Talking to the teachers

Lisa Emerson
School of English and Media Studies
Massey University
L.Emerson@massey.ac.nz
Structure of the research: Parker Palmer

• What do we teach?
• How do we teach?
• Why do we teach?
• Who is the I that teaches?
The “what” question - what subjects shall we teach?

• Think about your own teaching: What is your core curriculum now? What should it be? Or what would you like it to be?
• As a university, what should our overall core curriculum be?
• Should we teach values? Do we now? Should we? If so, what?
• Should we teach core competencies? Do we now? If so, what?
The “how” question - what methods are needed to teach well?

• How should we teach? Is the lecture format inherently bad? Is knowledge transmission always pedagogically limited?
• Should all learning be active or activity based – problem solving etc?
• Should the learner be the centre of the learning experience – always?
• What is the role of technology? How does it affect how we teach? Are there any dangers here?
The “why” question – to what ends do we teach?

• Are we teaching our students to do or to be? What should be our aim here?
• Who (or what) do we want our students to be or do in the world?
• What do our students think is our core purpose as – as teachers? As a university?
• Do we have – or should we have - a broader social purpose? What should it be?
• Do you have a particular metaphor that you think describes knowledge? What are the implications of your metaphor?
The “who” question – who is the self that teaches?

• Think about a specific situation/episode when your teaching was superb. What was it that made it so successful – for you, for your students?
• How often do you get that experience? What stops you from having that experience more often?
• The student as “customer”. What does this imply about our relationship with our students? If they are the customer who are we? Are you happy in this role? Why or why not?
The “who” question – who is the self that teaches?

- Is a different model or metaphor available for us to describe the relationship between student and teacher? If so, what are the implications?
- What could the institution do to enable a positive experience of teaching more often – and to sustain you in good teaching?
Why: the purpose of teaching

• **Students should leave the university with the ability to continuously learn.**

• **Our purpose: to create engaged, versatile, and flexible learners who are positive agents for change in their communities and the world.**

• **I don’t think we want to simply train functionaries for the “knowledge economy” – we want critical, engaged, creative people…Engaged citizens. That’s the first consideration**
Why: the purpose of teaching

- What do we want students to be? Leaders. The person who has the capacity and capability to shape the future in whatever situation/organisation they are in. …
- I wish that my students would become more confident, articulate, passionate, and highly motivated individuals.
- We want our students to be successful at what they do – to have the skills, knowledge, passion, ability to diversify, and be innovative in their field
Who we want our students to be?

- I believe we have a wider social purpose as questioners in society, challenging existing thinking, going beyond the technical satisfaction of commercial and government requirements. We need to facilitate critical thinking and reflection.

- We must provide a learning experience so students learn why something happens, or opens them to others’ experiences, so they have a wider worldview; it will also helpfully teach/breed tolerance and understanding.
Staff views of student perceptions

• Students unfortunately think our core purpose is to provide the exact knowledge required, in just the right form, that allows them the best possible grades.

• Sometimes I think students think our core purpose is to give them information, so that they don’t actually have to do anything. They can just absorb information.

• Our students see their lecturers as people who will give them the answers to their assessment questions, so they can pass with as little of their own input as possible.
Purpose: do we know?

- I believe our students should know what our core purpose is...both as teachers and as a university. However, I don’t think we communicate this with them at all well, if at all. In fact I’m not sure if we (teachers at university) are very clear about this.
What do we teach?

• *We also need to teach to fill society’s knowledge needs, as knowledge is not just an individual commodity, but one that serves wider purpose.*

• *With my own teaching, the core curriculum is largely about theoretical outcomes. I believe we should be moving towards a more applied focus whereby concepts are tested in real world situations.*
What do we teach?

- Core curriculum needs to include: sustainability, global citizenship, local culture and heritage and multi-literacies.
- Perhaps we should teach the principles underlying the humanities, the sciences and business/commerce as a core, though through functionally orientated courses rather than through theory/history.
Competencies and values

- There should be a set of core competencies explicitly taught (graduate attributes tie into this). I don’t believe we have a clear idea of what these are now. It certainly isn’t explicit.
- Competencies: yes, because these underpin the core idea of ‘doing’ i.e. the capability to apply knowledge; they are essential to have a ‘distinctiveness’ of our students as they leave and graduate.
Competencies and values

• *How can a university as a critic and conscience of society teach values? It should be teaching students to understand, critique and debate the values inherent in the discipline, the way it is taught, the way it is assessed.*

• *Values are always present in our teaching so I think we should stop and reflect as to what values we are teaching more than what values we want to impart.*
• The lecture format is not inherently bad – but needs to be viewed as the seed of teaching from which the students gain inspiration and gain overview of the ideas.

• Inspiring lectures are wonderful and students can experience them as if the lecturer was talking to them directly one-to-one…
Teacher experiences of teaching (the “who” question)

- How often do you get a good experience of teaching?
  - Frequently: 21%
  - Often: 19%
  - Occasionally: 43%
  - Rarely: 16%
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Barriers to satisfying teaching</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Conflicts regarding time</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Curriculum/content/timetable issues</td>
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<td>• Teacher’s limitations</td>
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<td>• Issues around students</td>
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<td>• Lack of resources</td>
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<td>• Other</td>
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Removing the barriers

- Five clear categories of response emerged here:
  - Resourcing (including time) 33%
  - Culture (including valuing of teaching) 32%
  - Professional development 13%
  - Curriculum issues 13%
The culture of the university

- Publically promote, profile, value good teaching. Ramp it right up as an important activity.
- Recognise and encourage time spent learning/working on/improving teaching
- Truly support teaching excellence - through the promotion process and not just pay lip service to this idea.
Metaphors and models: the consumer model

- Agreed with this model 42%
- Disagreed with this model 58%

- *I firmly believe we are providing a service to our “customers” and to society more broadly. I am very comfortable in that role. We are here to serve, not to impose our views or agendas on learners. Students pay for our services and have the right to the best quality service.*
Metaphors and models: the consumer model

- It’s a bankrupt metaphor which constructs students as passive purchasers of something they supposedly already know they want.
- [this image] leads to a power relationship that prevents a true co-learner situation.
- I’m not a shop assistant at the Massey retail store of Higher Education.
- No-one assesses me on the coke and fries I purchase.
Metaphors and models: Alternatives

- Co-learner 28.5%
- Facilitator 23.5%
- Resource 19%
- Mentor 17%
- Guide 17%
- Coach/helper 9%
- sherpa, friend, inspirer, shepherd, supporter, parent, troublemaker, inspirer, fool, artist, learning partner, learner as “inventor”, teacher as “hockey mum”, cross pollinator, navigator…..
Metaphors and models: Alternatives

• They are seekers, explorers. We are mediators, mentors and guides. We should emphasise their discovery
• We are colleagues, but with a serious duty-of-care dimension and life responsibility for guiding our students’ learning
• It is about guiding, facilitating a student’s potential, sense of self, purpose, to nurture and encourage confidence, passion and interest
• I am a traveller with them, in their university journey. I see things as they travel that they may miss.
Conclusions

• Staff have high ideals about the purpose of teaching
• Staff are generally openly and flexibly engaged with pedagogical issues
• Longing for a relationship with students which is facilitative and open
But...

- A majority to staff do not often have positive experiences of teaching
- They perceive a disjunction between their own ideals and sense of purpose and the ideals and purpose of students
- Constrained by a model that promotes an imbalance of power.
- Constrained by resources, lack of confidence, and a cultural context which does not value teaching
Things to ponder

- To what extent does this data suggest opposing views of education operating in the university?
- If so, is the conflict generalisable (in any way)?
- When do we talk about this conflict? (especially in the light of changing government policy)
- Should it be resolved? How?
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“The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitation, remains a location of possibility” (bell hooks, 1994, p. 207)

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