

Teaching and Learning Projects as ‘Heterotopias’

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Abstract

This paper seeks to explore some persistent issues which impact on externally funded teaching and learning projects. The discussion considers these issues using the lens of ‘heterotopias’, a concept introduced by Michel Foucault. Utilising insights from Foucault’s suggestive comments about ‘heterotopias’, the paper investigates the conceptual location of projects within different kinds of real, social and imagined space. The discussion draws on research data collected from leading participants in a longitudinal study of a sample of Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) in the UK. These were teaching and learning projects funded over a five year period from 2005 to 2010 by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Within the research sample of CETLs it is argued that examples can be found of projects which were, in Foucault’s terms, ‘enacted utopias’, ‘crisis heterotopias’, heterotopias of deviation’, ‘spaces of illusion’ and ‘heterotopias of compensation’. The implications for teaching and learning projects are considered in the context of continuing government funding for teaching and learning projects as a means to achieve change in higher education. Using evidence from a sample of CETLs, it is argued that projects can become ‘enacted utopias’ - that is a short term acting out of a particular vision of teaching in universities that is disconnected from the mainstream reality of academic life. Projects become an ‘illusion’ that disappears when funding ends and the pre-existing academic culture continues mostly untouched by the activities within the project. Projects are designed to compensate for long-standing inadequacies but, because of their short-term funding and semi-autonomous status, they are typically not in a position to effect long term reform.

Keywords: Foucault, heterotopias, teaching and learning, projects, Centres for Excellence.

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Introduction

It might seem to be far-fetched, even outrageous, to suggest that teaching and learning projects have anything in common with brothels, cemeteries, the boarding school (in its nineteenth-century form), military service for young men, ships, oriental gardens, museums and libraries. The latter are all examples of what Michel Foucault calls 'heterotopias' which are real places, but which are 'like counter-sites', where 'reality' is 'simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted'. Nevertheless, this paper seeks to exploit Foucault's insights about 'heterotopias' to explore some persistent issues which impact on the character and location of externally funded and time-limited teaching and learning projects. The contention under discussion is that like 'heterotopias' teaching and learning projects have 'the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralise, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect. These spaces are linked with all the others, but which contradict all the other sites'. They are simultaneously 'mythic and real contestation of the space', 'Des Espace Autres' (Foucault 1967/1984).

The paper uses as a case study the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (henceforward called CETLs), which were teaching and learning projects funded between 2005 and 2010 by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Some details about the CETLs are given below, but this paper does not attempt to provide a descriptive account of the CETLs, which would be a more complex and lengthy enterprise. Rather, it uses aspects of the CETLs to explore the 'mythic and real contestation of the space' occupied by 'projects'. The exercise of conceptually locating projects within different kinds of real, social and imagined space is useful, I suggest, not simply because 'Space provides evocative metaphors for crystalising the nature of society and social experience' (Gulson and Symes, 2007: 99), though this is so, but because it enables an examination of the ways in which teaching and learning projects are both 'within' and 'without' their institution, both reflecting the institutional culture which created them and yet also necessarily 'other'.

Teaching and Learning projects

In recent years projects have been very commonly used by governments and their agents as a way of stimulating innovation in teaching and learning (Gosling, 2013; Parsons et al., 2012).

In South Africa, for example, the Department of Higher Education and Training is utilising Teaching Development Grants:

for programmes that will be rolled out over a 3-year period (2014/15-2016/17) or part thereof, and that will assist to achieve the primary purpose of the earmarked grant to improve student success and enhance student learning through a sustained focus on improving the quality and impact of university teachers, teaching and teaching resources (DHET, 2014).

In New Zealand the Ako Aotearoa's National Project Fund, and in Australia the Learning and Teaching Council, and now the Office for Learning and Teaching, have invested significant funds in teaching development projects. In the UK time-limited project funding has been a major tool for promoting innovation in higher education over the last twenty five years, particularly using the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (Gosling, 2013). The most generously funded initiative to support teaching in the UK was the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) at a cost of £340m.

The central idea behind the CETLs was a simple one: 'to reward excellent teaching practice and to invest in that practice further in order to increase and deepen its impact across a wider teaching and learning community' (HEFCE, 2004: 1). Institutions were invited to identify what they considered to be 'excellent practice' and where the bid-assessors agreed in their self-assessment they were awarded recurrent funding, up to £500,000 per annum for five years, and a capital sum up to £2 million. Between 2005, 74 centres for excellence were established on this basis and continued until 2010. CETLs were diverse both in their structures, their pedagogic focus and their outputs. CETLs developed and engaged in many rich and complex collaborative networks (SQW 2011).

The social phenomenon, of which the CETLs were examples, are typically called 'teaching and learning projects' (Baume, Martin, and Yorke, 2002) but also 'programmes' (Parsons et al., 2012; Bamber, 2008) or 'initiatives' (Roxa and Martensson, 2008). Although there was a suggestion that CETL's were not 'projects' but 'centres' of activity, they shared the key characteristics with other externally funded teaching and learning development projects. The attributes of a project as we define them (broadly following Baume et al (2002)) are as follows:

1. Projects are time limited - funding is allocated for a predetermined length of time. They are a 'one-off activity and would not normally be repeated' (Baume, Martin, and Yorke, 2002) and, as a consequence, have life-span with a clear start and end date.
2. The outcome of a bidding process - funding is allocated as a result of a process in which the essential modus operandi of the project must be pre-specified. Projects are, therefore, discursively constituted through the 'proposal' submitted in advance of receiving funding.
3. There is an external agency or 'sponsor' (Baume, Martin, and Yorke, 2002) which provides the funds to resource the project. The agency, for example a national government funding agency or charitable foundation, will therefore set the criteria for selection, determine which bids are successful and have expectations about the outcomes, often linked to wider political objectives.
4. Projects are teleological (i.e. purposeful) and convergent (have defined aims): the goals/ aims of the project have to be pre-specified in the bidding process and as a result projects expect convergence of behaviour by specified agents or groups of agents to achieve the project's aims.

These characteristics have consequences for their character and institutional location, as we will consider, using data gathered from a sample of CETLs.

Brief note on the case study and the research context

Following the launch of HEFCE's Invitation to Bid in 2004, Gosling and Hannan (2007b; 2007) initiated a longitudinal study which sought to investigate the experiences of bid-writers, educational developers and university managers as they lived through the initiative. The overall aim of the research was to examine how individual agents, with a commitment to enhance teaching and learning, interacted with, and interpreted, a major initiative designed to support and reward teaching excellence. Data were collected at key stages of the CETL initiative i.e. formation (2006), mid-term (2008) and most recently, with Turner (2010) at the end of the funding period (Turner and Gosling, 2012; Gosling and Turner, 2014).

The final stage of the research focused on 15 case studies (the characteristics of each are outlined in Table 1) using interviews conducted at each stage of this study. In total, 49 participants representing a mix of bid-writers, senior managers and CETL directors and staff

were interviewed. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and coded using categories which sought to identify themes (a) continuing from phase 1 (b) emerging in the final phase of the CETL (c) relating to the personal experience of leading an innovation (d) relating to theories of change.

Each CETL was identified by an alpha-numeric identifier (e.g. C3) and coded by institution type (N for post-1992, O for pre-1992) and respondents were further identified by their role (B for bid writer, D for director of the CETL, ED for Educational Developer, and M for manager). The date of the interview is indicated by a year if this is other than 2010.

Heterotopias

This paper is about teaching and learning projects as defined above, but the approach adopted uses the lens of Foucault's brief paper on 'heterotopias' entitled 'Des Espace Autres', (Foucault 1967/1984) published by the French journal *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité* in October 1984, and was the basis of a lecture given by Michel Foucault in March 1967 (all quotes from Foucault are from this paper unless stated otherwise). Foucault argued that we are in 'the epoch of space'. He argued further that philosophy had previously focused principally on 'time', but now 'we are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed' (1).

Foucault contrasts heterotopias with utopias. The latter are unrealisable aspirations, whereas heterotopias are real places, they exist. But heterotopias are 'enacted utopias' which act as 'counter-sites', that is to say they mirror or reflect reality in a way which inverts or contests what is taken to be normal.

Foucault suggests that one form these 'counter sites' take is what he calls 'crisis heterotopias', which are 'privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc' (4). Foucault suggests that 'heterotopias of crisis are disappearing today and are being replaced, I believe, by what we might call heterotopias of deviation: those in which individuals whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed' (4).

Finally he says that 'Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory as heterotopias of compensation ...their role is to create a space that is other, another real space,

as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. This latter type would be the heterotopias, not of illusion, but of compensation' (7).

In the following sections, the paper uses each of these comments as vehicles for understanding certain aspects of teaching and learning projects using the example of the CETLs and how they were placed or located within their institutions. The paper does not explore Foucault's methodology or the wider implications of his work; rather it utilises his comments on heterotopias to explore their relevance to our understanding of teaching and learning projects. I argue that, by considering particular aspects of some CETLs we can find examples of 'enacted utopias', 'crisis heterotopias', heterotopias of deviation', 'spaces of illusion' and 'heterotopias of compensation'.

CETLs as real and social spaces

From the outset CETLs were defined by a spatial metaphor as 'centres' for excellence. But what were they central to? What were they the centre of? The CETLs occupied real, imagined and social space for individuals and institutions. They were 'located' - in various ways - some within organisational structures such as departments or faculties (C5, C6, C7, C9, C10, C12, C14) some were relatively independent of organisational structures (C2, C4, C11, C13) and some were 'distributed' across one or more institutions (C1, C3, C8, C15). But these are not clear-cut divisions because CETLs moved between close association with institutional structures for some parts of their activity and relative independence in other areas of their work. Their conceptual or epistemological location could also be quite complex. Some were peripheral to their home department (e.g. C8 and C9) but 'central' to particular institutional 'missions'. This sense of their place and status was rarely clear and was often contested (Gosling and Turner 2014). CETLs were 'located' also within a variety of intellectual, pedagogic, ideological domains - such as subject disciplines, pedagogical ideals and practices, theories of change and conceptions of academic life. Each of these different kinds of location required, sometimes difficult, boundary drawing, giving rise to issues of identity, inclusion and exclusion.

One important way in which the identity of each Centre for Excellence was defined was through their physical location. The CETL initiative was unusual in that it included up to £2m for capital spend, and all but one of our sample of CETLs used the money to build or refurbish a dedicated physical space. These typically included teaching and office spaces and

well-equipped students' study areas, but in some of the more unusual cases the funding paid for refurbished science laboratories (C12), a visual learning laboratory (C13), a rehearsal space (C14), an entirely new experimental teaching space (C4) and in another case a bus that functioned as a mobile teaching and resource space (C10).

A few quotations from directors indicate the significance of these physical spaces for the CETL's identity.

...this building, and we actually also got another little building around the corner at the end, has been really helpful because it's a nice building, people like coming here. (C9OBD)

...the bus can park up and get people from three or four care homes to come together, so you get the benefit of not only having a good space, but having the exchange of ideas.... Everybody sees it as [her name]'s bus. It's not [my] bus and I'm not precious about it if it didn't work, but it's certainly served a great purpose. (C10OD)

...the space has been really successful but that was largely due to our own designing of what went into it. But the mix, the furniture, the flexibility of the workstations....I mean if you come in term time it is now buzzing from opening time to closing (C4ND Partner institution 1)

...central to the design of the space is a high quality rubber floor, with under-floor heating. The furniture will be customised and iconoclastic, adding geometry, colour and contouring to the space. Working and sitting close to the floor will provide a culturally conscious sensibility to the space that is absent from northern European/American HE classrooms. (from web-site of C4OD Partner institution 2, 2006)

It is clear these physical spaces were important to the identity of the projects - the building, the bus, the study area, the experimental teaching space - and creating them took significant time in the early part of the CETL's life. But these physical spaces were not always well known to others in the university - indeed in some cases they were only important to the users, either because they were very subject specific, like the refurbished laboratories in C12 and the rehearsal space in C14, or because they were in an obscure location.

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We're still seen as some loony outfit in the basement of the Watson Building but everyone who walks in to the university goes in to that space and goes wow what ever happened here or this is the best kept secret in the university or you know (C8OD)

Perhaps even more important than the physical spaces that were created was the sense of being in a separate social space - that is separate from the normal constraints of organisational decision making and budgetary limitations. Most CETLs conceptualised their position as one of relative freedom from institutional structures, a space in which people were free to think differently, to experiment and develop new ways of teaching and researching their teaching and student learning. From our interviews it was striking how often spatial metaphors were used to express the idea that the CETLs created a liberating space as these examples show:

...the CETLs were in a really nice position where they were sort of outside the system and that allowed you to say things that being in the system wouldn't allow you (C2ND)

...we gave them the space to do the job (C4ND)

...lots of room to experiment, it's a big sand pit (C1ND)

...has been liberating ... freeing people to help others develop (C10OD)

...given people the space in terms of the conferences and the other events; to sort of like come together and just imagine where things might go and I think that's actually be quite a useful contribution that the centre's made in just sort of getting those connections and space to think. (C10OD)

...here was a wonderful idea about this space between two cultural organisations.... we're not part of things, we're sort of somewhere else and so we're cushioned with this money which you can carry over from year to year up to a point and so nobody can touch you really. (C14OD)

The teaching and learning project is here being understood as a 'terra nova' - a newly created space in which the normal institutional rules and disciplinary constraints are much less evident. They were separated from normal pressures by the 'ring-fenced' funding - another spatial metaphor suggesting a boundary drawn to protect those within. That is not to say that there were no constraints but, relatively speaking, they were a free zone where new

pedagogical ideas could be pursued ‘outside’ the core organisational hierarchies. Within the mainstream of university life, behaviour is bound by the pressures, priorities and budgets with which academics are familiar as their everyday ‘reality’, but inside the teaching and learning project, and within defined parameters, there was a perception of relative freedom.

Enacted utopias

Keeping this preliminary sketch of the spaces that CETLs occupied in mind, let us now explore some of these issues of their location through the lens of Foucault’s ideas about ‘heterotopias’. The first point is that, although some CETLs had utopian ideals, ‘utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces’, and the CETLs were places that certainly did exist but, as heterotopias, as Foucault says, then they are something like ‘counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia’.

At the bidding stage, anyone interested in creating a CETL was required to create discursively, in the proposal document, a world (within their institution or across two or more institutions) that would be better than the actual world they inhabited. Bidding for project funding gave permission to describe a better world and if successful in winning funding, to dream that the better world would come into being. When CETL bids envisioned a future for their subject or their institution, there was a division between ‘visions’. Some proposals were based on an extension of existing plans which the funding would ‘accelerate’ but others sought to create something new, to ‘effectively enact a utopia’ within specified limits.

In the first category were the CETLs where the additional funding enabled existing plans to be brought to fruition faster and more effectively than would otherwise have been possible. In our sample this included a learning and teaching strategy to improve retention (C1N), a faculty that wanted to expand its masters and on-line provision (C5N), and a department that wanted to refurbish its laboratories (C12O). These CETLs were well linked to existing organisational structures, they carried support from the academics who stood to benefit from enacting the goals of the CETL and were uncontroversial within the existing culture. These CETLs were not ‘heterotopias’ because they were very much embedded in the pre-existing and continuing world ‘real’ of the faculties. They did not represent ‘otherness’ but were recognisably extensions of existing power structures and hierarchies.

However those in the latter category were the dreams of individuals who had a clear idea about what they wanted to achieve, though their dream was not shared by the institution

as a whole or perhaps was shared with only a few collaborators. In two cases (C8O and C9O) that we have written about in another paper (Gosling and Turner, 2014) the bids emerged from individuals who had somewhat specialist interests which were not shared by other colleagues in their department. The CETL bidding process enabled them to map out and, by being successful, enact their private utopias. The opportunity to bid for funding was seized as a route to realise ambitions that had hitherto been thwarted or largely ignored. In these two cases bids were written as an opportunity to compensate for being a 'Cinderella' discipline (C9OD), or out of 'sheer desperation' because the area had 'received no support in terms of teaching input from any of the other schools in the uni although it had been run for eight years' (C8OD2006). In both cases the areas had lower epistemological status because they were outside the strong framing (Bernstein, 2000) of the main discipline, and were interdisciplinary and 'applied'.

In another example, in an 'ancient' and traditional university (C11O), lecturers had never been trained and were inducted into their teaching roles entirely by sitting alongside older colleagues and discussing their students. A rationalist analysis of this process suggested it was inefficient and stifled innovation. There were other economic pressures which were creating tensions with the traditional tutorial teaching methods. The dream was 'an opportunity to tackle a big strategic issue' and 'an opportunity to make progress' as the rationalist described it, 'turning graduates into academics' (C11BD2006).

In these examples we can see how a competitive bidding process encourages individuals to use a funding opportunity to fulfil a personal aspiration. In some institutions there were rigorous processes to eliminate eccentric or idiosyncratic bids in an effort to ensure that there was strong organisational backing for bids, although, in some of these cases, it did not prevent the CETLs becoming contested when the rhetoric of a bid proposal became a reality (Gosling and Turner, 2014). However, a strong personal vision was enough to persuade some senior managers of the virtues of a well-written proposal without checking whether there would be support from academics if the bid/proposal ever became real. Many of these more visionary CETLs struggled to communicate their vision and to obtain support for their particular 'enacted utopias'. Some did indeed become successful (in their own terms) after a long initial period of negotiation, but remained relatively isolated, unconnected to the main-stream activity of their department or faculty.

Teaching and learning projects exist on a spectrum which at one end has projects which extend existing provision in ways that are uncontroversial and at the other end are

enactments of a utopian vision. In these latter cases, there is clearly a much bigger task to communicate the vision to academics and managers, which both extends the time needed to bring the project to fruition but also runs a bigger risk of failure. For example, in one of our case studies (C14O) the original vision was almost completely abandoned because the external agency that was to have been involved failed to match up to the promises outlined in the bid document. But without risk taking there would be no radical visions and no genuine innovation.

Crisis heterotopias

Foucault suggests that ‘crisis heterotopias’ are ‘privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc.’

In their paper, ‘Fashioning docile teacher bodies? The strange space of the “staff teaching seminar”’, Grant and Barrow (2013) have also used Foucault’s notion of crisis heterotopias to explore the place of the academic development staff seminar. Using evidence from New Zealand in the 1970s, Grant and Barrow argue that, when it was appreciated that new staff face the crisis of teaching for the first time, the staff seminar was created as a place where these liminal members of the academic community can be nurtured and guided through the transitional period of their careers. In this role, they show the staff seminar as both ‘counter-sites that, unsettlingly, contradict other real sites, and yet are ‘somehow impossible and illusory, yet powerful and productive’ (Grant and Barrow, 2013: 308).

The CETL initiative may also be understood as a response to a growing sense of crisis that teaching was undervalued in universities. The ‘crisis’ was revealed in two ways; career promotion for academics took almost no account of teaching and prestige and status was gained almost entirely through research, publication and successful research grant applications. Furthermore, the development of teaching (as opposed to research development) was perceived to be starved of resources. The influential National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, known as the Dearing Report (Dearing, 1997), for example, asserted that, for teaching staff, there was a ‘lack of incentive to develop teaching’ (paragraph 8.14).

After twenty years of relatively small scale teaching development grants (Gosling, 2013), the idea of the CETLs was that the funding would be sufficient to effect a culture

change, that would grab the attention of the managers of universities and that would feed into capital development, so that reward structures would change forever.

Our intention is to strengthen the strategic focus on teaching and learning by directing funds to centres that reward high teaching standards, promote a scholarly-based and forward-looking approach to teaching and learning, and where significant investment will lead to further benefits for students, teachers and beyond (HEFCE, 2004: 3).

The size of the funding - though still small scale when compared to many research grants - was a feature of the CETL initiative that drew both criticism (from those who believed too much funding was being squandered on too few projects) and praise (from those who saw a unique opportunity to achieve real change). The volume of funding was both exhilarating and frightening.

I knew – I mean it was a very exciting time because at no other time in my working life and probably no time in my future working life will HEFCE ever put some large sums of money into learning and teaching in one go like this. So it was exciting, it was slightly scary to be in charge of a five million pound programme. (C15OD)

The generous funding arrived like an unexpected rescue mission for those who were struggling to enhance teaching.

...we were kind of running into the ground under the pressures, the various pressures, and this kind of gave us an opportunity (C9OD)

The funding period had an air of unreality about it, because all those things that had been impossible, because starved of funding, suddenly became possible.

...and it's been the money, and the resources of our staff, that have made those kind of projects result in stuff which we've then put on our website for general use and that's been a really sustaining and exciting thing (C8OD)

...what I've found absolutely wonderful and liberating about CETL was having money to try things out, absolutely liberating because we didn't have to have a business plan before you could try something. And it gave us the room to experiment which I know was what CETLs were about and so some things worked and some things didn't (C10OD)

The extraordinary nature of the CETL projects was put into sharp focus by their ending. The finish of the funding, for many respondents, signalled a return to the 'normal' state of affairs where funding would be scarce and teaching and learning work was under-appreciated. The future, which was surprisingly like the past, before funding arrived, looked bleak.

I could see it just becoming an utter grind without being adequately resourced (C2ND)

...[we saw] how directionless and demoralised and also confused a number of the folk from the other CETLs [were] about their future. (C8OD)

The CETLs were in this sense 'reserved for individuals...who [were] in a state of crisis' but it was only a temporary respite from the usual funding constraints and the return to normality proved to be difficult, even traumatic. The moment when the funding ends is a fundamental problem for all short-term funded projects. Most were dependent on persuading their own institution that there was a long term future for the activities they had been initiated within the time-limited funding. Some were successful, but most were not (SQW, 2011:44).

Heterotopias of deviation

Foucault says that heterotopias of deviation are those in which individuals, whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm, are placed. Is it an exaggeration to say that participants in the CETLs were in this sense deviant?

A few CETL leaders were self-consciously deviating from the norm of their institution. One spoke in terms of his CETL reviving a radical tradition in adult education:

'the innovative and progressive forms of teaching [that] have come out of that kind of community adult led context, so we have to get back to that. They have all been leftist, critical, 1968. It is recovering that tradition' (C4OD, 2006).

For this director - working from the idea of critical pedagogy - nothing less than the future of 'the University was at stake'. Another director (C9O) was 'deviant' in the sense that while all his colleagues were only interested in a pure form of the discipline (philosophy), he alone was interested in applying the discipline to real life situations in professional life. In another case (C14O) the deviant notion was to 'use the practices of the rehearsal room and transfer them to other disciplines', 'to bring together theatre practice with academic practice'. Not

surprisingly there was 'scepticism from other departments in the university initially before they actually experienced what we've done you know. They think we're just over here messing about I think' (C14OM). In another case, to which we will return below, the deviant idea was to bring users of mental health services into the teaching team - a notion that was regarded as quite revolutionary.

It can be argued, though, that the CETLs were deviating from the academic norm in another more fundamental sense. Research is the main focus of the work and professional interest of the vast majority of academics, and while they may also be committed teachers, they would not consider themselves either competent or motivated to undertake research or development work relating to their teaching. The CETLs deviated from this norm by providing the opportunity to engage in teaching and learning projects, to research pedagogy, and design innovations and for these activities to be funded as the principal focus of academic work. Needless to say, only a relatively small proportion of academics came forward to take up this opportunity. These participants might be called 'activists' in the mission to prioritise pedagogy over research.

The fact that engagement in teaching and learning was a minority interest created a systemic problem, according to the director a CETL in a university known for its research.

There weren't universities all around the country who were good at doing this kind of education development work and the CETL initiative brought in a whole lot of people, often very interesting people, but into totally new areas of work for them. So they were perhaps very experienced at teaching and doing stuff within their discipline but they'd never actually done educational development work, they'd never run something like a CETL, they'd never done any educational research. (C13OD)

Furthermore, in devoting time to achieving CETL's goals, they took risks with their careers by pursuing this minority - 'deviant' - interest. According to the Director of C3N working with the CETL was 'high risk':

Deans want their people to engage um, you know, in REF (Research Excellence Framework) stuff and don't see research into education, as, er, they see it as a bit secondary, and that is a bit of a disincentive for their staff, a bit high risk for their staff to engage in it because then their priorities get questioned. (C3ND)

In this institution, the senior management understood the potentially damaging impact (in their view) of staff becoming involved in this particular form of academic deviance, but in some other institutions the idea of a CETL was met with incomprehension.

When they heard that they got a CETL award they really couldn't understand what it was and I think at that time centrally in the university they didn't mention teaching and learning, you know it was expunged, everything was R-led, research-led and I know from my experiences here that staff innovation and industry around teaching and learning doesn't often get recognised in promotion. (C8OD)

As we have seen the CETLs created a new kind of space within which the 'deviant' minority could be indulged. Within the boundaries of the CETL, staff could be funded to undertake curriculum development projects, go to conferences in far off places, inhabit the splendid new teaching and learning spaces, and they could be 'valued' and promoted. Within the CETL their deviance from the institutional norms was rewarded and their interest normalised. Some did indeed receive promotion and recognition for their work in the CETL by the wider institution (Turner and Gosling, 2012) but It was soon apparent that university cultures were not about to be transformed, ways of working would not change and value systems, deeply embedded in the minds of academics, would not be replaced by the new priorities the government had hoped for. In other words CETLs remained 'heterotopias of deviance' and only in a few cases did they create a new 'normal' for teaching and learning development.

Heterotopias of illusion and compensation

Foucault wrote of heterotopias that 'Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory (perhaps that is the role that was played by those famous brothels of which we are now deprived)'.

CETLs which were merely extending and accelerating what would have happened anyway were never 'spaces of illusion'. Indeed in two of our case studies, the CETLs (C5 and C12) provided an opportunity for hard-nosed business developments that could generate income and be sustained post-funding. But for many CETLs, the contrast with the normal life

of the institution was such that they became somewhere special, almost magical places. The sense of unreality of dream-like, fantastical, qualities is reflected in these two comments.

It's been really exciting work ... we refer to it as the halcyon days. (C2ND)

Fantastic. I never dreamt that before I retired I would get, have such fun and I'd get the opportunity to be part of a team who actually grew something I'd always dreamt about it's been absolutely amazing, loved it, every single minute of it. (C8OD)

This was in a CETL where the seemingly impossible happened, where there was a radical break from the past by bringing users of mental health services into the teaching team. In some sense it was compensating for all those times when clients had been implicitly belittled and patronised. It was reflecting back to the 'normal world' a different possible world in which client and service providers could genuinely work together. The difficulty was how to create the 'bridgehead' that would connect the idealised space that had been temporarily created with the aid of exceptional funding to 'something that can't be closed down again' and 'to embed what we grow within the contributing schools when we leave'. (C8OD, 2006).

The sense that this was an 'illusion', and a temporary one, was reflected in the interview undertaken at the end of the CETL when the same director said 'I wasn't travelling with the notion that you know, five years of this, was going to turn round things round massively in that kind of way' (C8OD, 2010). She admitted,

the university hasn't recognised the importance of interdisciplinary mental health structurally in any kind of way, it hasn't recognised the complete uniqueness of what we've done bringing on board in anyway because mental health is still seen to be some marginal unimportant low status thing. (C8OD)

So although some real changes occurred for the period of funding they were not sustained and the CETL, like an illusion, disappeared. There was 'compensation' for what had happened before, but only for a temporary period.

In another example, where the discourse of the CETL challenged normal assumptions, the radical idea was to subvert the normal relationship between the lecturer as an authority figure (based on his/her research), and undergraduate students, by providing the opportunity for the students also to become the researchers.

Implicit in my thinking is the notion of the student as producer, the student as an active collaborator working alongside academics - not an equal relationship as we

can't pretend and wouldn't want to, we do have authority as academics, but encouraging and enabling an open and democratic well-resourced accessible program that is both about transforming the students' lives, transforming our lives in a progressive way. (C4OD, 2006)

Here a new set of rules about the relationship between teacher and students mirrored and reversed the usual teacher student relationship. All this was possible within the CETL because, as this director said, 'Ultimately we are pretty independent of the University'. It would not have been possible to achieve the same changes to the curriculum, teaching methods, so quickly through normal decision-making channels. With the protection of autonomous funding, decisions could be taken quickly and enacted within an academic year.

Students can come to us and get money £1,500 to do an interesting piece of work that is either inside or outside and we try and involve students in our meetings and in our committees and all our processes that we have so that we have as much student input as possible. (C4OD)

In a rather different way the CETLs reflected back to the university an altered state by funding activities that would normally have been rejected as too expensive, for example, in one CETL (C2N) six project leaders were funded to attend a conference in New York in 2008 and eight went to Berlin 2010'. Another example of the ways CETLs compensated for the norm was by being more generous on matters such as catering, which became symbolic of the CETL being out of the ordinary.

And it became legendary, we'd have a CETL seminar and then we'd have a nice flan or something and a glass of wine. It cost peanuts but you can't do it without some funding and yet that became legendary because our manager is so good at getting and doing things just perfectly and so people would – I'd say you know, it's the legendary CETL catering and that was part of the reward, something nice for a change instead of a plastic cup. (C10OD)

In response to the crisis of underfunding for teaching, the CETLs were created as heterotopias of compensation, indulging that which would normally have been denied. The CETLs existed as places in which the ideals that government believed universities should embrace could be enacted - where excellent teaching was developed and rewarded, where innovation would thrive, where students would be better taught, where new technology would

be invented and applied. Furthermore whole new buildings gave a concrete reality to this nirvana - shiny, bright, magnificent. But though the buildings have survived, much of the extraordinary reversal of realities were not sustained once the funding ended. The 'official' evaluation of the CETLs concluded:

Although definitely a minority, a number of CETLs stated that they would continue in their current form post-funding. Our impression is that none would continue with the same level of resources and activities as during the programme, but they would be recognisable as the CETL and continue with similar sets of aims and operations (SQW, 2011: paragraph 5.10)

The minority referred to here (in paragraph 5.8) was 17 out of 74 CETLs and of these 'none' would continue with the same level of activities. They were in that sense heterotopias of illusion and compensation.

The 'place' of teaching and learning projects

Can we draw any broader conclusions about teaching and learning projects, for example projects funded by Teaching Development Grants in South Africa, using the prism of Foucault's conceptual framework of heterotopias and drawing on the findings from our longitudinal study of the CETLs? In some respects, the CETL initiative was not typical, principally in the volume funding that was made available and the freedom they were given to operate in. We should, therefore, be cautious about generalising from this one instance. Nevertheless, some insights from this initiative do, I believe, have wider resonances.

The 'location' of teaching and learning projects is an important factor in how they are perceived and how much influence they can wield. Those that are very clearly located within a department or Faculty have a good chance of having a lasting impact providing they are supported from within the existing power structure. Typically these are the least 'heterotopic' and the most 'mainstream' projects, and are more likely to be sustainable because their goals are approved and supported by the management structure. In particular projects that bring benefits to the department, for example, by attracting new students or modernising the curriculum or facilitating the use of learning technologies, can be very successful and have a visible legacy. However, a recent experience in South Africa in the Large Classes project, shows that senior managers see themselves as only 'peripherally involved' in teaching projects and had not tracked their progress. Projects were mostly delegated to junior staff

who carried little institutional weight and had no direct access to decision-making. This created substantial issues of ‘institutional ownership and oversight’ (Jawitz, 2014) even when the projects were designed to improve retention and pass-rates of undergraduate students.

Ambitious projects that seek to achieve institution-wide change are more likely to be seen as being outside and even alien to the prevailing culture. Their ‘otherness’ gives them the maximum freedom from the constraints of the prevailing norms but only within what has been called the project ‘enclave’.

An enclave is a set of practices that exists in a larger organisational setting but which has characteristics that are distinctive, individuals within it subscribe self-consciously to a different culture (or way of doing things) to the organisational norm and there are clear organisational, temporal and sometimes spatial differences that distinguish it from its organisational setting (Saunders, Charlier et al., 2005: 43).

Some CETLs were ‘enclaves’ in this sense, somewhat ‘dislocated’ from prevailing assumptions and practices. Only a few were able (in Saunders et al’s terms) to ‘challenge wider practices in the organisation and so transforms itself from an enclave to a ‘bridgehead’ or platform for wider developments’ (ibid). Some were able to achieve a bridgehead by linking into new strategic plans in their universities (C4 and C6), others by modifying their original ambitions to more modest objectives that could be adopted by the host institution (C3 and C11). However, others failed to build a bridgehead or create temporary stabilities which would secure a future for the activities that had been funded during the CETL initiative (C2, C8 and C13).

Not all project directors have ambitions to achieve wider change. Some in our sample were content to achieve the objectives agreed within the boundaries of the project and the time-scale available. Such decisions to limit the aspirations of the project can reflect both agentic and structural factors (Ashwin, 2008). But some CETLs spoke of trying to achieve ‘culture change’ - a much more ambitious goal. In these cases directors were implicitly suggesting that the norms prevailing within the heterotopia could be and should be adopted across the institution. This means persuading the majority to accept the values of the minority - the exceptional has to become the new normal. However, because of their semi-detached location within organisational structures, and with time-limited funding, projects do not have time, power or the status to achieve this goal. That is not say that some changes and some achievements cannot be achieved, but projects can only achieve major institutional change if

they are part of a wider strategy that is integrated with all the main decision-making bodies within the organisation (Volbrecht and Boughey, 2004; Gibbs, 2013).

Funding for projects are often made available by government agencies because of a sense of crisis and are conceived to compensate for failings of the past. For example, in South Africa the current funding for quality enhancement projects is driven by a strong sense that 'we have not yet overcome the inequities in educational provision created during the apartheid era' (CHE, 2014). But a critical factor which affects whether a project can break out of being a heterotopia and become mainstream is the extent to which the diagnosis of the crisis is widely shared and understood by those the project seeks to influence. When the perception of fault, or shortcoming, that the project is designed to rectify is a minority 'deviant' view, not shared and possibly opposed by other powerful voices, the scope for the project to achieve lasting impact will tend to be limited. CETLs that tried, for example, to change departmental cultures by introducing applied or interdisciplinary work ultimately failed to have a lasting impact because the dominant voices in the department were opposed to such a re-interpretation of the discipline. In the Large Teaching Project in South Africa, projects struggled to articulate the need for change because 'Across all four institutions there was a commonly held view that large classes were inevitable' (Jawitz, 2014: 17). Projects can achieve short-term successes but their influence can be illusory and the changes introduced in the life-time of the project disappear when project funding comes to an end because there is not a widespread understanding of the need for the change. This is the fate of many teaching and learning projects (Sommerlad and Ramsden, 2000; Fielden, Gordon et al., 2005; Gosling, 2013).

Teaching and learning projects can occupy an alternative space, outside the prevailing constraints of the organisational decision making, which can liberate those who have a shared passion for innovation in teaching. Projects can be a huge benefit to those who are sympathetic to their aims.

It's allowed those people who are interested in learning and teaching permission to be interested in learning and teaching. It's offered them that sort of support that if it wasn't there it would be a very demoralising activity. (C6ND)

It is in this sense that projects function as heterotopias, real for those involved, but somehow distanced from mainstream realities and in a sense 'unreal'. Within this space, however, individual academics and technical staff are able to develop new skills and conduct research

into student learning and teaching practices which can then be applied to contexts outside the project. Strong team loyalties are typically built up within the projects as an embattled minority driven by strong convictions. The heterotopic space then becomes a fertile place for capacity building and knowledge creation. These spaces also, in Foucault's phrase, 'expose' the practices which pass for being 'normal' by showing what can be done if different priorities are pursued. It is through this exposure that taken-for-granted assumptions can be re-imagined and disrupted (Quinn, 2012).

However, achieving this heterotopic space is difficult and sometimes emotionally draining.

Yes, it has been a positive experience, yes it has, but bloody hard, bloody hard work and also the sort of hard work where you work and you think I don't know which direction I'm going in ... So I think probably the first three years are fairly dire in you know, dire in the waking up in the middle of the night with palpitations sort of dire.
(C14)

Projects often struggle in the opening phase to clarify what are realistic goals and to then to persuade others to join in the journey and the hard work needed to reach those goals. Project directors experience frustration, anger, and sometimes confusion, when the original plans for the project need to be revised, sometimes quite radically. Successful project directors are those who can be flexible without losing a sense of the goals to be reached. Although, as we have seen, projects have their own social space, in which the dominant realities of the host institution are reflected and possibly contradicted, they cannot continue to exist for long without adapting to the environment to which they are both external and yet also a constituent part (Baume, Martin et al., 2002). This means that creating 'bridgeheads' with the existing culture and practices of the institution is essential if the project's goals are to be sustained.

It is worth reiterating, by way of a concluding comment, that a willingness to be 'deviant', and a desire to 'compensate' for the shortcomings of the prevailing reality, are both necessary characteristics of innovators (Huber, 2004). Teaching and learning projects can, by providing a safe space for committed innovators to work, be an important test-bed for change. But unless the enthusiasm of innovators can be understood and accepted within the power structures and cultural assumptions of mainstream colleagues, the work of a project tends to disappear, sometimes without trace, at the end of the funding period.

Bionote

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Acknowledgement

The research on which this paper is based was carried out jointly with Dr Rebecca Turner, Plymouth University. However, the argument of this paper is the responsibility of the author alone.

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