

Keynote Discussion: The Journey from Equality To Inclusion: Moving From Theoretical To More Practice-Led Understandings Of Inclusiveness

JENNY RODRIGUEZ *

University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

How The Journey from Equality to Inclusion Relates to Work And Learning In Higher Education

CAROL COSTLEY *

Middlesex University, London, UK

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In this talk, I will discuss and problematise moving from a theoretical understanding of inclusiveness to a practical understanding of inclusiveness. This move could be considered a journey from equality to inclusion. My talk is organised in three parts. First, a discussion about the departure point with is a principled position where we acknowledge and value equality and appreciate its importance. Second, the problematisation of diversity, which I develop in relation to the idea of "the other question" (e.g., who is diverse to me and what does this tell me?). Third, I focus on the question of how we translate that knowledge into practice that results in inclusion on terms that are not unilateral and do not reproduce or perpetuate privilege and disadvantage.

Jenny Rodriguez

* Email: jenny.rodriquez@manchester.ac.uk

* Email: C.Costley@mdx.ac.uk

I will respond to Jenny's broader points by relating the points to the academic field or work and learning in higher education. This field represents a number of both curriculum and research areas (see paper on definitions in the WBL e-journal). Jenny has agreed to respond to the points I raise about experiential learning, 3-way partnerships between universities, students and work organisations, subjugated knowledge and the positive points and advantages to many part-time and full-time students of practice-based and practice-led learning. We intend to have a distinctive dialogue and engage with participants following our discussion.

Carol Costley

Commentary on the presentation

Jenny

Jenny started the talk by pointing out how the principle of equality does not generally lead to social action. We need to move from theoretical understanding of inclusiveness to practical action in relation to inclusiveness which can be understood as a journey from equality to inclusion. Ideas around equality tend to lead to opening of opportunities but not ensuring equality outcomes and therefore the way equality is understood should have an experiential base. She made three substantive points to this effect. Firstly, with regard to thinking about equality there needs to be acknowledgment that there is a departure point from the principled stage where we value equality and appreciate its importance (e.g., we believe most people are not intentionally racist or intentionally sexist, and so on). Second, regarding a problematisation of diversity, Jenny posed the question we often ask ourselves: Who is different to me? There is a form of categorisation going on and she suggested that we are in relation to others in situated positionalities. But are we making judgements about others taken from a norm of 'self'? Her third point related to how to translate that knowledge into practice that leads to inclusion so as to not reproduce or perpetuate privilege and disadvantage.

Carol

Carol thanked Jenny for opening with some significant points and said that she recognised Jenny's arguments in relation to the priorities for Access and Inclusion in Work and Learning. In terms of the lived experience of all those involved in situated practice Carol identified the need to recognise students' experiential learning as a positive and successful way of accessing people to the university. It is also a key teaching and learning approach not only to access people but also to empower full time students, giving them confidence that they have proven abilities that relate to the more codified knowledge within the university. These learning and teaching approaches could be used more across the sector but there is not a great deal of uptake.

She went on to voice a concern about the issues we were discussing in relation to 3-way learning partnerships where contracts or agreements are drawn up between student, university and outside organisation and to ensure that there is fairness, quality and agreement for all parties. She emphasised that the three-way arrangements are not without their complexities not least in the matter of power relations. Organisations outside the sector bring their own ethos and mode of practice. This has more recently become noticeable with degree apprenticeships that are employer-led in terms of content.

Jenny

Jenny agreed that in terms of experiential learning there is much value that can be put upon the learning that students bring. We should be asking what students can bring to us that we can value as worthwhile learning and how it can connect to their studies.

Re: partnerships, Jenny pointed out that we need to recognise our own power as lecturers in higher education. Also, she noted that institutions often do the minimum needed to comply to equality requirements and universities are included in this. Again, the worthy principles do not always lead to action.

We need to go beyond diversity to the idea of belonging – people have to feel included she said. There should be structures and arrangements about this kind of systematic thinking. It is a praxis that goes from procedures to equitable systems that recognise the privilege and

disadvantage in systems in our organisations. A form of categorisation that has intersectional aspects because they are situated. Hierarchies of knowledge and power.

Carol

Yes, for example, decisions are made by the university about who we partner with and why, what we will recognise, who is allowed to teach and mentor and coach and importantly what knowledge we will recognise. Often the learning in work situations and assessing that learning may not allow space for unanticipated learning, tacit learning and more humanistic characteristics of learning that contribute to successful work practices. For example, most aspects of curricular have 'teaching and learning specifications' which state what is to be learned in advance with no emergent learning identifiable.

Carol also noted that Education institutions are not necessarily more equitable than Public and Private sector workplaces. Workplaces often value more practice-based knowledge and how people are as much as what they know. Universities may, whilst accepting the concept of applied knowledge and making an exception of the Arts, rate practice-based knowledge as vocational and therefore not worthy of high level recognition. These notions of Knowledge and power lead to a subjugation of some knowledge related to Work.

Practice-oriented approaches facilitate greater opportunities The focus on practice found in curricular and pedagogic practices in work-based and work-integrated learning are more conducive to successful learning and attainment for a diverse group of people. Those in the field have witnessed this yet there is little written about it. Many of the curriculum initiatives taken by higher education in this field could be shared across the higher education range of subject disciplines, and further developed towards a more accessible and inclusive curriculum offer.