

Learner or Consumer? Market-Led Higher Education, Diversity, Inclusion, and Equality

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Abstract

This paper addresses issues associated with leadership in Higher Education (HE), by drawing on research and debate in relation to the role of education in reproducing social inequalities, and on expertise developed through academic leadership roles in British art schools. It seeks to stimulate discussion about the commodification of HE, which is often perceived as a threat to its accessibility, and therefore to its positive impact in enhancing social mobility, and will argue that it is only a threat if we cling to a culturally conservative belief in value-free learning, which serves only to reproduce the values of the white middle-class intelligentsia. By addressing the question of how to respond to the changing profile of all HE students, in terms of the diverse social and cultural capital which they bring with them, (which shapes what and how they want to learn), this paper will challenge some of the prevailing views about student engagement, from the perspective of an academic whose leadership role includes responsibility for developing learning and teaching strategies to ensure student progression, achievement, and graduate outcomes, and for enhancing the quality of the student experience.

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Introduction

Leadership within a post-'92 British university requires the development and implementation of strategies for change, in response to a number of pressing challenges which are facing the sector, including, (amongst other things), the creation of a market economy in higher education, the changing demographics of its markets, and the changing needs and expectations of students (Amos & Doku, 2019, Bhagat & O'Neill, 2011, Moran & Powell, 2018, and Willis & Gregory, 2016). This paper seeks to stimulate discussion about the marketisation of Higher Education (HE), and contribute to the development of learner-centric pedagogies, which is increasingly important in this context, in order to promote and facilitate changes in practice. It will challenge prevailing views about student engagement, in order to argue that students cannot be understood as *either* just 'learners' or just 'consumers', but must be understood as learner-consumers who will drive innovation in HE, but only *if* a more 'commercial' approach is adopted in the use of student feedback, as a source of market intelligence, by fully recognising that inclusive practice is not about increasing access to HE as it already exists, but about *changing* HE by responding to the needs of its increasingly diverse markets, in order to develop learning cultures which are relevant to the 21st century (McWilliam, 2010).

Many universities in the UK are currently seeking to develop competitive strategies to secure their viability within this new marketised environment. Some of these strategies are focused on



‘selling’ what is already offered (e.g., investment in advertising, re-designed website, and statement buildings). But in order to maintain competitiveness, it is even more important to understand that ‘selling’ is not ‘marketing’ (Brown, 1995), and to implement marketing strategies to *develop* the offer, in response to needs of *all* C21st students (which are now dominated by ‘Generation Z’, who have quite different expectations and aspirations from previous cohorts).

In this context, leadership requires the capacity to recognise these challenges as opportunities to transform HE. Increased competition will allow us to co-create learning experiences which reflect the values of diverse consumer groups (i.e. to become more inclusive), and to promote diversity as a way of providing choice (both through product-differentiation and through a pluralised approach to learning and teaching); in short, to become properly market-led, in contrast with the established ‘research-led’ approach to curriculum development (which has largely failed to drive innovation in learning and teaching).

But this requires the development of a new approach to student engagement which recognises the value of diverse sets of knowledges and competences which students have already acquired and accommodates a far wider range of learning styles (see below). In this context, then, effective leadership depends on the extent to which teaching teams can be influenced and motivated, in response to the challenges faced by the sector, and provided with ways of understanding the ‘learner-consumer’ (see below).

It also involves the development of an inter-disciplinary ‘learning culture’ in response to C21st economic and social contexts (McWilliam, 2010), e.g. by contributing to the ‘STEAM’ (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Mathematics) agenda. The

development of an interdisciplinary learning culture is not the main focus of this paper, and will be explored elsewhere, although it is important to note that it is linked to questions of student engagement – indeed the two projects are mutually dependent.

This requires HE leaders to promote a strong staff-development ethos, and to adopt the role of ‘lead-learner’. This is particularly challenging in a culture which is not only resistant to change, but within which many academics are resistant to the very notion of being ‘developed’, and staff engagement is at least as much of an issue as student engagement.

Learner-consumers

Before entering HE, learners have already acquired literacies and competences which help to determine what and how they want to learn, to achieve their aspirations.

The learner brings an accumulation of assumptions, motives, intentions, and previous knowledge that envelopes every teaching/learning situation and determines the course and quality of the learning that may take place. The teacher may ignore or use this learner-structured framework, but the centrality of the learner is given’. [So] ‘what the student does is actually more important in determining what is learned than what the teacher does’, and the teacher’s role is primarily to adopt ‘a focal awareness of the learner and the learner’s world.....Consequently, teachers should view students’ conceptions from the students’ perspectives, and ‘recognise that substantive learning occurs in periods of conflict, surprise, over periods of time, and through social interaction. (Biggs, 1996, pp. 348-9).

It is not uncommon in art schools though, for teaching to be understood as a process of transforming students from ‘consumers’ (or ‘fans’) into ‘producers’ (professionals). This suggests that the knowledges, competences, and literacies that students bring with them



is not valued as a form of cultural capital (indeed I have often heard it said that students need to unlearn much of what they already know). This understanding is based on a notion of consumers as passive recipients of (rather than active participants in) experiences, and a failure to recognise consumption as a driver of innovation, despite the creative industries' increasing use of 'consumer generated content' and the success of YouTubers and other internet entrepreneurs (who have never been anywhere near an art school, but have found better opportunities to demonstrate creative risk-taking elsewhere).

It has become accepted amongst cultural theorists that identity is always in production, fluid and complex rather than fixed/determined. Identities are performative "temporary attachments to subject positions constructed through discursive practices" (Hall, 1996, p.6). Identities are developed not in a relation of absolute distinction from others, but through parodic copying/emulation and appropriation which creates hybridisation. This cultural promiscuity drives the production of newness and difference and testifies to the "instability and mutability of identities, which are always unfinished, always being remade" (Gilroy, 1993, p. ix).

Consumers are not passive recipients of goods and services, but active participants in their production, and have always driven innovation in the cultural industries. Consumption is the active ('creative') production of socio-cultural distinctions, rather than a passive reflection of distinctions which already exist, and is therefore the vanguard of history (Miller, 1995).

Consumption is always necessarily creative, i.e. selective, eclectic and, above all, *unpredictable*. It is this very unpredictability which explains why reflexivity is so highly valued in the creative industries. Because of consumers' unpredictability, "no one knows" (Caves, 2000,

p.5) what new forms and practices they are going to develop, so the cultural industries need reflexive “cultural intermediaries” (Nixon, 2003, p. 18). Brand-owners are increasingly conscious of how discriminating and sophisticated consumers are, in their expectations that the brand must match their changing values (Noble, 2018), and through the work of cultural intermediaries, industry enables consumers to become the co-creators of their products.

Consumer culture is increasingly fragmented into highly differentiated taste cultures whose habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) articulates the social position of participants. But taste is not the expression of an already-formed identity, because, as has already been acknowledged, identities are performative, never formed but always in production. The exercise of taste is the transformative production of identities.

As consumers, students engage with learning experiences as a range of commodities through which they invest cultural capital, in the transformation of their own identities, and consequently in the development of a global knowledge economy. For example, the graduates of British art schools have arguably driven the success of UK creative industries during the last 60 years. The UK creative industries is now worth £101.5 billion (Bazalgette, 2017), the Creative Industries Clusters Programme has invested £80m in research and development partnerships between regional universities and a network of creative businesses.

It is often assumed that this success is the result of the particular approach to learning and teaching adopted in British art schools, which is practice-based and, (supposedly) student-centred. However, I would argue that this success is not due primarily to a particular pedagogical approach, but to the participation of ‘first generation’ working-class students, which increased the diversity of the student



population. This reflected the impact of post-WW2 multiculturalism and social mobility, brought about by the Education Act of 1944, which provided *opportunities* (Gladwell, 2008) for working-class children, (even though the proportion of working-class students in higher education was still relatively small).

This success is due to the practices involved in using the knowledges and competences which these students had already acquired as consumers of 'popular culture', enabling the products of the creative industries, in which they went on to work, to become much more highly differentiated, reflecting the changing tastes and preferences of more diverse social groups. These students became successful professionals because they became cultural intermediaries, enabling differentiated consumer groups to participate in the development of contemporary culture, as new markets whose tastes and preferences had to be recognised and appealed to, and therefore driving innovation in the creative industries.

Access and Participation

It is now widely accepted that the success of the creative industries depends on the diversity of their workforce (Easton, 2015), because creative practice is driven by the diversity of its participants (Negus & Pickering, 2004), and that widening access to HE is therefore essential. However, widening access to HE does not in itself guarantee inclusive practice in learning and teaching, which would involve recognising and valuing the diversity of students. Education is one of the means by which social and cultural hierarchies are reproduced within a capitalist economy (Bourdieu, 1984), so it cannot be assumed that access to education leads to democratisation. Education is only a means of promoting equality to the extent that it values the different

competencies and literacies which students bring, in order to foster reflexivity, i.e. enables students to develop their own capacity to recognise the forces of socialisation and to consciously change their thinking and behaviour, through *shaping their own* norms, tastes, politics, and desires.

Many British universities aspire to provide learning experiences which not only equip students with the skills to compete in the job market, but to *lead and shape* the future of the industries they will work in, and of the new socio-cultural spaces they will create. For example, the Vision of Kingston University is as follows:

- Our students will be sought after for their academic achievements and their ability to *shape* society and contribute to the economy (my emphasis);

and its Mission is:

- To enhance students' life chances through inspiring learning, advancing knowledge, *innovating* professional practice, and engaging with society (my emphasis).

Kingston School of Art's Vision is to be a unique catalyst for *creative risk-taking* and *cross-discipline collaboration*. A place for *challenging norms, pushing boundaries and exploring the unknown*. [To] *stand at the forefront of thinking, creativity and culture, and redefining the world around us* (my emphasis). And its Mission is to 'fuel a collaborative ethos through which we forge connection with industry and business, bring *innovative thinking*, and solve real world problems.

In order to achieve this, universities have to be able to foster students' reflexivity, which means allowing them to *shape their own* norms, tastes, politics, and desires. And, although British art schools have pioneered 'student-centred' learning, and are increasingly

committed to the concepts of student-led pedagogy and an inclusive and co-created curriculum (Finnegan & Richards, 2015), it has been pointed out that art school pedagogies actually sustain a particular 'habitus' through which culturally-specific values are re-produced (Orr, 2010). This exposes the claim to student-centredness as self-deluding, and explains the striking attainment gaps in art & design HE, even though many students from low-participation groups continue to be excluded from studying at art school in the first place, not only by economic barriers, but also by the cultural conservatism of art schools, which informs a wide range of practices, including admissions.

Admissions practices [in British art schools] ...privilege the habitus, subjectivities and cultural and linguistic capital of 'traditional' students, who tend to come from white, middle-class backgrounds. Although ...designed to be 'fair' and 'transparent', the lack of attention to complex sets of inequalities, differences and mis/recognitions ...undermines the project of widening participation... . The focus on individual practices rather than wider sets of discursive practices helps to hide the workings of inequality in processes of selection. (Burke & McManus, 2009)

These selection criteria are arguably more insidious than traditional academic criteria such as UCAS points because, as the basis of value judgements which become a form of discrimination, they are far more subtle.

[T]he concepts of cultural capital, habitus and field, as conceived by Bourdieu ...are ...perhaps particularly pertinent in Art and Design, where it can be argued that [cultural capital]'s pervasive implications are masked by notions attached to 'creativity' and 'talent'. ...and ...offers a lens through which widening participation can be seen as encouraging a more radical critique of the university and more particularly of Art and Design. ...[T]he 'liberal' nature of Art and Design and the focus on receptivity to more diverse 'talents' and offering the 'fruits of the academy' to wider student populations may in fact stand in the way

of more fundamental changes to education, which a widening participation focus may require. (Bhagat & O'Neill Eds, 2011, p. 21)

The art school habitus is sustained by a number of unquestioned assumptions about practice-based learning and active participation which, far from being student-centred, inform a culturally specific pedagogy. For example, the art school's studio culture depends on a visibly participatory environment which, it is assumed, enables active learning, in contrast with more solitary and/or cerebral activities (such as working at home and/or engaging with the world via the internet), which are assumed to be passive. However, the ways in which this culture privileges middle-class students equipped with particular forms of cultural capital has not been acknowledged. Underpinning such assumptions is a binary active versus passive opposition which seeks to privilege some ways of learning above others and fails to appreciate the wide range of learning styles which different students might prefer or might adopt in different situations. It fails to acknowledge that reading, viewing, thinking, and using social media are just as active (and interactive) as the learning activities which involve visible participation in a particular community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Worse, it marginalises and alienates those learners who do not conform to acceptable forms of student behaviour which are recognised as evidence of engagement.

But I would argue that there is no such thing as passive learning. For example, attendance at lectures is now typically viewed as a form of passive learning, and students who want to be taught are often seen as passive learners. But attending a stimulating and thought-provoking lecture is an opportunity for active critical thinking and the generation of ideas. Students want to be taught because they already know that a good teacher will inspire and motivate them, and as



consumers they (not unreasonably) also see this as value for money. And, not surprisingly, students from underprivileged backgrounds are more concerned with value-for money than their wealthier counterparts.

When asked about their experience of lectures, students frequently report that they find lectures valuable: the “evidence suggests that lectures elicit the lowest levels of anxiety in undergraduates... (and that) students are more engaged, learn better and enjoy themselves more when attending lectures....while students are frequently found to report that they learn less in active (sic) learning contexts” (Garnham, 2018, p. 10).

This binary opposition (active versus passive) underpins prevailing approaches to student engagement, which need to be challenged if we are to succeed in delivering on the aspirations articulated in our Vision and Mission statements. Student engagement is “the process whereby institutions and sector bodies make deliberate attempts to involve and empower students in the process of shaping the learning experience” (HEFCE, 2008, p. 8). British HEIs have invested heavily in ways to capture the student voice, and to measure their levels of engagement with their studies, and in using the data to drive change, via staff development. These data tell us a lot, and especially that *not all students are the same*, e.g. survey data tell us that that students from low participation groups are less satisfied with their courses than those from more privileged backgrounds (Warwick Economics & Development, 2018). However, the relative lack of effectiveness of this investment, so far, suggests that we are not hearing what students are telling us, because the established mono-cultural approach to student engagement is preventing us from hearing it.

Student Engagement

In debates about student engagement, the concept of ‘student as partner’ (SaP) is commonly used in opposition to the concept of ‘student as consumer’ (SaC), and the majority of researchers have argued that approaching students as consumers is associated with a lower academic performance, whereas approaching students as partners enhances their learning (Senior et al, 2017; Curran, 2018).

It has been recognised that there are a number of problems with the ‘students as partners’ approach, including the issue of how to reconcile the power relations between students and staff. Students’ awareness of the power relations between themselves and their tutors helps to explain why some of them might enjoy ‘active’ learning less than lectures, and also why the experience of receiving feedback is perceived by them as de-motivating and unfair. Research has shown that tutors often make judgements about students, (not just their work), when marking and giving feedback (Orr, 2010; Orr & Bloxham, 2013). Research also shows that, far from being supported and enabled, students often feel disempowered by feedback from tutors, which they see as reflecting the values of the tutor (Blair, 2007; Winstone, Nash, Rowntree, & Parker 2017), rather than a recognition of the student’s own values and ambitions.

This issue has been responded to by recognising the complexities of student engagement (i.e., behavioural, emotional, and cognitive) and by ‘recognising the importance of personal growth for both staff and students’ (Curran, 2018), i.e. that both are learners in the partnership, but primarily by simply challenging the ‘customer-provider’ model of HE and what is perceived to be a ‘dominant SaC ideology’.



However, I would argue that this does not reconcile the power relations between students and staff, but simply masks it. This distinction between SaC and SaP is a spurious one, which not only masks the power relations between students and staff, but fails to value the cultural competencies and literacies which students bring with them *as consumers*, and fails to acknowledge the centrality of meaning-making – creating and interacting with diverse forms of representation - to student practices.

As previously mentioned, consumers engage in the transformative production of their identities through the exercise of taste, and we know that students achieve more when they enjoy learning. However, pleasure, and enjoyment are not inherent features of experiences, but the effects of experiences which provide opportunities to use socially-specific skills and competences (cultural capital) which have already been acquired, in the ongoing transformation of self-identity (reflexivity). Students have their own criteria for assessing the value of learning experiences, which is often completely at odds with the values of staff, e.g. lectures rated highly by peer observers are not necessarily rated highly by students, who expect lectures to ‘add value’ to material which could be accessed elsewhere (Smailes, 2018), which explains why students often choose not to attend (Kashif & Basharat, 2014), and the amount of time which students choose to spend on assessments is determined not by the weightings given by academics but by their own tastes and preferences (Attenborough et al, p. 16). Furthermore, students’ perceptions of their own development is partly through their engagement with non-study activities (Neves & Stoakes, 2018).

Students (now) have high expectations of their university experience and what it can offer them in order to improve their lives. Diversity across the sector indicates that there is no one “student experience”; rather individual students

have their own experience. It is therefore our responsibility to provide our students access to ...opportunities ... which will transform their lives. (Shelton, 2018, p. 7).

Research shows that there is no one single element of the student experience that can be controlled to enhance satisfaction. Evidence gathered through research at the University of Derby in 2015 highlighted students' *personal* expectations and priorities, and that student satisfaction is determined not only by motivators (e.g. students' individual goals and achievements, leading to perceived satisfaction when fulfilled), but also by 'hygiene factors' which are beyond the individual's control. The research demonstrated the significance of both academic opportunities, (in relation to which students' priorities are based primarily around intellectual challenge and career aspirations), and of other priorities such as building social networks, which depend on the social and cultural aspects of student life.

This resulted in the introduction of a Student Experience Framework, intended to be inclusive of all learning styles. However, because the University explicitly positions its students as 'partners' but '*not as consumers*' (p. 8, my emphasis), the research neglected to capture the diversity of students' notions of their own 'total' experience, to enable an inclusive understanding of the lived experience of students, so the resulting Framework contradicts the principle that 'there is no one student experience', and re-enforces an established and singular notion of student engagement as 'active participation' in a relatively narrow and prescriptive range of activities, (e.g. international study trips, and involvement in University processes and projects). This re-enforces conservative notions of acceptable student behaviour and, far from embracing diversity, re-asserts the values of the middle-class intelligentsia, for whom these



activities have inherent value. An inclusive Framework would not only recognise a much wider range of forms of 'lived experience' as 'active' engagement, but would embrace the *unpredictability* of what these might be, as the learner-consumer engages in their own self-transformation.

To develop inclusive practices in learning and teaching in response to the changing profile of HE students, we need to develop a more sophisticated socio-material approach to student engagement, where agency is understood to involve objects and artefacts as well as students and staff (Gourlay, 2015; Latour, 2005). To do this, we need to move away from the prioritisation of Student-as-Partner above Student-as-Consumer, by recognising that students are learner-consumers who are actively engaged (as all consumers are) in the development of their own identities through the constant appropriation of objects and experiences, through a wide range of learning styles and modes of interaction.

Participatory culture, and related concepts such as co-creativity, are often associated with the digital world (Leadbeater, 2008), in which the current generation of students have grown up. But it is a mistake to assume that some forms of learning are inherently more participatory than others (Ferreday & Hodgson, 2008). In C21st culture, old and new media have converged (Jenkins, 2006), and consumers choose, in highly unpredictable ways, how and with what to create meaning. Participation is not an effect of the medium or form ('high' vs 'low', analog vs digital), or the spaces (actual or virtual), or the types of learning activities (solitary vs communal, face-to-face vs networked) through which the learner participates – it is an effect of the *practices* involved.

The concept of 'student as partner' masks the power relations between student and academic (and even supports the coercion of students into 'subject positions in the service of the ideologies of the more powerful') because it derives from a discourse where 'participation' is understood only as 'a desirable set of practices' (Gourlay, 2015, p.402, p.404) rather than in terms of the complex day-to-day practices involved in 'being a student', as a temporally situated social practice. These practices involve a range of 'literacies' and competencies which students have already acquired as consumers of a range of media, both new *and* old. But in prevailing discussions of student engagement, what students bring is valued less than what they are *expected* to do, and what appears to support a 'student-centred' ethos is simply a re-enforcement of culturally-specific notions of acceptable student behaviour.

Moreover, normative notions of student behaviour are clearly culturally-specific, and reproduce white middle-class values, which explains why survey data tells us that students from low-participation groups are less satisfied with their course than those from more privileged backgrounds.

Students are the (co-)creators of their own learning experience, through the active appropriation of the resources which universities provide. Like all consumers, students are learning all the time, and making their own choices about what is interesting, appealing, useful, meaningful, enjoyable i.e. they are *discriminating* and *reflexive*. This might mean *not* engaging with some aspects of their course, and selecting and appropriating objects, images, and experiences (none of which are inherently more 'interactive' than others), to create their own hybrid knowledges and competences, in building on their already acquired cultural capital.



The 'student-as-partner' approach to student engagement fails to acknowledge the centrality of meaning-making – creating and interacting with forms of representation - to student practices and subjectivities. 'The day-to-day business of being a student is saturated with a range of complex textual (including the visual and the multimodal) practices, both face-to-face and online. These texts are not merely means of information transfer, but are constitutive of both disciplinary and individual knowledge, and also *identities*' (Gourlay, 2015, p. 406, my emphasis). Students engage with a huge range of both digital and analog texts, via a complex range of both digital and analog spaces, and it is this *hybrid* setting within which student engagement takes place, i.e. student engagement is a socio-material practice. Student engagement is identified by Gourlay as residing in networks of agency involving mobile devices and computers as well as books, artefacts and other objects which are usually thought of as merely tools or inert materials. But these texts are constantly being 'appropriated' by students and re-used in the practice of meaning-production, and in developing their own identities.

An approach which privileges student-as-partner over student-as-consumer arguably *stifles* students' reflexivity, by failing to value whatever cultural competencies and literacies they bring with them, regardless of the types of media with which students have interacted to acquire them, and regardless of the types of learning activities through which they wish to develop them.

Conclusion

An increasingly competitive landscape provides HE leaders with the opportunity to actively demonstrate commitments to student-centredness and inclusivity, by recognising that students are learner-consumers, actively engaged (as all consumers are) in the development of their own identities.

Some of the universities in the UK which have made some progress in narrowing the BME attainment gap have achieved this by recognising (implicitly at least) that students are learner-consumers, in that they have socially and culturally specific values and tastes through which they develop their own identities. For example, Kingston University London (Amos & Doku, 2019, p. 30) has introduced an Inclusive Curriculum Framework which seeks to ensure that individual learners see themselves reflected in the curriculum (just as the producers of all commodities seek to ensure that consumers see themselves reflected in their products), and De Montfort University has established a pedagogical model (Universal Design For Learning) which reflects an awareness of the unique needs of individual learners in a wide variety of learning contexts, to create learning experiences that remove barriers from the learning environment, which provides students with choices about how they acquire information, and with multiple means of engagement which take into account learners' interests and preferences, and which allows learners to demonstrate their understanding in alternative ways (Merry, 2018).

The commodification of HE is often perceived as a threat to its accessibility, but access is not in itself inclusive, indeed it can be just the opposite. I argue that it is only a threat if we cling to a culturally conservative belief in value-free learning, which serves only to reproduce the values of the white intelligentsia. This belief underpins



the binary SaC v SaP opposition which is not only spurious, but is preventing HE from developing innovative practices, despite all its rhetoric.

In a highly competitive environment, leadership in HE is, above all else, about enabling innovative practice to flourish. Creative industries learned long ago that innovation does not 'trickle-down' but is consumer-led (King, 1973), and the history of consumer cultures shows us that markets are complex, continually shifting, and subject to fragmentation, because consumers are increasingly reflexive and therefore unpredictable.

HE is lagging behind the creative industries in its failure to value students as consumers. This would require a willingness to take risks (as with any market-orientated enterprise), but increased competition, league tables and TEF metrics have tended (so far) to intensify the risk-averse tendencies of HEIs.

Innovation in HE is too often understood simply as a matter of promoting 'new' tools (e.g. 'technology enhanced learning'), and, without a more sophisticated approach to student engagement, this merely de-values some learning activities and re-enforces a spurious distinction between 'active' and 'passive' engagement.

The notion of students as co-creators of their learning is a 'wicked problem' for universities (Willis & Gregory, 2016), but academics protest that a co-creation is *not* to be confused with being driven by conspicuous consumption (Senior, Moores, & Burgess, 2018). Consequently, while "co-creation is often spoken about as a pedagogical strategy ... there is little evidence of implementation" (Willis & Gregory, 2016, p. 1), and it is reduced to merely enabling the student voice, through which good NSS (National Student Survey) results can be used to justify the *lack* of innovation.

Similarly, while all universities now claim to enhance students' employability, there is little evidence of new pedagogical strategies to support this. For example, we know that interdisciplinarity has driven innovation in the creative industries, because media and practices have converged, and 'hybrid' practitioners are more likely to progress to professional jobs (Cox, 2005; Bakhshi, Hargreaves, & Mateos-Garcia, 2013; Bakhshi & Yang, 2018). Yet most students are still taught by a relatively small course team, without access to the expertise in other departments, and the majority of academics are entirely focused on their own discipline, encouraged to do this by an environment where curriculum currency is reduced to 'research informed teaching', and where 'research' is almost always subject-based.

Many practices in HE have remained unchanged for more than a century, and the failure to innovate is due to a failure to recognise that innovation is consumer-led. Effective leadership would promote a staff development ethos to support teaching as a creative practice, i.e. which is responsive to change, for example by considering how we seek out problems as a stimulus for creative thinking, and develop new ways of working within constraints, rather than viewing them merely as threats to established practices.

While many academics colleagues are engaged in pedagogical research, and often showcase impressive examples of innovative practice at learning and teaching conferences, these individuals often struggle to disseminate innovative practice within their own institutions, where innovation in learning and teaching is not incentivised or recognised except in tokenistic ways.

HE leaders need to ensure that research and staff development strategies are focused on curriculum currency, informed by the knowledges, literacies and aspirations which *all* students bring with



them, (rather than on the discipline/subject). An understanding of culture as ‘participatory’ requires acknowledgement that knowledge is never value-free, and that its production is always contextualised by and contingent upon, socio-economic circumstances. The purpose of HE is not, therefore, to compensate for an assumed unequal distribution of competences and literacies, but to recognise what *all* students bring to their learning, to encourage them to use these resources, and to value the unexpected ways in which they might do this.

Therefore, a wider, more pluralised, range of ways of learning need to be encouraged and accommodated, to reflect a much more heterogenous mix of students, and the diversity of contemporary culture. Curriculum content and assessment strategies need to explicitly recognise that social and cultural diversity is essential in driving innovative practice, because the diversity of contemporary culture is driven by the promiscuity of its participants. This would enable the concept of the learner-consumer to be embraced, and a new approach to student engagement to be developed, allowing *all* students to drive innovation in HE.

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