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Christian Beighton

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Convergent correlationism: analyzing teacher educators' reflection on professional practice

Christian Beighton

Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Education , Canterbury Christ Church University, Kent, UK

ABSTRACT

This paper uses an original analysis of epistemological presuppositions to develop conclusions about reflective practice in a higher education context. Drawing on interview data and philosopher Quentin Meillassoux's recent work on philosophical presuppositions, I discuss convergence in teachers' 'correlationist' presuppositions about the nature of knowledge and practice. These epistemological presuppositions, which converge around a subjectivist worldview, underpin reflections about pedagogy and can hinder understanding of the limitations and affordances of reflection itself. This analysis leads to three conclusions: first, forms of reflection on practice which seem diverse may converge on essentially similar reflective presuppositions; second, apparent incompatibility between individual examples of reflection about pedagogies can hinder practice where teachers and students fail to perceive this underlying similarity; and third, a scale of comparison (Meillassoux's spectrum) can enhance inclusiveness by identifying where correlationism limits or even forecloses teachers' reflection-on-action.

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Introduction

Reflective practice has long been popular in teacher education, which seeks to 'inculcate reflection as a valuable practice that teachers should maintain in their future work' (Hunter, 2021, p. 11). Often drawing on the work of Schön (1983); Brookfield (1995); Moon (1999) and many others, it is seen both as a methodical way of challenging assumptions about practice and of deliberately disrupting preconceived beliefs in order to enact change in teacher education.

It is therefore in the long-term interests of the profession that we understand how individuals and academic communities engage with these practices. However, if reflection is to provide 'a pathway for new and deeper learning' (Brandenburg, 2021, p. 16) reflective practice must be able to critique its own preconceived ideas and assumptions about reflection as a metapraxis (see also Farrell, 2020; Farrell & Kennedy, 2019; Hall, 2020; Williams, 2020).

This is easier said than done, however. For Isomöttönen (2021), educators often fear theory and consequently tend to adopt relativistic epistemological positions. If we are to go beyond such 'common-sense notions' about what epistemology is, our thinking about thinking may require 'considerable expansion' (Wareham, 2019, p. 56).

CONTACT Christian Beighton  Christian.beighton@canterbury.ac.uk  Canterbury Christ Church University, North Holmes Rd, Canterbury, Kent, CT11QU, UK

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This paper therefore reflects critically on epistemological beliefs in teachers' reflections on practice. To assess the role of such an expansion in the continuous development of effective practice, while avoiding unwarranted generalizations, I focus specifically on teacher educators in UK higher education (UKHE). With falling student satisfaction data in a context of 'academic capitalism' (Rhoades, 2020; see also BIS, 2016; NAO (National Auditing Office), 2017; OfS (Office for Students), 2018), the potential value of reflection-inspired development is clear for understanding teacher educators' views on the nature of knowledge and their professional practices.

To do this, I turn to what Quentin Meillassoux (2009) calls 'correlationism' and an analysis of data from interviews of teachers (N = 21) of academic literacy. Discussed in greater detail below, correlationism is a specific type of epistemological presupposition which reflects problematic assumptions about how we gain knowledge about the world. It helps explain how reflection can be linked to pedagogical choices which in turn prove to be limited by particular, and often shared, epistemological presuppositions.

Meillassoux's epistemological arguments help put flesh on the way we think about theory, practice and especially reflection about them. They also identify tacit convergence in ways of reflecting on practice and knowledge in a HE teacher education context. Specifically, I show how particular epistemological presuppositions, expressed in teachers' views about academic literacy, risk foreclosing practical attempts to meet the goals of inclusion and diversity. By identifying an important feature of thinking about epistemology and practice, I show how an apparent divergence in epistemological thinking masks a deeper convergence in similar, if not identical, views about knowledge and knowledge-seeking practices.

Doing so targets constructivist beliefs about knowledge and suggests that educators consider the impact of such convergence. Different examples of reflection do not indicate a distinct set of diverse perspectives on knowledge, but rather a clustering of essentially similar views. Following Meillassoux, this clustering indicates a typology of shared epistemological presuppositions on a spectrum with two helpful attributes. First, it highlights approaches to reflection and practice which struggle to meet the needs of diversity and inclusion within teacher education environments. Specifically, it asks whether correlationist moves such as the personalization of epistemology in reflective practice (e.g. Horgan & Gardiner-Hyland, 2019) and their implications really inform pedagogy faced with the facticity of (this) diversity. Second, beyond such criticisms, it highlights more expansive alternatives for practices outlined below.

To situate these claims, I first link discourses of pedagogical excellence HE to questions of diversity. I then discuss Meillassoux's treatment of correlationism, before discussing the methods used to collect this study's empirical data. My analysis of these reflections leads to practical conclusions about (and for) reflective practice.

Background

When the UK vowed to 'reshape the higher education landscape' with a greater emphasis on students' needs and quality of provision (BIS, 2015, p. 7 see also QAA (Quality Assurance Agency for Great Britain), 2015), it named 'teaching excellence', 'Social Mobility' and 'Student Choice' as drivers. An 'Office for Students' and a 'Teaching Excellence Framework' (TEF) were created as 'the lens through which any other reform to quality processes would be viewed' (BIS, 2016, p. 4).

The success of this approach is moot. According to the high-profile National Student Survey (NSS), which measures this quality against student satisfaction data, consistently high levels of student satisfaction of 83–84% have been noted in recent years (National Student Survey (NSS), 2020; National Student Survey (NSS), 2020). However, the National Auditing Office identified a downward trend in 2017, with only 32% of students happy with the value provided in 2017, down from 50% in 2012 (NAO (National Auditing Office), 2017). The value of the NSS data has also been questioned as key institutions have refused to participate: prestigious UK universities have either returned low satisfaction levels or, like Manchester, Bristol and Oxford, boycotted the surveys in protest. At Cambridge, this meant NSS completions fell from 68% in 2016 to just 17.3% in 2018 and continued for the third year in a row (CUSU (Cambridge University Students Union), 2019).

Mixed satisfaction data must be understood alongside growing diversity in the UK Higher education sector. International student numbers rose by 11% or 58,450 in 2018 and over 485,000 international students currently study in the UK (UCAS, 2018; HESA, 2020; see also UKCISA, 2021). While accruing financial and cultural benefits, chasing students and academic credibility through questionable marketing techniques, surveillance and data-farming have all been criticized (see, for instance, Jessop, 2018; Zuboff, 2019; Author 2020a). According to CUSU (Cambridge University Students Union) (2021), these approaches merely serve to fuel internecine competition, turn students into passive consumers, and prioritize marketing and superficial changes in order to increase satisfaction rates without tackling structural issues. From this perspective, genuinely critical reflection on practice is therefore an ethical and practical necessity.

Method

Reflective practice as a key developmental skill and a means of establishing, maintaining and changing educational practices. Reflection on such practice is, by definition, framed by one's epistemological presuppositions: reflection can only occur within the limits of what we consider knowledge to be and how we believe it to be acquired. Such limits are themselves subject to change by acts of reflection, and to better understand this kind of thinking and its presuppositions, HE teacher educators (N = 21) were interviewed. Drawn from a single institution (a feature discussed below), this cohort reflected the heterogeneity of HE teacher education, where many are simultaneously (doctoral) students and teacher educators while undertaking other, varied, teaching roles. Their backgrounds reflected the diverse socio-economic and ethnic composition of this field.

Taking place over several months: volunteers were asked to discuss academic literacy, a central aspect of HE pedagogy. Semi-structured interviews were used, and interviewees were asked to reflect on why academic writing is important, what barriers exist to successful development, and what pedagogies work. This simple format was used because the practice of reflection was itself very familiar to the participants as a developmental tool: more complex data collection approaches might even present a barrier to evoking practices that the participants were so used to discussing as part of their professional training. Indeed, the well-documented imitations of interviewing as a data collection technique (i.e. as subjectivist, unreliable, ungeneralizable etc.) could be turned to double advantage: on one hand, the approach was an extension of existing teacher education practices and therefore likely to be valued by the participants as

a useful developmental exercise. On the other hand, the approach encouraged precisely the sort of epistemological reflection that was under analysis, enhancing its methodological coherence.

The recordings were transcribed, supplemented by notes made during the interviews, and finally analyzed, focusing on the epistemological ideas discernible in these accounts.

Participants and selection

Just three accounts were chosen for analysis, partly because analysis required a close reading of transcript data and thus dictated a relatively small cohort. Three specific participants were chosen from the whole cohort because their accounts presented particularly cogent accounts. An in-depth qualitative approach would be therefore possible, allowing an appraisal of both overt and tacit reflections. Choosing three of the most experienced teacher educators, located in just one institution, does not claim to represent the whole cohort or the HE sector as a whole. Rather, and more productively, it provides evidence of a range of views in context while also testing the value of a specific reflective tool (Meillassoux's spectrum).

Analytical framework: correlationist epistemology

If teachers are to 'reflect on their philosophy' (Farrell, 2020, p. 284), they should do so in an insightful and methodological way. The strand of philosophy referred to is epistemology, which enquires into the nature of knowledge and how it is acquired. An under-researched way of framing this field's complex debates can be found in the term 'correlationism', associated with French philosopher Quentin Meillassoux (1967-). His work (Meillassoux, 2009, 2014) is linked to a group of contemporary thinkers often labelled 'speculative materialists'. While in profound disagreement on key ideas, they share a desire to challenge relativist thinking and notably the dependence of perception on subjectivity. Writers such as Brassier (2007a, 2007b) and Harman (2011a, 2013) all challenge this legacy of Kantian philosophy and its reification of human experience.

Their position critiques constructivism and a subjectivist trend in much recent thinking (c.f. Isomöttönen, 2021; Meyer, 2009; Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). Linked to ideas often attributed to so-called post-modern thinkers and which continue to circulate, this Kantian legacy states that things are only thinkable insofar as they can be thought *by and for us*. We are thus effectively isolated from the world, which is merely a *correlate* of our own pre-existing conditions: the *correlationist* may accept the existence of a mind-independent world in theory, but in practice reverts to the idealism of assuming that all knowledge is a correlate of their own perception, which is reified as a consequence.

This represents an overt challenge to educators who, for instance, see subjectivity, agency and reflexivity as essential to 'a consistent and coherent sense of self' (Trautwein, 2018, p. 996). For Meillassoux, however, such commonplaces reduce the factual existence of things to an immaterial correlate of the subjective mind:

If it is consistent, correlationism will have to deny that the referents of these statements [about 'ancestral' events which occurred prior to the existence of consciousness] really existed as described prior to any human or living species.

(Meillassoux, 2014, p. 15)

Correlationism, then, asserts that although we may *in principle* be able to think a world beyond our senses, *actual access* to the world is denied us by our human finitude (Harman, 2013). It is not, of course, the only way to think about the world, and, like all subjective approaches to knowledge, forecloses the question of how we gain knowledge of the world at all. Tending to confuse subject and object by making the correlate of subjective perception the object of enquiry, it invites criticism of the absurd solipsism according to which one's own reflections are themselves a figment of one's own thoughts. This may help explain why some of those new to reflection are less enthusiastic about the activity of reflective writing than those who promote it (see for example, Hunter, 2021). For Hunter, it is understandable that teacher education trainees should be reticent about engaging in reflective techniques which they know will be assessed, and tensions between performativity and effectiveness in teachers' reflective practice, even its potential emptiness, have often been discussed (e.g. by Macfarlane & Gourlay, 2009; Benade, 2012).

Meillassoux, to ground his critique, interrogates the existence of objects and events which took place before the human eye could conceivably perceive them, driving home the solipsistic nature of the belief that everything is an illusion created by and for us. For Meillassoux, the correlationist must explain a basic flaw which allows this stance to be reversed into a form of realism:

[S]he sees herself as at least able to emphasize a facticity of the thought-being correlation so radical that it deprives her of any right to *rule out the possibility* of there being no common measure between the in-itself and what thought can conceive

(Meillassoux, 2009, p. 44, my emphasis)

What this passage argues is that the correlationist cannot escape their own conclusions. If our experience necessarily depends on a correlation between subject and world, then the necessary existence of this correlation is, ironically, proof that objective reality – facticity – exists, at least according to the correlationist. The correlationist fallacy collapses when this 'dodge' is exposed, ending the 'long cold winter' of anthropocentric philosophy (Harman, 2011b, p. 36). Following Brassier (2007b), we can extend the correlationist position to any attempt to foreclose the epistemological potential of fields outside the subjectivist purview, *a fortiori* that of teacher education, as Farrell says (above).

The epistemological spectrum

Meillassoux, for this reason, provides a helpful illustration by suggesting that both weaker and stronger forms of correlationism can be identified along a spectrum with idealist epistemologies at one end and their realist counterparts at the other (Harman, 2011b). While the concept of such a spectrum is not really new to educators (see for example, Blaikie, 2010; Coe et al., 2017) it is potentially extremely useful for reflective practice. If we agree with Meillassoux and use the spectrum to identify how apparently diverse reflections on knowledge and practice are underpinned by an homogenous set of correlationist assumptions, then debates about a presumed theory-practice divide also become fruitless. This is because correlationism makes it impossible for the practitioner to actually engage with the 'stuff' of knowledge because the latter, for the correlationist, is no more than a reflective construct or 'correlate'. Especially where this construct is held to be both

conditioned and legitimated by the teacher's reflection on action (correlating subject), we can see how difficult it is for the teacher to really accept that the learner's knowledge (correlated object) is any more than a construct conditioned *by and for* the teacher. The learner and their knowledge are negated by an epistemology whose fundamental pre-supposition is that they do not actually exist as living entities at all. The door is open to all forms of injustice once the learner and their knowledge have been reduced to such a status. These ideas formed the basis of the analysis below, as I sought to identify the different ways in which some teacher educators reflect on practice in this complex, challenging context.

Beth¹

Beth, whose role has included a focus on academic writing at master's level, sees academic writing as a 'logical way of putting forward ideas'. Involving clarity of structure and established HE conventions, it is 'something you want to read'. This means 'incorporating' other theorists' views in a critical way, which for Beth meant the familiar balancing process of being 'relevant to the arguments for and against'.

Pedagogically, Beth advocates an explicitly visual approach to acquiring such structural features, 'so they can see what it looks like (...). it's a very visual thing (...) once they see it, they get it. I'm speaking literally'. One-to-one support is essential, providing help to ensure an individual understanding of the requirements. Learning is thus 'a bit like learning to cook':

If you've never read a recipe before, you're a bit confused by what you're supposed to do, and if you're asking someone to make a four-course meal and they don't know how to boil an egg, then of course it's going to seem insurmountable.

The challenges to such a 'recipe', Beth believes, are individual, albeit perceived through cultural and metacognitive lenses. Cultural requirements can be hard to accept and to follow if they are new or alienating, and even perceiving and understanding them requires a certain metacognitive awareness. Successful individual development, Beth feels, includes learning about how learning is represented as discreet sets of situated rules, requirements or genres. These are formal and sequential, like a recipe, providing knowledge to be used for further development.

Compounded by misunderstandings about what is required ('some kind of Dickensian English', she says) and the 'pomposity of an awful lot of academics', an apparent lack of ability can result from a background in other 'languages' (maths or engineering for example). This mismatch between prior knowledge and present demands can build a fear of failure: a potential threat to identity can also remain a barrier as students from other cultures face new knowledge in the form of new conventions and norms. Such institutional questions, Beth feels, are harder to address from an individual perspective, not least when institutions misunderstand learners' needs and barriers:

[it] doesn't tend to be taught, that's the problem and so it's held up as a sort of monolith to students as something they are supposed to achieve and they have no idea what it means or how to do it.

Many of the issues highlighted by Beth suggest that academic literacy involves an individual construction of knowledge of acceptable forms. In her reflection, epistemologically, knowledge, and the means of acquiring and assessing it, are all individual constructs which can be facilitated or hindered, but not defined, by third parties. Wider systems in HE thus can fail to respect this individual perspective and even exacerbate individual barriers. Academic literacy's processes of logic, meta-cognition and cultural awareness are best treated as fundamentally individual in nature, reflecting this correlationist epistemology.

Odette

Odette expressed a different, more social view of academic literacy as involving 'just another genre of writing'. Defined by particular rules, the genre reflects an identifiable academic community which binds and respects them. Referring to knowledge practices beyond the desires and beliefs of the individual, these shared prescriptions define a genre. Those engaged in the community agree to conform collectively to them, a social perspective which underpins a particular way of thinking:

It's also an attempt to create a genre that reflects a way of thinking, so the content is about thought, that is not just a personal narrative but has some kind of basis in other people's research, other people's thinking, sometimes in the thinking of recognized, knowledgeable people/gurus in the field.

For Odette, experts and their knowledge define a 'field', where writing involves an engagement with others' expertise, a defining feature of critical thinking. It is a 'net that holds things together' and is always produced by and with others. Indeed, rather than 'personal narratives', she stresses the need to shift from such subjectivity to explicitly socially constructed literacy practices. Only this relationship with evidence and expertise can foster originality:

So it's the type of writing that moves you from a personal opinion to a more evidence-based [one], because other people have said it or because you have found out something by an original investigation . . . or a fairly original investigation

Knowledge in such contexts will always be contested, described by Odette as 'not a seamless individual narrative' or mere 'story-making without anything else'. The (academic) community's needs, she insists, include forms of measurement and evidence of certain kinds of 'academic' thinking. Essentially a way of organizing thoughts, it's valuable precisely because it is 'assessable', 'measurable' and comparable to and by others within the field.

Pedagogically, Odette recognizes that this can foster the teaching of consensual, stylistic aspects of text. Other, more difficult and perhaps more important issues of, for example, genuine reflection, can be occluded. Teachers, she feels, tend to highlight what she saw as minor issues of form which are by definition easier to identify, comment or feed back on than robustness of thinking, or depth of reflection:

[This] keeps people worrying about how many references and things, how many commas etc (. . .) and I wonder sometimes if it's because other issues are harder to grapple with. Harder to give somebody feedback on, and also harder to teach or, sort of, coach people at getting better at.

A specific epistemological belief, therefore, drives many of Odette's choices. While teaching should focus on style as well as content, form should not eclipse substance, because the genre as a form of congealed knowledge exists to bind a community through this shared knowledge, not just practices.

Beatrice

Like the others, Beatrice recognized that academic literacy is largely a question of conformity to the institutional requirement to display knowledge:

It's what students have to do, something you have to do . . . to communicate their ideas, to let us know that they're, that they understand what they've been taught, [and] communicate it to us, really clearly, at the right level.

Indeed, for Beatrice academic literacy is a performance required of the learner who has no choice but to adopt its constraints. Accordingly, Beatrice's teaching tends to focus on formal features which, while guaranteeing clarity, can become 'something that they are used to slipping in and out of':

It should be nice and clear, and straight forward, not complicated . . . it definitely shouldn't be them imitating some kind of Hogwarts-ish, professorial diction (. . .) which is hugely convoluted doesn't say anything and is full of waffle and obfuscation.

She also describes it as a 'tool' to be picked up and used as a 'vehicle' that is the same for everyone. This is 'a good metaphor', she feels, because it's vital to communicate with 'a common audience' and to 'engage with that tool' as a 'common currency'. Learners may have their own 'patois or dialect', but practical knowledge about different styles of communication is needed to 'get on in life'.

Beatrice feels that, because assessors believe that these features count as essential knowledge, good students will pay special attention to what their individual teachers prefer. This makes the task something of a performance as students explicitly 'look at what markers and teachers have said they look for' as well as 'what they don't like'. This affects her own teaching and assessment approach, as she stresses the role of marking as a way of ensuring that the style is 'right':

And if I'm giving feedback, its technical things, one idea per paragraph (. . .) just technical practical stuff. (. . .) with the right level of evaluation using the right kind of referencing, using the right kind of diction, using the right kind of style.

Epistemologically, then, Beatrice bases her pedagogical choices on the individual's need to conform to another reader's individual preferences. Literacy knowledge is subjective in the sense that it requires an individual performance of what another individual is perceived to require – an undeniably superficial dressing-up game.

Discussion

Beth, Odette and Beatrice's confident reflections on practice illustrate significant differences in epistemological outlook: Beth is suspicious of the social context in which we learn to write, and her stance on epistemology suggests a form of individual constructivism which emphasizes

individual narrative. Pedagogically, individual support and expression are therefore indispensable, leading to the sorts of teaching approaches she discusses. Odette, on the other hand, sees knowledge as defined by socially constructed parameters. Her pedagogical rationale thus focuses on group work, shared texts and the criterion of communicability. Readers will recognize the constructivist teaching approaches which seem appropriate to her, shaping the way she organizes her teaching, how she sees herself as teacher and her expectations of her learners. For Beatrice, knowledge in and of academic literacy is an appliance to be picked up and put down as required. Her pedagogic choices reflect this view of knowledge as display. Again, teachers will recognize this approach, which is common in parts of teacher education in the UK. For practical reasons, training programmes often promote easily defined, easily assessed training activities and assessments, focusing for instance, on the formal properties of texts rather than content, which is much harder to communicate, quantify and assess.

For critics such as Odette, this implies at least three pedagogical issues of special relevance to diverse cohorts. First, treating academic literacy as a matter of technical knowledge does not explain the barriers to acquiring academic literacy practices. Second, they ignore the existence and acquisition of other tacit – but important – knowledge. Third, and perhaps most important, academic literacy often involves affective features such as fear or disdain expressed in the inability or refusal to perform the sometimes artificial or abstruse practices of a powerful body (see, for example, Wellington, 2010). This attitude to knowledge can lead to disturbing practices, particularly regarding international students: one UK university, for instance, has been accused of overt racism in an email which explicitly identified Chinese students as needing an explanation of cheating in the run up to exams (BBC, 2019; see also EHRC, 2019).

Other questions also arise for reflective practice in HE teacher education contexts. First, are teachers aware of the role of epistemological presuppositions in pedagogical choices? If epistemological choices and pedagogical practices are related, the former must be taken seriously by both teacher and learner. Second, if teachers recognize this, how do they represent these presuppositions to themselves and others – including learners – in collaborative professional environments? How do they perceive and articulate the relationship between pedagogy and epistemology as collective praxis? How do they represent and justify their own knowledge practices to third parties? Third, are teachers equipped to treat such praxis critically, making choices informed by understanding of the different epistemological perspectives available? The convergence around correlationism here suggests that a tacit consensus exists around subjectivist epistemological presuppositions that exclude, *a priori*, non-correlationist knowledge.

Meillassoux's critique of 'correlationism' and his spectrum offer, therefore, a useful way to reflect on both these data and the practices they describe. However, this spectrum is only powerful if it can also engender productive alternatives. By suggesting useful conclusions for inclusive pedagogical practices in the crucial crossover between epistemology, pedagogy and ethics in the context of growing diversity in HE, it constitutes a reflective tool for more inclusive practice. By showing that correlationism can be juxtaposed with alternative epistemological standpoints, all of which are available to the practitioner as ways of reflecting on practice, it enriches pedagogical reflection, choice and practice in at least three ways.

First, it provides a useful framework for practitioners to think about their work. Where do they stand on this spectrum, and why? How far does this identification of their views inform or even limit their belief about what teaching practices are best suited to their

learners and their context? This spectrum of comparison between practices thus not only highlights and questions teachers' own presuppositions in a critical way, but it also demonstrates the practical availability of other epistemological positions. In particular, it draws attention to more material aspects of academic literacy, ironically foreclosed in an increasingly diverse HE context often criticized, as we have seen.

Second, the spectrum provides a useful link between one's own practice and others'. It shows how similar approaches can seem distinct but nonetheless share the same fundamental presuppositions. Once a common element of correlationism is identified, teaching does not have to preclude one form of practice on the grounds of its factitious incompatibility with another. It also offers a basis for the sharing of good practice.

Third, an awareness of one's own place on the spectrum highlights the potential of alternative positions. It clearly benefits teachers to know that their epistemological position is founded in awareness of other possibilities, but beyond this an understanding of what underpins these possibilities means that teachers can reflect more coherently and extensively on alternative pedagogies.

Conclusion

This paper discusses how three teachers' reflection on pedagogical theory and practice reveals tacit epistemological presuppositions. Despite the very small-scale data provided here, drawn from a single institution, Meillassoux's spectrum can be helpful across disciplines and institutions. Indeed, teachers themselves often find the more material phenomena of experience, experiment and observation most beneficial to learning (Van den Bos & Brouwer, 2014), highlighting the tension between correlationist assumptions in reflection and the materialism of actual practice. An awareness of such tensions can help their explicit incorporation into an inclusive pedagogical toolkit. This would in principle help produce the kind of reflection which is 'meaningful and transferable across multiple learning and teaching contexts' (Brandenburg, 2021, p. 17).

But this also implies several productive challenges.

First, literacy, as an emergent phenomenon, is promoted to facilitate the co-evolution of knowledge within specific HE communities (see for example, Advance HE, 2019). This occurs not in individuals but in environments and the transitional spaces or relational 'milieux' between them as they develop. An inability to think these spaces undermines the development of best practice pedagogies when educators' basic epistemological presuppositions clash. The spaces of reflection are foreclosed by correlationism.

Second, literacy must be understood as a means of producing, or at least working with, ideas as problems rather than as pre-formed concepts. This means writing about others' work by using it and developing it and its affects to propose new, differential outcomes which in turn can be reflected upon and redeployed. This implies a necessary debate about criticality in the academy. In this non-linear, affective environment criticality and creative imagination are contiguous because criticism and creativity share the same basis in thought as a process of reflective engagement with the new. Reflection must be affective and creative if it is to be useful.

Fundamentally, then, Meillassoux's spectrum and an awareness of the traps of correlationism do more than just remind us that reflection should not be reduced to the reproduction of an individual subject's own epistemological frame of reference. It

demands we engage with others in an encounter which may well implicate disparate, even aberrant sources or points of view: what matters is how it functions and how it further affects things. Rather than recycling existing approaches and frameworks, it embodies the healthy suspicion that our understanding of existing, even seemingly well-known positions, has always already excised their vital properties. It is our own perceived limitations which need expanding if we are to get the best from reflection on practice.

Note

1. All names and accounts were anonymised.

Notes on contributor

Christian Beighton is a Senior Lecturer in Post Compulsory Education and Training at Canterbury Christ Church University, based in the faculty of Arts, Humanities and Education. He has held a wide variety of roles in HE, FE and private settings in the UK and abroad. His publications include research on academic practice, social justice and ethics in further and higher education, as well as work on a range of research methodologies.

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