

The Transformative Potential of Engagement with Scholarship

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ABSTRACT: Professional practice and institutional culture can be transformed and transformative when they critically engage with and challenge long-standing individual and collective habits of mind. By supportively creating space to raise awareness of and critically reflect on assumptions about professional practice, roles and identity, new perspectives emerge with important implications for both teachers and their students (Mezirow 1991; 2000; Kreber 2013; Cranton 2016).

Over a period of 3 years, an initiative among teaching-focused academics in the School of Modern Languages and Cultures at Durham University (UK) set out to review understandings of and engagement with the scholarship of teaching and learning. This involved the development of a detailed, operationalised definition of scholarship within the context of the School, the broader discipline of Modern Languages, and Higher Education more generally. Other concrete steps were taken, including introduction of an annual scholarship review and the closer integration of scholarship into procedures for career progression and promotion. Teaching-focused academics were encouraged to develop their scholarship activities, participate in and organise scholarship-related events and to actively seek to support each other professionally through the sharing of such activities internally and the dissemination of appropriate outputs externally.

This paper presents a case-study analysis of faculty engagement with scholarship, involving 3 participants, all teaching-focused academics at different stages in their careers. The data analysed is derived from semi-structured interviews in which participants were encouraged to develop narratives of their own experiences and perceptions of professional practice and identity before and after introduction of the School's scholarship initiative (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009; Yin 2009; Richards 2015). The case-study approach allows us to nuance and refine conclusions drawn from our reading of the research literature, and from quantitative data collected as part of a broader study.

The paper will argue that efforts to *reinterpret* scholarship and promote an *engaged* approach to it (Kreber 2013) have been transformative in terms of teachers' professional practice and identity and, at the same time, have enhanced student learning and the student learning experience.

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