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Abstract

This article examines recent UK policy initiatives to enhance teaching and learning in higher education in the UK, and the quality of the student experience there. The Higher Education Academy has recently begun to work in this area and the Higher Education Bill (2004) has passed into law. A reflective review of previous initiatives is therefore very timely. The article shows that, while these different initiatives have been explicitly addressed at different levels of analysis, the meso level--a particularly significant one--has been largely forgotten. Meanwhile these interventions have been based on contrasting underlying theories of change and development. One hegemonic theory relates to

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the notion of the reflective practitioner, which addresses itself to the micro (individual) level of analysis. It sees reflective practitioners as potential change agents. Another relates to the theory of the learning organization, which addresses the macro level of analysis and sees change as stemming from alterations in organizational routines, values and practices. A third is based on a theory of epistemological determinism and sees the discipline as the salient level of analysis for change. Meanwhile, other higher education policies exist alongside those mentioned above, not overtly connected to the enhancement of teaching and learning but impinging upon it in very significant ways in a bundle of disjointed strategies and tacit theories. Of particular relevance here are policies on funding, on research and on widening participation, all implemented in an increasingly managerialist environment in which work intensification and degradation of resources are occurring. Missing in all this is coherence across the policies, and their underlying theories, at the different analytical levels. Because there is disjointedness in various government and other agencies, higher education policies they have tended to obstruct rather than complement each other. Hence our use of a metaphor from Eastern philosophy--the notion of blocked chi. Also missing is a robust theory of change and associated set of policies at the meso level of analysis--the departmental level. We suggest ways in which the latter omission might be rectified, thus freeing the "chi of change". (HRK / Abstract übernommen)

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