Developing the Theory and Practice of Higher Education through Pedagogic Research

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UK Higher Education

- University study is big business: 2.27 million students paying up to £9000 tuition fees, with increasing interest rates
- Increasingly global market for HE
- Diversified UK sector (private/ public)
- Popularity of students as partners model
- **Increasing auditing of academic activities using peer review and metrics (REF and TEF)**
What is pedagogic research?

Pedagogic research as ‘a contested term’ (Cannon, 2001)

- Pedagogy – ‘the art or science of teaching’ (OED), suggests teaching in any sector
- Yet Greek root ‘paid’ (anglicised to ‘ped’) means child
- The term ‘andragogy’ preferred by some (e.g. Knowles 1984)
- However, ‘pedagogic research’ in the UK generally used to refer to Higher Education teaching and learning research!
Pedagogic research crossing boundaries

Boyer (1990) articulated four distinct types of scholarship:

- the scholarship of discovery research;
- the scholarship of integration, including the writing of textbooks;
- the scholarship of service, including the practical application of knowledge;
- the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL)
Why do pedagogic research?

• Provides crucial evidence to underpin developments to the teaching, assessment and the student experience

• May enhance possibilities for career development/promotion

• May be useful for underpinning submissions to the REF or TEF
What are the pitfalls in focusing on pedagogic research?

• Can lack credibility as researchers
• Time constraints limit engagement with pedagogic research
• Limited expertise if researching outside own discipline
• Difficulty of finding collaborators
• Poor promotion prospects

Pedagogic research: the ‘Cinderella’ of Academia

“Though often patronised with words of encouragement, it has not really been recognised or valued by the 'ugly sisters' of the QAA and in particular the Research Assessment Exercise.” (Jenkins, 2002, p.1).
Pedagogic research publications

- Between 2000 and 2010, Tight (2012) identified a striking increase in the volume of high quality higher education research published in peer reviewed international journals.
- 59% of these papers were focused on teaching and learning, course design, or the student experience.
- This challenges the popular view of pedagogic research as being of “little intellectual value beyond the improvement of an individual’s practice in a localised context.” (Macfarlane, 2011, p. 127)
The Research Excellence Framework (REF)

- Research quality assessments used for many years in UK and internationally (e.g. Australian ERA)
- Changes for REF2014 included the introduction of evaluation of impacts beyond academia
- Rules for REF2020 as yet unknown...

Pedagogic research has an ‘uncomfortable’ relationship with research evaluation processes
REF and pedagogic research

PedRIO undertook a research project, aiming to explore issues surrounding the submission and value of higher education (HE) pedagogic research within the 2014 REF.

It included a desk-based study exploring outputs and impact case studies submitted to the Education UoA, as well as 15 telephone and face-to-face interviews with UoA coordinators and other stakeholders.

Under-representation of pedagogic research in the REF

Analysis of interview data offered several competing explanations for the seemingly low submission rate of HE pedagogic research. These can be summarised as follows:

• HE pedagogic research did not meet the quality threshold for REF
• HE pedagogic research was not well understood by the UoA coordinators
• Political issues limited the submission of HE pedagogic research

Pedagogic research and quality

Some pedagogic research was described as follows:

• “...micro level classroom based work which was worthy in its own way but wasn’t REF-able you know... had no theory in it”

• “A lot of the stuff I saw was too small samples to be treated seriously ... good kind of professional development work and necessary work but not REF work”

Even for research which did make it into the REF, the Education sub panel reported patchiness in quality, with some outputs:

• “insufficiently theorised to make a contribution to knowledge and/or was low in rigour, with poor use of statistical data or inappropriately selective reporting of qualitative data” (REF 2014, p. 107).
Pedagogic research and UoA co-ordinators

It was sometimes difficult for UoA co-ordinators in a School of Education to identify:

• “the hidden researchers into pedagogy who permeate the system but are not generally valued in their own departments”

In addition, there was a need for coherence in the submission:

• “I was quite keen to keep everything simple and straightforward as it were ...”

Some queried whether UoA co-ordinators understood HE research:

• “There are two pros who give us a lot of attention, that are very supportive... On the other hand, do they understand our work? Do they understand our methodologies and our approaches we use? I don't know, you know, they are school teachers.”
The politics of pedagogic research and the REF

• “If you’re not part of the REF crowd you don’t get involved in the REF process, and to be honest, because I’ve had so much other stuff to do I haven’t busied myself with it too much.”

• “In this University, politics play a big part, only the School of Education staff were returned, which is infuriating.”

• “What we are seeing already is ... the split off of research from teaching... we have increasing numbers of staff who will be moved onto teaching and learning contracts.”

• “There were some the uni could not submit as they were not on the right contracts and they wouldn’t adapt them – One person was so disappointed she left.”
Pedagogic research enhances REF: UoA 25 Research Power ranking (n=76)

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<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>University</th>
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<td>1</td>
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The Future? REF 2021

Opportunities: Stern review recommendations suggest increased focus on research intensity (more people submitted) and impacts which might include those on higher education.

“...we are recommending that the REF impact element more broadly recognises the impact of research on teaching” (Stern, 2016, p. 31)

“I think that to go into the next REF, we need to double that scale ... the big players are the ones that are going to gain the big money and at that point I think you are in a very interesting area of discussion because there were [HE pedagogy] people out in the faculties [who weren’t included]” (Kneale et al., 2016, p.22)
The Future? REF 2021

Challenges: There is still some way to go to overcome the credibility issues which pedagogic research has:

“...it is clear that to progress to the most senior positions, a research record is usually needed, and that pedagogical research is not valued as highly as other disciplinary research.” (Locke, 2014, p. 24)
The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)

In an effort to enhance the status of teaching in HE, the UK government committed to a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) which aims to recognise and reward universities which provide excellent learning and teaching.

Universities which participate will be awarded a Bronze, Silver or Gold rating in the TEF.
The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)

“I think the TEF is an attempt by the government to say that teaching matters. There are anecdotal stories about universities not taking teaching seriously and that’s... going back at least a decade in my experience. So I can see what’s being attempted here. The government is actually trying to rebalance the focus of institutions towards teaching.”

(Sir Steve Smith, vice-chancellor of Exeter University, in Fazackerley, 2017)
TEF – What it is hoping to achieve

- Provide an excellent (measurable) teaching experience
- Ensure teaching has equal status with research - staff promotion
- Social mobility - widening participation, better retention and progression to further study or a graduate job
- Provide students with the information they need to judge teaching quality
TEF Year Two: Assessment Criteria

- Teaching Quality
- Student Engagement
- Valuing Teaching
- Rigour and Stretch
- Feedback
- Learning Environment
- Resources
- Scholarship, Research and Professional Practice
- Personalised Learning
- Student Outcomes and Learning Gain
- Employment and Further Study
- Employability and Transferrable Skills
- Positive Outcomes for All

Positive Outcomes for All
## TEF Metrics

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<th>Teaching Quality</th>
<th>Learning Environment</th>
<th>Student Outcomes</th>
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<td>Student feedback about ‘The teaching on my course’ (from the National Student</td>
<td>Student feedback about ‘Academic support’ (from the National</td>
<td>Employment/further study (from Destination of Leavers in HE survey, DLHE)</td>
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<td>Survey, NSS)</td>
<td>Student Survey, NSS)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student feedback about ‘Assessment and feedback’ (from the National Student</td>
<td>Non-continuation (withdrawal) rate (from Higher Education</td>
<td>Highly skilled employment/ further study (from Destination of Leavers in HE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Survey, NSS)</td>
<td>Statistics Agency, HESA, data)</td>
<td>survey, DLHE)</td>
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- Three year averages
- Separate metrics for full time and part time students; each split by various characteristics
- All metrics benchmarked depending on the student intake
Concerns about TEF metrics

• Are students well-placed to evaluate teaching? Evidence shows that student evaluations positively correlate with the grade they receive on that course.

• Some studies have found teaching effectiveness to be negatively correlated with student evaluations. (Braga *et al.*, 2014)

• Student evaluations of teaching are significantly correlated with instructor gender, with students regularly rating female instructors lower than male peers. (Boring, 2015; MacNell *et al.*, 2015)
Gendered Language in Teacher Reviews

This interactive chart lets you explore the words used to describe male and female teachers in about 14 million reviews from RateMyProfessor.com.

You can enter any other word (or two-word phrase) into the box below to see how it is split across gender and discipline: the x-axis gives how many times your term is used per million words of text (normalized against gender and field). You can also limit to just negative or positive reviews (based on the numeric ratings on the site). For some more background, see here.

Not all words have gender splits, but a surprising number do. Even things like pronouns are used quite differently by gender.

Search term(s) (case-insensitive): use commas to aggregate multiple terms

funny

TEF Provider submission

This consists of up to 15 pages of additional information that provide an opportunity to:

- Add **additional context**, such as mission
- Support or **explain performance against the metrics**
- Put forward additional **evidence against the assessment criteria**
- Further explore **performance for specific student groups**
TEF Provider submission

Most are not yet published but we have some information about what kind of evidence was included:

- External awards (University of the Year, National Teaching Fellowships etc)
- Proportion of staff with a teaching qualification or accreditation
- Links with industry and local employers
- Information about physical and digital facilities
- Process for (and results of) internal course and lecturer evaluation activities
- Quotes from external reviews of teaching
- Curriculum development initiatives
- Internal reward and recognition schemes
Examples of TEF provider submissions

Some Universities have already published their provider submissions. They include:

- Nottingham University
  https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/about/documents/tef/tef-feb2017.pdf

- Kings College, London University
  https://www.kcl.ac.uk/study/learningteaching/kli/Teaching-Excellence-Framework/KCL-TEF-submission.pdf
How is pedagogic research included in TEF submissions?

1. It illustrates an evidence-based university enhancement culture

A culture of continuous improvement underpins teaching and learning through student feedback and representation, annual action plans, pedagogic research, and feedback from external examiners and PRSBs. Where issues for students are identified (such as additional support needs), these inform enhancement activities. For example, first year surveys led to development of an early identification tool for students to self-assess study skills and be provided with advice and links to further support (UoP)
How is pedagogic research included in TEF submissions?

2. It offers evidence of impact and effectiveness of enhancement activities

We recognize that, along with other HEIs, we have a BME student attainment gap. In order to address this we established a BME Student Success Project, based on research with BME students, which set Faculty KPIs in 2015-16. We have subsequently reduced the attainment gap from 8% to 4%. (KCL)
How is pedagogic research included in TEF submissions?

3. It provides alternative metrics to evidence teaching excellence

The University’s first year experience survey (2014) indicated that 94% of students were satisfied with their programme, and more than two thirds were happy with the level of interaction with other students and academic staff. (UoP)
How is pedagogic research included in TEF submissions?

4. It exemplifies the university’s approach to staff development around teaching

*With respect to pedagogic practice and research, we have developed and introduced a scheme to support staff members in their applications for Fellowship with the HEA (Notts)*

*KLI has been running a well-established Annual Excellence in Teaching conference for 10 years, which provides an opportunity to encourage practitioner research, and allows staff to share best practice and engage with international speakers. (KCL)*
Where does this leave us as pedagogic researchers?

Only one specific mention of ‘educational research’ in TEF guidance:

“Impact and effectiveness of innovative approaches, new technology or educational research” (Listed as possible example of evidence of Teaching Quality)

However, many opportunities to use pedagogic research to provide evidence against the criteria.
Examples of evidence for TEF include:

- Impact and effectiveness of schemes focused on monitoring and maximising students’ engagement with their studies.
- Impact and effectiveness of innovative approaches, new technology or educational research.
- Impact and effectiveness of feedback initiatives supporting students’ development, progression and achievement.
- Use and effectiveness of learner analytics in tracking and monitoring progress and development.
- Impact and effectiveness of initiatives aimed at understanding, assessing and improving retention and completion.
- Learning gain and distance-travelled by all students including those entering HE part-way through their professional lives.
- Evidence and impact of initiatives aimed at graduate employability.
Pedagogic research could be useful...

a) In helping understand and improve the metrics for your university

b) By feeding into the written submission in terms of offering alternative metrics or evidence
The House of Lords forced an amendment to the Higher Education and Research Bill saying that TEF can’t be used to set variable fee levels, arguing that the exercise isn’t ready.

The amendment to the Bill also makes it impossible for the government to use the TEF results to decide which universities can recruit international students.

Results were due to be released this week but they have been delayed because of the election.
Conclusion

The increasing focus on research intensity in the REF together with the need for evidence of impact on students for the TEF submission combine to provide a potential space for further growth in pedagogic research. There are opportunities as well as risks from the new ‘ugly sisters’ of HE.
Thank you for listening!

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If you want to find out more, all the TEF Guidance can be found at:  http://www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/tef/guidance/
References


References


References


