

Post-Graduate Research Association Conference 2017

Crossing Boundaries: Beyond and Across Academia

Canterbury Christ Church University, Kent, UK - 25.05.2017



Crossing Epistemic Boundaries

The Professional Learning of Academics in Higher Education

Wayne Barry

ABOUT ME

- Learning Technologist
- EdD Candidate
- Tutor – PGCAP / MSc by Research
- Educational Developer
- Blogger

PROJECT CONTEXT



Academics working in UK Higher Education are:

- facing an **existential crisis** of authority, legitimacy, identity and purpose (Behari-Leak, 2017);
- navigating a **world of uncertainty and complexity** (Barnett, 2000) in post 'Brexit' Britain;
- working in Universities driven by **New Public Management (NPM) policies and practices** (Boyask *et al.*, 2004), e.g. corporate efficiency, entrepreneurialism, customer-focused (Hussey & Smith, 2010);
- being measured against **new accountability, auditing and performativity regimes** (Mäkitalo, 2012) that fetishizes data (Anderson, 2017), e.g. Key Performance Indicators (KPI), Research Excellence Framework (REF), and Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).

So...

- 1) What are the conditions (e.g. academic role) that enable or encumber professional learning of academics in higher education?
- 2) To what extent does an academic give precedence to one form of professional knowledge (e.g. subject discipline) over another (e.g. institutional policy)?

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Those relevant individual or collaborative opportunities, encounters or experiences that promote enhanced skills, knowledge, capabilities and practices that are situated within an HE academic's own career development and may also meet present and future organisational objectives.

FORMAL

- Conferences
- Courses (e.g. PGCAP)
- Reading
- Workshops

INFORMAL

- Blogging
- Committees
- Listening to Radio
- Peer Discussions

SOCIOMATERIALITY

Humans are constituted through relations of materiality - bodies, clothes, food, devices, tools, which, in turn, are produced through human practices. The distinction of humans and artifacts, on this view, is analytical only; these entities relationally entail or enact each other in practice. As Law puts it (2004:42; emphasis in original):

"This is a thoroughgoing *relational materiality*. Materials - and so realities - are treated as relational products. They do not exist in and of themselves".

Orlikowski, 2007:1438

SOCIOMATERIAL PERSPECTIVES

Actor-Network Theory (ANT)
(e.g. Latour, 2005; Law, 2008)

...a disparate family of material-semiotic tools, sensibilities and methods of analysis that treat everything in the social and natural worlds as a continuously generated effect of the webs of relations within which they are located. It assumes that nothing has reality or form outside the enactment of those relations. Its studies explore and characterise the webs and the practices that carry them. Like other material-semiotic approaches, the actor-network approach thus describes the enactment of materially and discursively heterogeneous relations that produce and reshuffle all kinds of actors including objects, subjects, human beings, machines, animals, 'nature', ideas, organisations, inequalities, scale and sizes, and geographical arrangements.

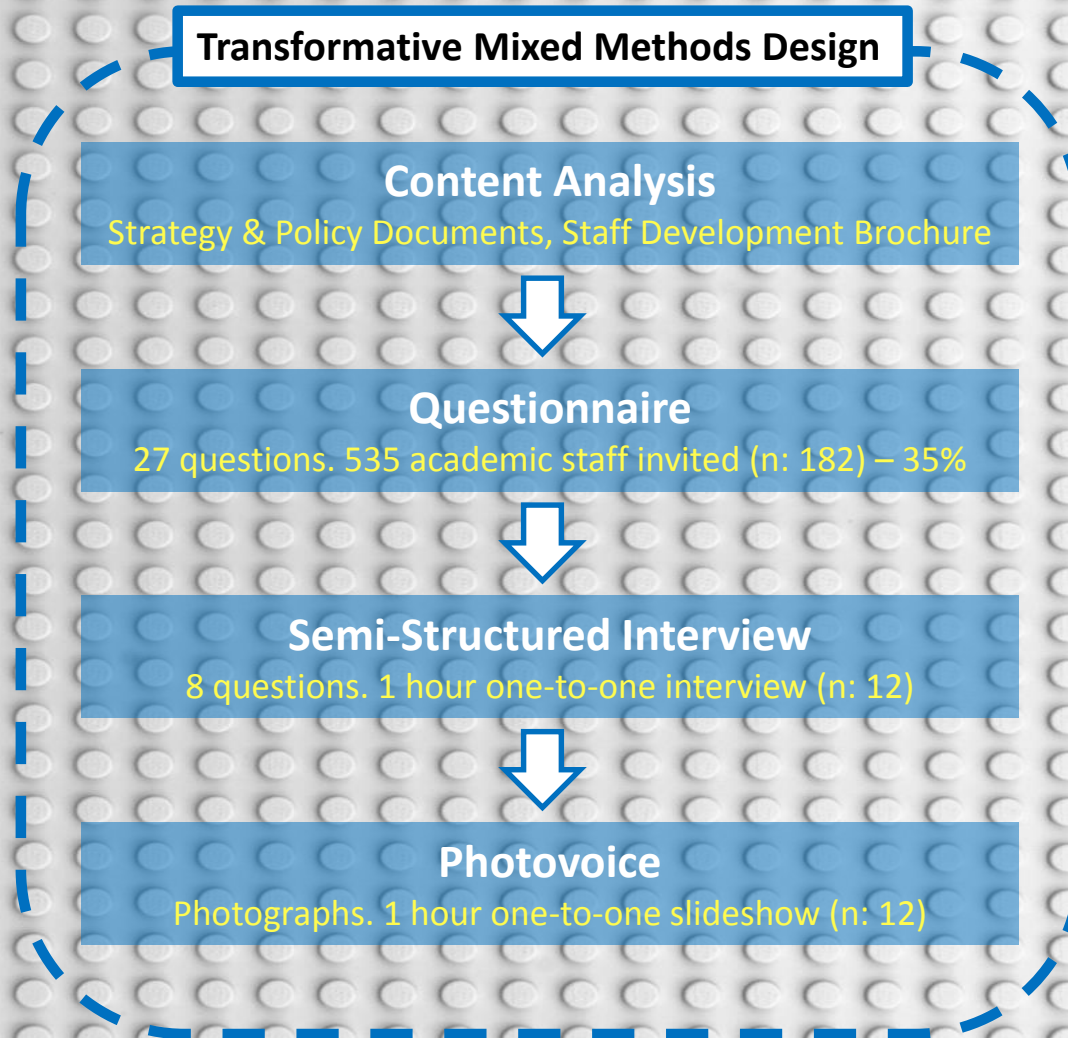
Law, 2008:141

Non-Representational Theory (NRT)
(e.g. Lorimer, 2005; Thrift, 2008)

...focus falls on how life takes shape and gains expression in shared experiences, everyday routines, fleeting encounters, embodied movements, precognitive triggers, practical skills, affective intensities, enduring urges, unexceptional interactions and sensuous dispositions...which escape from the established academic habit of striving to uncover meanings and values that apparently await our discovery, interpretation, judgment and ultimate representation.

Lorimer, 2005:84

METHODS & METHODOLOGY



PARTICIPANT PROFILE

47

respondents

Module Leader

Permanent Contract

Main University Campuses

1-20 years experience in HE

12

participants



KEY FINDINGS



Institutional Noise

Disruptions and interruptions caused by technology (e.g. email), people (e.g. colleagues) and processes (e.g. meetings).

Surrogate Workspaces

Fixed spaces used for academic work and professional learning that places academics 'out of sight'.

Transient Workspaces

Fluid spaces used for academic work and professional learning that places academics 'out of sight', e.g. car.

Human-Automobile

Provides an invaluable spatial and temporal window of opportunity for professional learning.

Knowledgeable Others

Subject knowledge reigns supreme over other forms of knowledge (e.g. employability)

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS



Learning-Working

Professional learning and academic work are intimately entwined (*cf* Malcolm & Zukas, 2014).

Space Invasion

HEIs encouraging the development of shared office space. An 'incubator for ideas'.

Sanctuary

Importance of a space that enables creative & critical thought, production & professional learning.

Time War

Professional learning seen as a 'luxury' as externally imposed and controlled timetables set time available (see Ylijoki & Mäntylä, 2003)

Facile Knowledge

The role of the 'knowledgeable other' enables academics to absorb certain knowledges (e.g. sustainability). Knowledge may be superficial.

THANKS FOR LISTENING!



————— QUESTIONS? —————

CORE REFERENCES (1/2)

Anderson, G. (2017) 'Participatory Action Research (PAR) as Democratic Disruption: New Public Management and Educational Research in Schools and Universities', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 30(5), pp. 432-499. DOI: 10.1080/09518398.2017.1303211.

Barnett, R. (2000) *Realizing the University in an Age of Supercomplexity*. Buckingham, England: Open University Press.

Behari-Leak, K. (2017) 'New Academics, New Higher Education Contexts: A critical perspective on professional development', *Teaching in Higher Education*, pp. 1-16. DOI: 10.1080/13562517.2016.1273215.

Boyask, D., Boyask, R. & Wilkinson, T. (2004). 'Pathways to "Involved Professionalism": Making Processes of Professional Acculturation Intentional and Transparent', *Medical Education Online*, 9(13). Available at: <http://med-ed-online.net/index.php/meo/article/view/4367>.

Evetts, J. (2009) 'New Professionalism and New Public Management: Changes, Continuities and Consequences', *Comparative Sociology*, 8, pp. 247-266. DOI: 10.1163/156913309X421655.

Fenwick, T., Edwards, R. & Sawchuk, P. (2011) *Emerging Approaches to Educational Research: Tracing the Sociomaterial*. Oxford, England: Routledge.

Hussey, T. & Smith, P. (2010) *The Trouble with Higher Education: A Critical Examination of our Universities*. Oxford, England: Routledge.

CORE REFERENCES (2/2)

Latour, B. (2005) *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Law, J. (2008) 'Actor-Network Theory and Material Semiotics', in Turner, B.S. (Ed.) *The New Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*. 3rd Edition. Oxford, England: Blackwell, pp. 141–158.

Lorimer, H. (2005) 'Cultural Geography: The Busyness of being 'more-than-representational'', *Progress in Human Geography*, 29(1), pp. 83-94. DOI: 10.1191/0309132505ph531pr.

Mäkitalo, A. (2012) 'Professional Learning and the Materiality of Social Practice', *Journal of Education and Work*, 25(1), pp. 59-78. DOI: 10.1080/13639080.2012.644905.

Malcolm, J. & Zukas, M. (2014) *Discipline and Workplace Learning in Practice: An Exploratory Study of Academic Work*. London, England: Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE). Available at: http://www.srhe.ac.uk/downloads/Malcolm_Zukas_Report.pdf.

Orlikowski, W.J. (2007) 'Sociomaterial Practices: Exploring Technology at Work', *Organization Studies*, 28(9), pp. 1435-1448. DOI: 10.1177/0170840607081138.

Thrift, N. (2008) *Non-Representational Theory: Space | Politics | Affect*. Oxford, England: Routledge.

Ylijoki, O-H. & Mäntylä, H. (2003) 'Conflicting Time Perspectives in Academic Work', *Time & Society*, 12(1), pp. 55-78. DOI: 10.1177/0961463X03012001364.



SOME CREDITS

Special thanks go to the twelve participants who warmly invited me into their learning worlds.

All photos are licensed under Creative Commons Zero (CC0).
(sourced via [Unsplash](#), [Pixabay](#) & [Pexels](#))