
- Chan, S., Crossley, P., Deer, L., Maguire, D., Samson, A., & Anaid, A. (2007). The role for the casual tutor in design and delivery of courses: Experiences from teaching Geopolitics in 2006. *Synergy*, 25(June), 19 - 22.
- Coaldrake, P., & Stedman, L. (1999). *Academic Work in the Twenty-first Century: changing roles and policies*: Higher Education Division, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra.
- Davies, B., Gottsche, M., & Bansell, P. (2006). The rise and fall of the neo-liberal university. *European Journal of Education*, 41(2), 305-319.
- DEST. (2000). *Staff 2000 selected higher education statistics, 2006*
- DEST. (2003). *Newsletter No.3*, 1/6/07, from <http://www.backingaustraliasfuture.gov.au/implementation/pdf/news3.pdf>
- DEST. (2004). *Learning and Teaching Performance Fund: Issues Paper*, from http://www.dest.gov.au/highered/learning_teaching/documents/ltp_issues_paper.pdf
- Commonwealth Grant Scheme Guidelines - Extract from Chapter 7, Increases in Assistance for Higher Education Providers Meeting Certain Requirements (Section 33-15) Federal Register of Legislative Instruments (FRLI) - 21 July 2006 Cong. Rec.(2007).
- Eib, B. J., & Miller, P. (2006). Faculty Development as Community Building. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 7(2), 1-15.
- Fuller, A., Hodkinson, H., Hodkinson, P., & Unwin, L. (2005). Learning as peripheral participation in communities of practice: a reassessment of key concepts in workplace learning. *British Educational Research Journal*, 31(1), 49-68.
- Hager, P. (2004). Conceptions of learning and understanding learning at work. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 26(1), 3-17.
- Hall, S., & Parker, L. (1996). A strategic approach to providing support for sessional academic staff. In *Different approaches: Theory and practice in higher education: Proceedings HERDSA Conference*. Perth, Western Australia, 8-12 July.
- Harvey, L., & Knight, P. (1996). *Transforming Higher Education*. Buckingham: SRHE & Open University Press.

- Herbert, D., Hannan, R., & Chalmers, D. (2002). *Enhancing the training, support and management of sessional teaching staff*. Paper presented at the AARE Conference, Brisbane.
- Junor, A. (2004). Casual university work: choice, risk, inequity and the case for regulation. *Economic and Labour Relations Review* 14(2), 276-304.
- Kift, S. (2003). *Assuring Quality in the Casualisation of Teaching, Learning and Assessment: Towards Best Practice for the First Year Experience*. Paper presented at the 6th Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference 2002: Changing Agendas - Te Ao Hurihuri, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand, 8-10 July, 2002.
- Kimber, M. (2003). The tenured 'core' and the tenuous 'periphery': the casualisation of academic work in Australian universities. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 25(1), 41-50.
- Knight, P. (2006). Quality enhancement and educational professional development. *Quality in Higher Education*, 12(1), 21-40.
- Knight, P., Baume, D., Tait, J., & Yorke, M. (2007). Enhancing part-time teaching in higher education: a challenge for institutional policy and practice. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 61(4), 420-438.
- Knight, P., Tait, J., & Yorke, M. (2006). The professional learning of teachers in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 31(3), 319-339.
- Knight, P., & Trowler, P. (2000). Editorial. *Quality in Higher Education*, 6(2), 109 - 114.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McInnes, C. (2000). Changing academic work roles: the everyday realities challenging quality in teaching. *Quality in Higher Education*, 6(2), 143 - 152.
- McKenzie, J. (1996). Developing part-time teachers' teaching. In *Different approaches: Theory and practice in higher education: Proceedings HERDSA Conference*. Perth, Western Australia, 8-12 July
- McWilliam, E. (2002). Against professional development. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 34(3), 289-299.
- McWilliam, E., & Jones, A. (2007). An unprotected species? On teachers as risky subjects. *British Educational Research Journal*, 31(1), 109-120.
- Mittendorff, K., Geijsel, F., Hoeve, A., de Laat, M., & Nieuwenhuis, L. (2006). Communities of practice as stimulating forces for collective learning. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 18(5), 298-312.
- Osborn, M. (1999). *Helping academics to help themselves: a work embedded approach to professional development*: Proceedings of the 1999 HERDSA Conference, Melbourne.
- Rice, M. (2004). *Discomfort at the coalface: Issues for sessional tutors teaching in online enhanced learning environments*: Beyond the comfort zone: Proceedings of the 21st ASCILITE Conference, Perth.
- Rogoff, B. (1995). Observing sociocultural activity on three planes: participatory appropriation, guided participation and apprenticeship. In J. V. Wertsch, P. Del Rio & A. Alvarez (Eds.), *Sociocultural Studies of Mind* (pp. 139-164). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tait, J. (2002). From Competence to Excellence: a systems view of staff development for part-time tutors at-a-distance. *Open Learning*, 17(2), 153-166.
- UNSW. (2004). *Sessional Teaching Staff Strategic Action Plan: Incorporating policy and checklists to promote the inclusion of sessional teachers into UNSW's*

communities of practice: Learning and Teaching Unit, University of New South Wales.

Visovic, A. (2006). Becoming a tertiary teacher: learning in communities of practice. *HERD*, 25(4), 323-339.

Watters, J., & Weeks, P. (1998). *Part-time academic staff: Creating a voice*. Paper presented at the HERDSA Conference, Auckland, New Zealand.

Whelan, K., Smeal, G., & Greal, J. (2002). Teaching and Learning Development of Casual Academic Staff: an Institutional Approach, *Paper presented at the AARE Annual International Conference*. The University of Queensland, December 2-5, 2002.