

# Toeing A Line?: Tutors working at the boundary between pedagogy and therapy

Jan Huyton, University of Wales  
Institute, Cardiff

# Introduction

☞ This presentation will:

- Present some of the early findings from my research into the emotion work undertaken by higher education tutors
- Use 'the dangerous rise of therapeutic education' as a tool for exploring the data
- Propose recommendations to underpin tutor support and development

# My Research

- Increasing amounts of emotion work (CREW, Brunel University) taking place in HE
- Unacknowledged emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983; 2003; Ogbonna and Harris, 2004)
- Effects of work intensification and emotional labour

# My Research

- Over 100 responses to electronic survey
  - Extent and nature of work with individual students
  - Lack of preparation for role
  - Lack of 'professional supervision'
  - Confusion around boundaries and referrals

# My Research

- Currently analysing results from 10 participants in reflective practice study
  - Lack of preparation for role
  - Boundaries
    - Awareness but lack of clarity
  - Invisible work behind closed doors
  - Efficacy of centralised student support services

# My Research

- Outcomes for participants
  - Usefulness of reflection on and discussion about practice
  - Demonstrated where clear boundaries already exist
  - Identified where boundaries need to be defined
  - ‘Academic citizens’ (Macfarlane, 2007) at the expense of their own research

# The Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009)

## ☞ The therapeutic university

- Diminished figures, obsessed with feelings, no longer able to engage with disinterested critical inquiry

## ☞ The therapeutic workplace

- Management and unions both moving towards adopting therapeutic models of support for diminished workers who lack skills and confidence

## The Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009)

- ‘Workers will not spontaneously arise from the therapy couch that they, together with their unions and managers, have created. Unless there is a challenge to the construction of the idea of human beings as vulnerable and diminished that is being strengthened through therapeutic education, it will be impossible for workers to confront and resist the therapeutic workplace.’ (p 121)

# My Research – evidence of boundaries

- I try and keep my boundaries very clear, I'm constantly addressing my boundaries, so that I don't slip into [therapy] or if I do it's rectifiable, I'm always referring to counselling whenever there is a need
- I've got a particularly needy student who does cry a lot and I'm finding myself less sympathetic to the crying ...I think you have to become a little bit colder because otherwise you're gonna get affected by it
- I've had to make it clear that I don't have an open door policy, that was something I made clear from the beginning, that if I was to do xyz I couldn't possibly have an open door policy. My job here is not to be available in that sense

# My Research- boundaries are not clear

- I mean how awful would that be...someone says to you, you know, my mother's just died and I'm in a state and the next sentence out of your mouth is 'oh we have a fantastic counselling service'
- Yes it's a real ambivalence – if they're distressed and they're human beings I'd find it very hard to just say – go over there then – I'm not saying I want them to pour out their heart – certainly not – but even just saying, well all you've got to do is fill in this form let's have a look at it and let's get an extension, even that is often enough but they just don't realise –there is a real ambivalence between listening to somebody and helping them out of that situation and thinking why am I doing this?

## But for some tutors the boundaries are clear

- ☞ I think sometimes all they need is that little bit of support or their confidence boosting so they can move forward
- ☞ That supporting type stuff is tricky because we need to get that balance between providing the right support...but knowing when you are really good and when you are excessively good ... there's a degree to which you can be overdoing it ...it's soaking up your research time ...

## But for some tutors the boundaries are clear

- ☞ Everyone always wants a meeting and you think, you don't need a meeting, you just need to tell me what the problem is and I'll solve it!
- ☞ You do need to protect your own time to achieve the other goals that the institution sets you, and that can mean prioritising your research
- ☞ I don't think we should be doing too much for the students, they should learn how to do it themselves

# Reflection can help

- ☞ Reading these and writing these has made me realise I need to be firmer from the start. I'm happy to give support but we need to have this boundary if you like, you need to look at yourself
- ☞ It's far more tempting to not do it, you don't really do it because there's no recipient, no-one makes you think differently about what you're doing like you have with me, with the questions that you've asked that have then made me think, oh yeh I'll think about that one a bit deeper...
- ☞ It really surprised me how many incidents over a short period of time I was dealing with ...the levels and types of problems, the presenting issues and how I felt was surprising to me

# My Research- who defines the boundaries?

- We are told here that we are student centred, but I'm not quite sure what that means. I think student centred means you let them get away with what they want to but make sure they pass at the end.
- I've not been given anything or advised of anything. The safe and ethical issues I try to adopt are from my vocational background
- I've talked at length to a friend of mine who's a counsellor – what is it that I feel we need in that role? Not counselling because you are not a counsellor but I think perhaps there are active listening skills and reflective skills that could be useful

# Staff development

- ☛ That would then mean me admitting a degree of vulnerability and a need for help, but maybe that's what I'm doing, I don't know
- ☛ If you offer staff development all those who are interested would go, and so it would go on. Personally I think the one way would be to have a specific role for certain members of staff and that is what they do.

# Staff development

- I suppose the thing that is important to me is when you are dealing with people. That's the thing that should be monitored. It's almost like saying that how many publications you've got is easy to monitor, and if somebody's got a problem (with emotion work) how do they actually resolve that? So maybe there's an element of not wanting to know?
- One of the people who's on the phone to me the most is the head of department, who uses me for ideas of how to support and bounce ideas of how to try and disengage [students] from being so dependent on the tutors in the department

# Professional Supervision

- I could in my staff appraisal I suppose make a big fuss about it but I almost don't want to do that because I feel like I'd somehow be a bit weak then, you know other people are coping why aren't you? But also because my staff appraisal will be done with my head of department, her views are black and white, we have student services, they go to student services, and so...I just wouldn't go there
- Sometimes there's a concern that if you speak to someone about your emotions, they're going to want to do something, or you feel as if you're not handling things professionally

# The Research Imperative

- ☛ To get promoted and get advanced here you need to do research. Students are important but at the same time, as long as you are on target with your evaluations that's OK, but if you go much beyond that its...well where's your research?
- ☛ I've doubled the numbers on this programme, retention has increased, the students' achievement and classifications are better generally, but I haven't started my PhD...the research is the thing that's suffered because I have not had the capacity to do that because of the work I've put in with the students

# Conclusions

## ■ Boundaries

- In the absence of an ethos of personal tutoring/academic advising, tutors (and students) are not altogether clear about where their boundary should be
- Some tutors were quite clear on their own personal boundaries, others were struggling on where to draw the line
- This did lead to some activity that could have been described as attempts at counselling rather than learning and teaching intervention

# Conclusions

## ☛ The therapeutic university

- Approximately half of participants were overwhelmed with emotion work/emotional labour which they felt was neither acknowledged nor valued by the university
- These tended to be those who were unclear about where to draw boundaries – and they felt their research and academic inquiry was diminished at the expense of student support work
- Those who were absolutely clear about their boundaries felt they knew where to draw the line, and prioritised research and academic inquiry

# Conclusions

## ☛ The therapeutic workplace

- Absolutely no evidence whatsoever of therapeutic models of support for tutors
- Some evidence of tutors expressing the need for 'professional supervision'
- Evidence that colleagues and relatives are the vehicle for 'offloading' in the absence of institutional facilities

# Conclusions

- The role of reflection/reflective practice
  - Most participants found the process of reflection and discussion to be illuminating and helpful
  - A number of participants changed their practice because of consciousness-raising via the reflective dialogue
  - The absence of facilities for reflection/reflective practice in the workplace can result in 'inappropriate' levels of pastoral or academic support with individual students

# Recommendations

- A collective understanding of a personal tutoring ethos needs to be developed by educators and institutions
  - The role of 'the affective' in learning and teaching needs to be acknowledged by institutions
  - Appropriate and proportionate staff development and support needs to be made available by institutions
  - Reflective practice should be promoted

# Recommendations

- ☞ Tutors and students need to be 'appropriately' supported by institutions
  - This may mean considering the development of collective support mechanisms as well as individual/personalised
  - This would ensure that tutors work safely and appropriately with students and would keep in check any inappropriate transcendence into 'therapy'

# Recommendations

- ☛ Institutions need to ensure that all academic staff who work with students have a basic understanding and **acceptance** of:
  - The role of 'the affective' in learning and teaching
  - Active listening skills
  - How to make a sensitive referral

## References

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