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6. THE ROLE OF VALUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The Fluctuations of Pedagogic Frailty

INTRODUCTION

The values that an individual brings into a university that can help to explain pedagogic approaches begin being formed and adapted from the moment we are born. Each individual has a set of personal values that are informed and then further influenced by a series of unique experiences that are not replicable. As careers develop the personal values an individual has will be influenced, and in some instances significantly altered by the discipline that each has either studied or worked within. This may lead to significant challenge to the personal values that have previously guided an individual's actions. This can lead to moments, or perhaps longer periods of frailty as an individual either adapts or finds appropriate compromises. The context is clearly therefore important. In the UK for example, the narrowing down towards a single disciplinary lens begins when students in schools make selections about subjects to study, and by the time they reach University most are involved in a single discipline. This becomes even more focussed during a PhD. Other educational models however exist and exert a broader disciplinary influence for longer, for example in the USA where students take a broader range of subjects initially at university. The strength of the disciplinary lens therefore is potentially variable. There is subsequently a complex interplay between the personal values an individual has developed since birth and the influence of particular experiences, such as the discipline of study. This chapter examines the importance of values for understanding our approach to learning and teaching and how frailty influences how these adapt drawing on experiences working with academic staff in the UK and a range of veterinary medicine teachers in the USA.

PERSONAL AND SOCIAL VALUES

According to Inlow (1972) these values are highly significant because they form the basis for explaining and understanding the actions that we take as we fulfil our duties, in this case within higher education institutions. It was Breakwell (1986) who posited that the establishment of these values are influenced by our engagement with a variety of groups that each person finds herself or himself

interacting with. For those in academia, many of whom come through a significant period of study within a particular field, either in practice or through study (such as a doctorate), there is a process of socialisation through which a set of values are likely to have been imparted (Smith, 2010). It is therefore within this process of socialisation that identities are likely to be framed and that the personal values that have already been formed are likely to shift and be adapted. As suggested previously (Kinchin, 2016), it is likely that within this process of socialisation that more predominant discourses emanate from a complex range of areas and social groups. The result may be a challenge to how an individual acts and the potential reshaping of the values that an individual has brought into a discipline. These challenges would seem to be most likely to exist at the outset of a career, where the social values brought by groups or institutions are less known and often encountered for the first time.

The discourses around the values held by particular groups are however complex and how an individual responds to them is far from uniform. They are influenced by the context within which the socialisation occurs. While they may come from the discipline, this may also be influenced by a shifting balance between say teaching, research and administration. The discourses may differ therefore at each institution where these balances alter between those institutions that have a greater research focus than those with more of a teaching focus. In fact even within each faculty or department there can be variation with particular groups focussing on research and others on teaching and many of these are often subtle and part of a 'hidden curriculum' (Snyder, 1971). The responses of each individual may adapt as a consequence and a uniform approach or discernible pattern is extremely unlikely (Lygo-Baker, 2006). The unique personal values that an individual arrives with will come into contact with the values that are both explicit and implicit within the new environment. The values that reside within the institution may challenge the personal values held, leading to potential conflict (Breakwell, 1986) and a potential frailty (Kinchin, 2016). The response may be that an individual adapts her or his own approach, incorporating the more dominant social values of the group they find themselves working within. For some this may however provide a significant challenge and Harre (1998) suggests that this may indeed lead to different selves being exhibited. Although the individual may have a core set of values that inform the overall actions they take, it may be that in certain circumstances these are suppressed and an individual acts in ways that enable them to navigate a way through the challenges presented when otherwise their personal values may be exposed and questioned. As such, they take on an adapted self; becoming or exhibiting a set of actions in one role that would not be representative of the values they may display in a different role, in a different setting. So in other words, within an institution the values that inform and direct the 'teacher' self may differ from those that do so for the 'departmental' self or the self that is a 'volleyball coach' outside the institution.

INITIAL ASSUMPTIONS

It may appear logical that for a relatively inexperienced academic faced by the prospect of establishing herself in a new role she is likely to try to find ways to overcome any perceived vulnerability; to seek means that enable her to get over aspects she feels inhibit her capacity to act. Anyone working on an academic development programme will be aware of the understandable request for “tips” to make the initial experience of teaching feel less daunting. Recognising that knowledge about the role that the person has taken on is somewhat limited, it is quite reasonable to expect that an individual will seek answers: ways of knowing about a role from those who appear to have greater experience. For many new academic staff this will be the first experience of having responsibility for the learning of others as a teacher. Faced by significant uncertainty, it is likely that people respond by seeking tips and techniques that provide solutions to perceived areas of weakness. Whilst apparently logical when uncertainty is faced, the suggestion has been made that this may actually result in a cycle of non-learning (Kinchin, Lygo-Baker, & Hay, 2008) and indeed may call into question the role of those supporting the enhancement of understanding about the role of academic development. Subsequently, although the tips and techniques may appear to alleviate initial anxieties, if these disrupt the personal values significantly this may ultimately lead to rejection. It will undoubtedly lead to significant discomfort and what appear to be solutions may actually develop routines that are ultimately less valuable to the development of thinking about how the role can be enacted.

It may therefore appear a reasonable assumption that frailty is something most likely to be encountered at the outset of a career. The increasingly volatile habitat an academic encounters is likely to pose a series of problems and the new academic is likely to have less experience to utilise in order to respond (Brew, 2010). Whilst working with veterinary teaching staff in the USA it became apparent that such assumptions may actually mask some important variations. Discussing the notion of frailty with both residents (qualified veterinarians who are specialising but new to teaching) and more experienced colleagues all initially recognised the term. However, for them initially this related to their work as clinicians, not as teachers. Mostly this was in the context of owners bringing animals to them who were in need of treatment and therefore often ‘frail’. The majority of these were older animals; the frailty corresponding to a lack of appropriate functioning of part or parts of the body. The veterinarians noted that however frailty can also be recognised in younger animals, who also often require attention, particular at or just after birth. Initially the link to academic frailty was not obvious. However, through conversation this evolved to suggest alternative interpretations which may prove to be insightful. The conversation considered how this elliptical view of frailty within the life of an animal that they work with may also be applied within the pedagogical frame.

Frailty at the outset of a career appears to respond to the likely uncertainties of being in areas where not all the answers are clear, as suggested above. Experience cannot be called upon to solve all the situations that are faced as a consequence. This is to be expected and may help to explain how the values that have helped to shape an individual, whilst evolving through periods of academic study, become influenced and adapted more sharply at the beginning of an academic career. Whilst values will exist they are also likely to be more pliable as an individual seeks to find a position within a university and more importantly within an actual department or faculty that causes them less problems and that they are comfortable with. Experience working with newer academics has demonstrated that they are often uncertain because of the complexity of their new position (Jones et al., 2015). There are no clear generalizable rules over this but evidence suggests that individuals are attempting to engage with a variety of discourses (Lygo-Baker et al., 2015). These relate to the administrative elements of the role, becoming more familiar with the quality assurance and expectations of an institution, the discipline and for many a range of professional bodies. The newer academic may also be coming to terms with a realisation that whilst they bring with them a depth of knowledge of a particular component of a discipline, often through a recent doctoral study, they are surrounded by others with a depth of knowledge that is likely to be far greater than theirs. As they enter, excited at the prospect of furthering the knowledge of the discipline, extending the boundaries by asking and forming new questions; they encounter according to Rowland (2002) greater fragmentation of the disciplines than ever before.

This fragmentation can undermine further the personal values that have provided a basis for actions to date and that have helped an individual experience success. In addition, in the majority of positions the new academic is expected to teach and is confronted with an entirely new set of discourses, usually formed around prior and accepted knowledge within the teaching of a discipline. These aspects combined can cause an instability and a range of new 'social' values (Breakwell, 1986) that may disrupt the personal unique values that each new academic comes to their role with. This was found to be the case with trainees in human and veterinary medicine (Lygo-Baker et al., 2015) where the new academic staff noted that whilst the broad narratives were familiar, the actual articulation of these was framed in a set of discourses influenced by contextual factors based on actions that were not always familiar or in line with the expectations and experiences of the staff. This can create a 'culture shock' (Ward et al., 2001), presenting challenges and leaving people feeling uncertain, vulnerable and therefore frail.

Reflecting further on this previous work undertaken with veterinary residents in the United States I am further struck by some overlap between what was originally witnessed and the notions being discussed with more experienced practitioners discussing frailty. After spending time observing these newly qualified staff, many of whom were taking responsibility for clinical decisions and at the same time for the teaching of students, we had identified a series of dynamics that appeared to be useful in explaining how values were being challenged or adapted. Thinking back

the initial expectation was that the trainees were seen to be, at the outset of their new role, frail in terms of both the clinical knowledge and even more in terms of their teaching roles. Through the research undertaken (Lygo-Baker et al., 2015) we had identified four dynamics that helped to explain the journey that the residents were outlining as they aspired to become successful clinical teachers. These are represented within [Figure 1](#). First these new faculty identified themselves as being novices who wanted to move towards being identified as experts. They felt very much that they were individuals who had to demonstrate their worth. They believed that the experienced clinical teachers were able to collaborate across the various roles and functions (for example, oncology to dermatology) which they felt less able to do. As a consequence, they experienced uncertainty. They believed that with time they would continue to gain confidence. However, they focussed initially almost exclusively on their own role and found it difficult to draw across from different clinical ideas and areas.

In further discussions with these staff they described how they sought to develop from the starting positions that they identified towards an alternative position they believed their more experienced colleagues occupied. However, it became apparent that the journey between the extremes identified was not uniform. Whilst there was a general tendency of movement towards one end of the binary, the movement was not continuous in one direction; there were fluctuations. The initial assumption had been that the movement was away from positions that would be defined as exhibiting greater frailty towards those at the opposite (the top circles in [Figure 1](#)) where people were anticipated to profess greater resilience. This journey, we deduced from the research, was influenced by a process of socialisation (Smith, 2010). This related to the values that were drawn from the institution and the faculty itself and combined with the identity of the discipline or role people were involved within. These created a series of social values that potentially enabled people to become more adaptable and more able to sustain their actions. As the individuals spent longer in the role the expectation was that any frailties experienced at the outset would be reduced.

As the academic becomes more experienced the friction felt between personal and social values would be expected to reduce. Through a process of socialisation into the faculty there is likely to be a reduction in the differences as individuals make decisions about where they are uncomfortable and how willing they are to compromise their own personal values and allow the social values to take precedence. It may appear logical to expect therefore that the initial frailty experienced within the first parts of an academic career would slowly become resolved. However, having spent time within academia and observed how people act and where they experience discomfort there may be an alternative interpretation. A sense of frailty may indeed return as the academic becomes more experienced and this began to emerge in discussions with the experienced veterinary teachers. The more experienced clinicians described how changes brought about by political changes nationally and locally disrupted their sense of resilience. In addition, the shift in behaviours of learners, who they

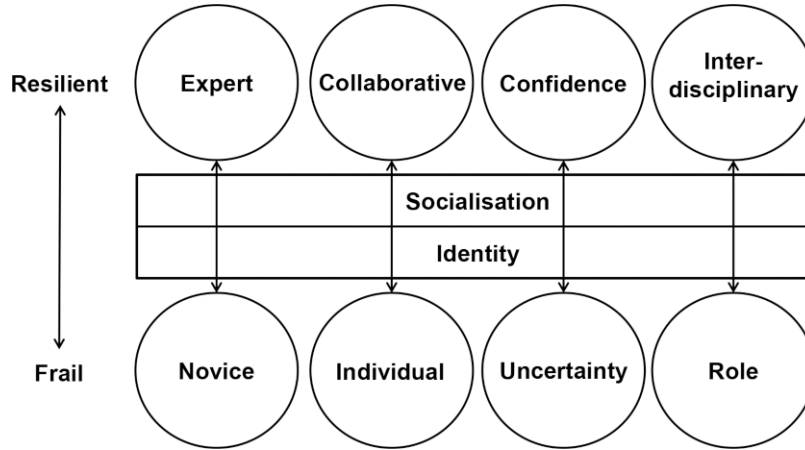


Figure 1. Fluctuating frailty (adapted from Lygo-Baker et al., 2015)

believed held greater expectations caused challenges to their values and caused greater potential frailty.

THE RENEWAL OF FRAILITY

Where does this renewed frailty emerge from? The answer is probably extremely complex. However, we may be able to start to shed some light upon this by considering the following two distinct examples. The first is through the promotion system. An individual may have been successful in a certain role and developed a series of values within this that they are comfortable with. However, a change in position can disrupt this, developing new challenges and providing an individual with a different set of social values. How many of us have worked with individuals who appear to have shifted their values as a response to particular debates as they have been drawn through to new roles that have involved taking on greater responsibility? Perhaps it is easier to express particular values in certain roles and that people have to compromise when promoted? It may therefore be that holding or expressing certain values appears to have little consequence in some roles as the social values that are encountered are less likely to challenge the personal values expressed. However, at particular points in a career as one progresses the pressure to ‘conform’ to particular social values may increase. Here the social values that become apparent put greater pressure upon the individual to meet a set of expectations that may not be in line with the personal values that an individual holds. Each individual has a choice, mediated by career aspirations or family situations that influence how much compromise is undertaken as a consequence. This may therefore challenge the personal values, making them increasingly frail. Clearly this suggested gap between being frail and resilient will, by definition, vary between each individual because the personal values are, as

previously stated, unique. It is therefore possible that for some the gap is negligible and that the discomfort is limited. However, for others this may be far greater.

The second example comes from considering the end of the dynamic in [Figure 1](#), where people would appear to be resilient. This position was identified as being occupied by those staff who held greater experience. Here we consider how this may actually act as a potential inhibitor to learning. As Mazur (1997) has suggested in his work on peer instruction, the experienced academic may not always be the most appropriate person to support learning. He argues that experience rather than acting as an aid, may in fact prohibit the ability to relate to the knowledge and experience of the learners. This leads Mazur to suggest that the most effective teacher may be an individual who has just gained insight into the issue being taught. Whilst this can be used to encourage learners to take greater responsibility for their learning, it may also hint at a frailty related to experience that has not been discussed previously. As experience provides more and more evidence upon which an individual can base her or his decision making, it may in reality mask aspects that are no longer articulated by the experienced practitioner because they have become invisible to them. The experienced practitioner no longer asks questions about certain aspects of practice because she or he has progressed beyond such a state.

ADAPTATION OF VALUES

The result of these experiences is a renewal of frailty. As the first example demonstrates this can occur as a consequence of the decision to adapt the values held, or as Harre (1998) implies, create a new self that has a predominance of certain values, to alleviate the challenges faced. Such a process may however make the individual frail, either as a consequence of not being comfortable with the new self and the values that accompany this, or because the individual has been promoted to a situation where the discourses that surround the new position are unfamiliar or require an adaptation to previously held view points, requiring a further adaptation of the values, leading to even greater frailty. The second example suggests that in addition, rather than experience providing a greater distance from the initial frailty described by those newly arriving into roles in higher education (or for that matter any occupational role), it may create a distance that is difficult to bridge when working with and especially teaching those who inhabit more limited experience. This, was apparent in conversation with the more experienced veterinarians. It was suggested that this could be seen to create a potential for a return to frailty as they come to the end of their careers, recognising it is more and more difficult to remain in touch with techniques, knowledge and the experience of colleagues and especially students.

LEARNING AND FRAILTY

An aspect that we have touched upon but not fully considered to date is the broader context within which the personal and social values interact. This evolving landscape,

as discussed in the previous chapter (Stevenson, Whelan, & Burke), suggests the shifts being experienced today are likely to unsettle the personal values held further, leading potentially to greater frailty being felt. The university is involved with learning and at the very centre of this process is frailty. As a notion, being successful in our learning suggests that we move from a state of not being able to understand to being able to recognise, and then as our understanding grows can start to both utilise this knowledge, integrate it with other aspects we are aware of and potentially use it to develop new questions (Firestein, 2013). This requires a learner to frequent spaces where they are uncertain (Jarvis, 1995). This suggests a value in being placed within areas of discomfort, or as Jarvis argues 'disjuncture', where what we understand cannot provide us with an answer and we need to find additional information or alternative approaches. This can be uncomfortable, not having a capacity to respond initially, to use an artefact or to recognise its purpose. Those who successfully learn can move on but those who cannot remain in a place of struggle, presented with the option of seeking out alternatives, to try and find support, attempt new approaches by adapting or, as many will do, potentially giving up. This suggests a frailty that can lead to rejection. This presents a challenge for the teacher who may find themselves at different stages of frailty in respect of the knowledge with which they are presented. In addition, the approaches that learners are familiar with are additionally shifting, presenting further challenges for teachers trying to respond to the expectations that learners have, based on their previous experience (Amir et al., 2011).

For the new academic this can challenge the values that are initially held. For many there is a realisation that the expectations they may hold, emerging from their values about learning, are suddenly questioned by students. This can come through different challenges, such as a request for different resources or a particular format for their learning. Learners are increasingly confident in using their authority to put pressure on their teaching staff (Freeman, 2016). In the UK for example they do this through the National Student Survey. This can add to the frailty that occurs as the new academic begins to negotiate how the academic self becomes established. So for some, frailty may initially grow as they discover the challenges faced and how their own values may or may not assist or become challenged as they navigate their initial experiences. For more experienced staff the gap in knowledge about the experience of the learners may grow annually. Not only are the 'traditional' students who arrive at university having a very different learning experience prior to coming, the demographic is also growing in terms of number and diversity (Giannakis & Bullivant, 2016). Whilst this provides greater richness to the learning environment, for many this adds a complexity to teaching and can disrupt those who have, through the experiences they have gained, developed routines which have in the past appeared to suffice. As the career develops, if these routines are not adapted, there is the likelihood that they may not be as appropriate for learners who bring very different experience to the lecture theatre and laboratory. This can lead to a return to frailty.

As outlined in Chapter 5, the broader context within which academic staff work is increasingly causing challenges to personal values. New discourses around

managerialism (Jarvis, 2014) have emerged, within which the student experience (Temple et al., 2014), the student voice (Freeman, 2016) and the student as consumer (Sonnenberg et al., 2015) all appear to have increasing influence on how higher education is described and then enacted. These impact on those within the sector and the narratives within which they are found often challenge the personal values whilst becoming further consolidated within policies that subsequently direct the activity of academic staff. The latest in the UK being the Teaching Excellence Framework.

So whilst an academic may anticipate that at the initial stages of a career the values that she aspires towards may indeed be adapted as roles and responsibilities become clearer, many may expect that the general trajectory of frailty may be downward through a career (Figure 2). As has been suggested in this chapter, perhaps this is not actually the case. Whilst values may appear to coalesce between personal values and the social values encountered, it may be too simplistic to suggest that this will lead to a general reduction in discomfort of the associated frailty. Yet surely if we exist within the environment of higher education we should become more familiar with the discourses and gain a greater ability to respond and find areas of comfort? Whilst this may be the case for many, in the work above we have perhaps started to explain why a uniform downward trend should be reconsidered.



Figure 2. Hypothesised frailty shifts over a career

A review of the literature may help us begin to understand this alternative perspective further. First, each individual academic has to respond to the changing expectations of the political landscape, influencing how an academic is expected to behave and respond. The undermining of professional autonomy has been argued by some to question the role that an academic plays as a teacher (Piper, 1994).

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A similar experience can be seen to exist across a range of professional roles such as lawyers, medical professionals, religious leaders and school teachers. These professional roles, once revered and rarely questioned are now regularly challenged by those outside the actual role in lay positions. Piper also suggested that for many academics identity is foremost attached to the discipline and not to the teaching of the discipline. He argued that this latter element decays whilst the primary link, say to being a 'historian' or a 'physicist' remains. This additional challenge brings a new set of potential social values into play that may influence the personal values and the actions an individual academic takes. The new Teaching Excellence Framework in the UK is an excellent example of such change and also highlights an additional challenge. While previously an academic could work within an academic identity framed by the discipline almost exclusively, this has changed. The teaching element of the role is now under far greater scrutiny and in particular those who previously have not had to give this particular consideration are likely to find themselves with additional challenges to face.

AN ECOLOGICAL SHIFT

The result is an ecological shift, by which I mean the development and evolution of new voices within the frames that people work. These new voices establish new discourses, where professional groups are challenged. This appears within a new modernity discussed by a range of authors (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1998). A consequence is that the structures that have previously existed and provided a stability around which to recognise fairly secure social values that influence socialisation into a role such as that of an academic, have altered. Now these structures themselves are involved with almost constant change. This leads to the potential requirement for the academic to respond to the changes that are out of her/his influence with new voices. The fluidity of change (Bauman, 2000) requires the almost constant re-propositioning of values such that adaptability is a necessary element to enable frailty to be responded to. As staff recognise new voices that are representative of potentially different social values, the complexity of both the number of these, what they mean and how to respond increases. The overall impact is that professional groups are increasingly challenged to re-evaluate the values they hold (Lygo-Baker, 2006).

In higher education McNinnis (1993) has argued that there are three sources where collective or social values can exist. The first, which has been a constant challenge for each new academic, is within the discipline. Here the individual experiences challenges as their values interact with the academic disciplinary 'tribe' (Becher & Trowler, 2001) through a process of socialisation (Smith, 2010). McNinnis suggests that the second source is the physical department within which an individual works. Here the individual has to negotiate how both the disciplinary and institutional interpretations are presented and respond to these. Again this is most likely to impact on the new academic, although we can begin to see how certain changes may cause instability for more experienced staff as well. The final source is at an institutional level. Here,

where significant change has occurred recently, through for example student fees and the introduction of league tables, there is a potential reframing of values. These may have greater impact on the stability of more experienced staff who find their values threatened by more significant shifts than are likely to be experienced by their newer colleagues. These processes encourage a personal re-evaluation of values through which there is the possibility of an overall identity becoming subject to reinterpretation (Lygo-Baker et al., 2008), as a response to greater frailty being recognised.

The veterinary teachers I have worked with stimulated much of this repositioning of frailty as a fluctuating experience. Whilst reflecting on the work of trainees the more experienced staff acknowledged the frailty that they recognised in their colleagues. They saw an uncertainty within the hospital and in the laboratory working both with clients and with students. However, the experienced staff also reflected that they too faced uncertainty over the role they were playing and often sought the support of others in order to be able to resolve aspects not previously encountered. The only difference at times was that more experienced staff had a greater appreciation of who might be able to assist them in finding an appropriate response. One academic likened her approach to the natural survival instinct of the animals she had cared for with her own instinct that made her follow a similar approach to teaching that she had encountered during her own period as a learner within the discipline. She explained that when she first entered the teaching hospital she had at least some familiarity with how things had appeared to be provided to her from her own learning and so she had mirrored this. As time progressed and she gained a greater familiarity with the learning environment, she explained that she had adapted and to some extent brought out, as she described it, her own personality as a teacher. She was uncertain as to whether this was adapting toward new values or returning to those previously held. She felt that what did occur was that this led to feelings of vulnerability.

After thinking about the animals that she cared for she said she recognised that as she neared the end of her own work within veterinary medicine she was actually sensing a return to a more frail self. She described this as in part an inability to relate to some of the discourses that now existed despite attempts to do so. She gave the example of the shift in expectations of the learners that she believed to be prevalent. She noted that there was a growing belief amongst learners that they could only be examined on what had been taught in a classroom. She explained that in addition she felt that the ways she had developed and that she felt comfortable utilising were not always responded to by the learners and that as such she was increasingly uncomfortable. She stated she felt that she was returning to frailer state. It was increasingly difficult for her to relate her own often sophisticated understanding to the experience of those entering the classroom for the first time.

CONCLUSION

Within a career fluctuations occur to our levels of frailty. These may result from taking on new roles, the change in institution and so on. In addition, the constant change

experienced adds new discourses and requires individual responses from academic staff. In the UK there has been a rise in the number of students entering universities, the fee structure has altered, the diversity of the student body has increased, technology has and continues to evolve and there are greater interventions by government on behalf of the public. Whilst many may welcome some of these changes the implications for the academic are potentially serious. These changes bring increased social values into the environment that may challenge the personal values held, leading to the potential for greater conflict and disruption. So while it may be anticipated that those newly arrived in a university setting may experience frailty heightened by new discoveries about colleagues, learners, the institution and so on, this may not be exclusive to new entrants. Frailty appears to be in flux throughout a career. As a consequence frailty is a potentially constant companion and one that needs to be recognised and responded to in order to limit the disturbance that it can bring.

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