

### Session 3, Glen O'Grady: ABSTRACT

#### REFLECTION ON CHANGE FROM DIFFERENT ELEVATED PERSPECTIVES

I wonder if you agree with me that reflecting on BEING a director of an academic development unit can be challenging, especially when engaged in change? And it's not because we are ignorant of the process of reflection or lack an appreciation of the value of reflection. As academic developers we are more likely to teach reflection more than any other process and concept (Kandlbinder and Pesta 2009). What makes reflection challenging (for me at least) is the expectation to reflect in a manner that integrates reflection from different elevated levels.

There is an immediacy to our work we do. Compressed by time and resources, we engage in the uncertainty, uniqueness, and value-conflicts that characterise higher education. We do this by using processes that Schon describes as reflection-in-and on action.

But there are other forms of reflection carried out from different elevations and distances.

*I enjoyed taking the time to step away from the busyness of the workplace and have a helicopter view of myself being able to sit comfortably with the uncertainty. It was like a light had turned on and illuminated my practice in a way that enabled me to notice my assumptions. (Hickson 2011)*

A helicopter view of what we do affords us insight into what shapes our work. An elevated distance provides the opportunity to theorise about the work we do as Directors, and to frame our specialised knowledge and academic work (Lee & McWilliam 2008; Blackwell & Blackmore 2003).

But it is also possible to take a further elevated perspective akin to what Bawden (1991) describes as the view from a satellite. This affords a much wider perspective, wherein not only do the details of what we reflect upon change, but the very frame of references we use to understand our work comes into question.

*The view of the Earth from the Moon fascinated me — a small disk, 240,000 miles away. It was hard to think that that little thing held so many problems, so many frustrations. Raging nationalistic interests, famines, wars, pestilence don't show from that distance. — Frank Borman, Apollo 8, 'A Science Fiction World — Awesome Forlorn Beauty,' Life magazine, 17 January 1969.*

Questioning the frames of reference that we use to make sense of directing in academic development leads us to a form of reflection where we begin to theorise about our theorising. An example of this is where Leibowitz (2017) claims:

*that the way academics and academic developers have been thinking about curriculum change... has been held captive by logics that prevent thinking of alternative and transformative approaches*

It is probable that we value each of these different forms of reflection. But it is perhaps less apparent as to how, as Directors, we integrate these different ways of knowing. While Dewey suggests distance to be necessary in reflection, distance can also create a paradox. Creating distance so we can theorise about our work can also cause a potential separation between what we are trying to understand, and what we want to be close to on a day to day basis. We could find ourselves paradoxically setting out to attain a more intimate, and “real” understanding of the work we do, but in doing so, distancing ourselves from the cultures we live in by making something sociologically disturbing or anthropologically strange (Van Manen 1982).

Over the course of the next few meetings, we would like to reflect on how we deal with change. We will have presentations that offer different elevated perspectives of our work to help us all consider how to locate ourselves and our role in change. We invite you to discuss with each other how to integrate these different perspectives.

## References

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