

Auditorium
2.40-3.25pm

Theory for the reflective educational practitioner

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The popular notion of 'critical reflection' or 'self-reflection' depicts learning as emerging from experience (Dewey, 1933) and is based on the premise that reflection leads to an improvement in and transformation of professional practice and the practitioner (Fook et al., 2016). However, we wonder whether reflective practitioners, pressed to turn a reflective gaze on their practice, are in fact able to reach improvement and transformation if they do not engage with theory rather than intuition. Our concern is with pedagogy, an area, particularly in higher education, where the practitioner is not always equipped with expertise. So, the questions arise: What theoretical frameworks and pedagogical research may inform our practice? How do we go about understanding what is 'good' or even 'good enough' pedagogical practice and research in the classroom? How do we ground our own reflection in theory?

In this panel discussion, we would like to share how we have investigated our own praxis (understood here as 'embedding theory *within* practice' (Maton et al., 2016, p.72, original italics), with the sociological toolkit of Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) (Maton, 2014), in particular the dimensions of *Specialization* and *Semantics*. We would then like to discuss with the audience the ways these tools may be useful to them in their specific contexts.

LCT is a social realist approach which aims to provide tools for researching and changing educational practices by investigating the underlying codes, what is considered 'legitimate' in knowledge practices across institutions and disciplines (Maton, 2014). *Specialization* refers to LCT's conceptualisation of the nature and the structure of knowledge practice (Maton, 2014), and reveals 'what' or 'who' is viewed as 'legitimate' and which is prioritized in various knowledge practices. Depending on the discipline we teach and our own dispositions, we may orientate our practices towards knowledge (this is often the case in the Sciences, where facts and core concepts are accepted as the prioritized legitimate knowledge), or towards the knower (often seen in the Humanities and in Social Sciences where debated perspectives on concepts are prioritized as legitimate knowledge) or both. Some disciplines, such as Design, exhibit a wide range of specialization codes, where some practitioners are more knowledge oriented (Engineering design); more knower oriented (fashion); or oriented to both knowledge expertise and the knower's natural or cultivated dispositions (Architecture) (Dong et al., 2014). These orientations are the reflection of deeply held beliefs about our disciplines and they transpire in the way we share knowledge and evaluate learning. By turning this theoretical lens onto our pedagogical practices, we make these orientations visible - a concrete basis for reflection and transformation.

Semantics, on the other hand, is applied to analyse the context-dependency of a knowledge practice (semantic gravity) and its complexity and technicality (semantic density). Knowledge that is tied to a context (and cannot be applied to another) is said to exhibit stronger semantic gravity (SG↓) and knowledge that is decontextualized, more abstract and generalizable to other contexts is said to show weaker semantic gravity (SG↑). Weaker semantic gravity includes dense knowledge, which is concerned with terms that encapsulate a great amount of disciplinary knowledge, while stronger gravity shows less technicality. These tools are useful to analyse teaching units.

The *Specialization* and *Semantics* dimensions are tools to explore our pedagogical practice at the curriculum and the teaching unit level and may reveal engrained characteristics in our practices that constitute hurdles for students' engagement and success. This session will enable us to discuss concerns related to the ways we investigate our pedagogical practices and to explore the ways LCT, as a theoretical tool, may enable us to improve them.

Keywords

Reflective practice, praxis, Legitimation Code Theory, Specialization, Semantics

References

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