

Surpassing Others or Surpassing Ourselves? Exploring the Concept of Expertise in Higher Education

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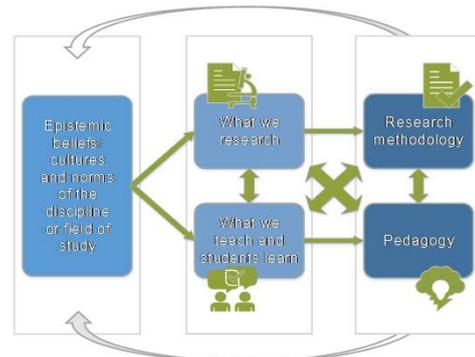
Surpassing others: the trouble with 'excellence'

- ▶ Ambiguous (Gilles, 2007)
- ▶ Lack of clarity between 'threshold' and 'excellent' (Gunn & Fisk, 2014)
- ▶ Self-defined (Gibbs, 2008)

- ▶ Excellence is a state that is achieved, and can't be achieved by everybody
- ▶ Implications for professional development

Surpassing ourselves: the potential of 'expertise'

- ▶ Subject knowledge & skills
 - ▶ Domain specific
 - ▶ Making connections / big picture view
 - ▶ Pattern recognition
 - ▶ Problem-solving
 - ▶ Self-monitoring / meta-cognitive skills
- (Glaser & Chi, 1988)



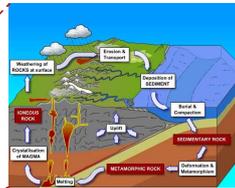
Connecting Research and Teaching in Disciplinary Communities (Clever 2014)

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There are 26 goats and 10 sheep in the barn.
How old is the farmer?

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How is expertise acquired / maintained?

- ▶ Experience alone does not necessarily equate to expertise
- ▶ “Bounce: The Myth of Talent and the Power of Practice” (Syed, 2010)
- ▶ Phases of learning for expert performance (Bloom, 1985; Ericsson et al, 1993):
 1. Playful: regular practice, rapid progress (extrinsically motivated)
 2. Intensive: guided, high expectations, clear goals (intrinsically motivated)
 3. Committed: analysing, overcoming particular difficulties = Deliberate Practice
 4. Eminence: contributing to the field
- ▶ Deliberate Practice = reflective / self-determined / heutigological practice

“Research across domains shows that it is only by working at what you can't do that you turn into the expert you want to become.” (Ericsson et al, 2007)

Expertise as a process

- ▶ “Expertise is a process of progressive problem-solving in which people continuously rethink and redefine their tasks” (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993)
- ▶ Experience: learned patterns & procedures, efficiency, routine, automatic
- ▶ Getting stuck in a rut: reducing problems to be solved by those patterns
- ▶ Progressive problem-solving: doing better things, innovating

- ▶ Excellent – *excellere* (to surpass)
- ▶ Expert – *experiri* (to try: see also 'experiment' and 'experience')

Mapping expertise to excellence

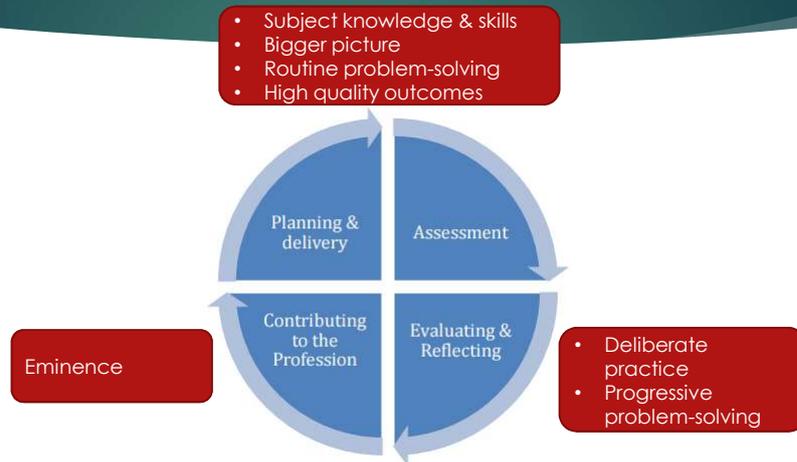


Diagram 4: Central themes of teaching excellence awards
Gunn & Fisk, 2014, pg.25

That was the theory: what about the research questions?

- ▶ What are the characteristics of an expert teacher in HE?
- ▶ How do these characteristics relate to those of general expertise?
- ▶ How are progressive problem-solving and deliberate practice manifested in teachers in HE?
- ▶ What about academic expertise (holistic)?
- ▶ Research methods: what can we learn by comparing experts with experienced non-experts (and how do we find them)?
- ▶ If we can better understand teaching / academic expertise might this help inform academic development (CPD), reward and recognition practices?

Discussion Questions

- ▶ Is (any of) this meaningful in your context (e.g. your own professional practice, in academic development) and, if so, in what ways?
- ▶ What other research questions might we explore?
- ▶ As it stands (without the additional empirical evidence), could this be a useful framework for understanding and developing expertise / excellence in HE teaching?

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