Research and Teaching: a holy or an unholy alliance?

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Context 1: sociological and policy

- Mass higher education
- Differentiation of mission across institutions
- Knowledge society
- Selectivity in research funding
- Quality audit
- ie, each university has to be ‘excellent’ in T but not in R
- So: ‘teaching universities’
Context 2: philosophical & historical

- Part of the idea of the university that R and T are inseparable
- Assumption that R informs T and (less strongly) that T informs R
- The university is essentially a site of critical knowing; of systematic inquiry
- R and T are but two aspects of such critical inquiry
- The western univ tradition: Von Humboldt; USA; UK

The myth of an idea

- Until recently (1950s), even Oxford was primarily a teaching institution; and on some measures all universities are still primarily teaching institutions.
- On the other hand, research has become the dominant ideology in universities: prestige, identity, economic capital
- Far from supporting each other, R and T are pulling apart; universities in the UK have separate R and L&T strategies;
- Successful researchers buy themselves out of teaching; the reverse doesn’t happen.
- Within departments, R and T are in tension: students can’t gain access to research-oriented staff for they are often absent, even as academic globetrotters
- Contrasting identities arise for researchers and for teachers.
Research and teaching: relationships in practice

6 relationships:
• R supports T
• T supports R
• T and R are mutually supportive
• T and R are separate
• T and R are antipathetic, with T dominant
• R and T are antipathetic, with R dominant

All these relationships can be found, within a single university; and many can be found within a single department.

R supports T

Again, different relationships:
• The academic staff are researchers and see their T as a space in which to project and disseminate their R
• T is an activity in which to imbue students with the values and perspectives of R
• T is an activity in which students come to understand the latest R by exposure to recent R papers; but the academics aren’t doing that R themselves
• T is an activity in which students assist academics with the academics’ own R
• T is an activity in which students conduct their own R
Some questions

When we say that R supports T, is it that:
• the academics are teaching on R that they are currently conducting?
• or that the academics are teaching on R that they have conducted?
• or that the academics are teaching on R that others in the same U have conducted?
• or that the academics are teaching on R that others somewhere are conducting
• or that the academics are teaching on R that others somewhere conducted somewhere at some time past?
- and is the R content or process or culture?
ie the claim that R does or should inform T is inherently ambiguous.

Never the twain shall meet

• T is inherently more complex than R
• For it involves R in some way but goes beyond it
• T has its own demands – of promoting learning; of engaging with students; of enabling students to make progress
• T is now attracting interest in its own right
• For too long, T has been seen simply as an adjunct of R
• Now, university teaching is on the point of becoming a new profession
• So perhaps T and R should be kept apart, conceptually and practically?
(and some universities are doing this, separating the different forms of academic labour.)
A holy or an unholy alliance?

- The idea of the university calls for *some* kind of positive relationship between R and T
- They offer a holy alliance in the realisation of the university
- But in practice they may form an unholy alliance
- For R may actually damage T (R becoming an ideology)
- And T may diminish R

Towards a feasible utopia

- A feasible utopia – we shall probably never see it but it is possible
- So what might a new set of relationships between R & T look like – that might be utopian but still is feasible?
- - a set of relationships that enable R and T both to flourish without impeding the other, if not actually supporting each other (for that latter might be hoping for too much).
Spaces of the university

• Let us conceive of R and T as spaces in the university
• Two questions: how have R & T been as spaces?
• How might they be?
• The relationship between R&T varies across institutions and disciplines – in practice, one has tended to occlude the other (hide it from view)
• But perhaps more positive relationships might be possible.

Complex spaces

• Overlapping spaces but visible
• Interacting, liquid spaces
• R and T - themselves complexes of spaces
• T: pedagogical space; curricula space
• R: R as such but also
• Scholarly, reflective space
• Engaged space – R as active in the world (Mode 3)
• Intellectual and discursive space
Supercomplex spaces

• The supercomplex university is a university in which its core assumptions and principles are continually interrogated
• The spaces that comprise this university are continually in-the-making.
• Nothing is frozen, or inert or exhibits discursive power/ideology, seeking to dominate (science/religion/bureaucracy/…)
• This is a university that welcomes difference – of thought, of action, of identity
• R & T are continually on the move; new patterns, new shapes, new engagements
• - as the university and society come to new accommodations with each other
• Seeing R & T as clusters of activities can help to reshape and realise anew the university in the modern age

Wisdom – a unifying idea?

• A number of unifying ideas have been offered: ‘learning’; ‘inquiry’; ‘criticality’; ‘scholarship’; ‘intellectual love’
• Perhaps ‘wisdom’?
• ‘Wisdom’ – a capacity to step outside of one’s immediate frame of reference and bring other perspectives to bear
• Both R and T are paths to wisdom? Both are utopian ideas.
• But, even if this is the case, what then?
• Nothing follows from the observation
• Except that the idea of wisdom offers us a guiding light in moving forward: no one idea/principle but multiple ideas and possibilities to provide multiple perspectives; multiple identities.
Conclusion

- The university is in need of new thinking
- A new conception of the relationship between R & T can help
- Seeing R & T as liquid shapes
- The university is a set of fluid and expanding shapes, finding new internal and external patterns
- In this way, the university may yet be reborn.