Book Reviews

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At the time of reading Reconstructing professionalism in university teaching, my thoughts have already been heavily shaped by intra and trans institutional debates akin to the position of research at my own institution vis-à-vis teaching and learning in the higher education sector. The University of Stellenbosch, like several other higher education institutions in South Africa, has already strategically committed itself to becoming a research orientated university. Does this position necessarily mean that teaching and learning are secondary? Unlike several concerned voices which echo sentiments in favour of teaching, I am not convinced that becoming a research orientated university necessarily undermines the roles teaching and learning ought to play in academic discourse. Likewise, I do not imagine research, teaching and learning as exclusive entities of higher education praxis. Nowadays, a lot is made of service learning which predominantly involves transformative student activities in various communities as an extension of formal university programmes, for example, in schools, universities, clinics, churches, workshops and NGO’s in order to ensure that higher education becomes socially more relevant and responsive to demands of equity, redress, development and democratic citizenship. My contention is that university teaching, learning and service learning are processes which ought to contribute towards research, that is, knowledge production. University academics are essentially knowledge producers who invariably use educative processes such as teaching and learning to guide their research discourses.

It is with such an understanding of the complemen
tary relationship between research, teaching and learning in mind, that I find Reconstructing professionalism in university teaching a refreshing and noteworthy voice in consolidating the claim that “Good teaching can produce excellent research and the latter, in turn, reinforces effective teaching and learning”, thus, concomitantly supporting demands for equity and critical praxis. In this review article I shall explore the practices of several voices in Melanie Walker’s “Barcelona” higher education project to show how “teachers and learners in action a critical community of inquiry” seem to contribute towards good educational (action) research, which in turn reinforces effectiveness in university teaching.

Mapping the “Barcelona” higher education project: Melanie Walker’s voice

When Melanie Walker left South Africa in 1996 to take up a post of Director of the University’s Teaching and Learning Service at the University of Glasgow (Scotland), she and five other colleagues set out to work collaboratively in researching their own teaching, and in supporting and challenging each other through a shared critical dialogue about higher education. They called themselves the “Barcelona Group” which comprised lecturers from different academic disciplines, different ages, status, gender and length of service. Not only were they active researchers in their disciplines, but were also committed to teaching, to their students, as well as being concerned with the broader political and social inequities. Walker engaged with people who wanted to improve their teaching practices, especially now that the activist academic identity is challenged in a “changing world shaped by the aridity of a marketized civil society” (Walker 2001:6). The group held the view that the purpose of higher education is not only to contribute to society’s economic growth, but also to the kind of society which involves educating for democratic life.

In “Collaboration with/in a critical community of practice” Walker (2001:39) posits that “Barcelona” was chosen as a name for the group because they saw this “as a metaphor for the processes and practices of the group and for our universities, mirrored in the architecture, aesthetics and regeneration of the city of Barcelona itself”. The group’s “communication were of various kinds audio taped group discussions, email conversations, an electronic web board, the circulation of news clippings, poems and academic texts, and meetings with one another” (Walker 2001:40). An attempt to theorize this critical community’s collaboration was not easy, although group members agreed that collaboration had been rewarding for all of them. Central to their collaboration were the process of dialogue and the construction of knowledge about learning. Group members could not be expected to agree on everything all the time, but the shared commitment to develop critical persons remained their focus. Heated debates were natural because of the diversity of the group. According to Walker (2001:45), authentic participation was important in the building of their collaboration. Participation is authentic “if it includes relevant
stakeholders and creates relatively safe structured spaces for multiple voices to be heard” (Anderson 1998:575). Walker (2001:51) reminds us that although “collaboration is not inherently liberatory” it challenges individualisation – a view supported by Castells (1997:65) for whom participation in collaborative groups enables people to resist the “individuation of identity attached to life in the global networks of power and wealth”.

Walker (2001:4) was “particularly keen to facilitate and support educational action research as a form of research led development”. The project entailed the following processes: (1) a framing context of higher education policy and discourses; (2) collaborative and reflective professional dialogue in an interdisciplinary group of lecturers; (3) action in classrooms; (4) action research processes which sought to understand and improve curriculum practice; and the development of a reflexive “model” of continuing professional development in higher education (Walker 2001:7). The group were required to meet at least twice a term where they shared and circulated a range of different types of evidence from their case studies. In the words of Judy Wilkinson “... all of us were learning, challenging and changing” (Walker 2001:5).

In “Action research for equity in teaching and learning”, Walker sets out to explain why the group chose action research as a methodology in order to improve the educational experiences of their students and themselves. According to her the term “action research” is credited to the work of John Collier, a United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs, and/or Kurt Lewin, a North American social psychologist. Collier’s work focused on collaboration, grassroots interests and direct links to social action (Walker 2001:21 22). Walker had been busy with action research in South Africa, under “volatile and contested conditions”. She contends that through disciplined action research she deepened the quality of reflection on her practice. For her action research was exemplified in the notion of “praxis” as a dialectical and interactive shaping of theory and practice, research and action, underpinned by an explicit commitment to social justice (Lather 1986). The process involves action, participation, improvement, collaboration, inclusion and critical self reflection (Walker 2001:24). Walker (2001:37) contends that without action research as a form of pedagogical research, teaching and learning remain “subjugated discourses in higher education”. This link between action research and transformative teaching practices is corroborated by the views of members of the “Barcelona” group:

- Quintin: “I have gained considerable insight into pedagogical practices both generally and across a range of subject areas, and better understand how such ideas might be incorporated into my own discipline”;
- Mike: “The comparative and critical context shed new light on my own concerns; it has been a stimulating experience”;
- Alison: “The collegial support and constructive criticism from other seconded staff with their different disciplinary backgrounds has been in valuable”;
- Chris: “The interdisciplinary composition of the group offered frequent and mutually beneficial peer review and critique and productive cross fertilization of ideas about teaching and learning”; and
- Judy: “The collaboration has not only widened my academic perspective through cross disciplinary discussions and joint projects, but also honed my teaching skills” (Walker 2001:54).

“Introducing a mentoring programme”: Judy Wilkinson’s first voice

Judy Wilkinson regards the two years that she spent on the mentoring project and with the “Barcelona” group as “an experience that contained both joy and anguish, during which my (her) attitude to learning and teaching was challenged and my (her) perception of the role of an academic was radically changed” (Wilkinson 2001:61). As a lecturer in mathematics in the Department of Electronics and Electrical Engineering (University of Glasgow), she became concerned with questions on the role of engineers in the community: “Should ideas of the responsibility of an engineer within society be fostered, or is it sufficient to teach them a high level of technical competence?” (Wilkinson 2001:61).

In 1997, the Engineering Council in the United Kingdom produced a document which stated that all engineering students are expected to develop skills in managing people, projects, resources and time and be aware of the financial, economic, social, ethical and environmental factors of significance to engineering. The technical knowledge was covered in the existing course, but the social and industrial domains required a different approach. While visiting some industrial plants, outside the UK, where her fifth year MEng students were placed for their technical research projects, Wilkinson discovered that all new employees were given “induction training”. “They were introduced to the company, philosophy and culture, as well as specifically trained for the task” (Wilkinson 2001:62). However, students in Wilkinson’s department, apart from one “induction day”, started on the first day with a lecture in mathematics. “They were not told why they were taking mathematics, how they were expected to take in or use the information or (and) ... what the expectations of the department for their progress were” (Wilkinson 2001:62). New undergraduates feel disoriented at the start of their
university career, and there is a significant drop out rate in the first and second year.

In 1997 Wilkinson initiated a mentoring scheme which would help first year students to settle in. Groups of about eight students would meet with a research associate or postgraduate student at least once a week. A programme was designed to help students to overcome the initial “shock” and to start them thinking about their course holistically. “Mentoring would offer an opportunity to introduce an ethos of caring and debate ...” (Wilkinson 2001:63). She contends that for students to develop skills in team working and communicating, there must be an ethos of respect and cooperation: “The mentors would create the safe environment in which the students would begin to discuss, argue, reflect and grow” (Wilkinson 2001:64).

When Melanie Walker introduced the action research methodology, Wilkinson at first felt apprehensive about it. She was used to analysing experimental data as an engineer, but has never experienced collaborative, critical inquiry amongst teachers/lecturers in their own teaching practices. Wilkinson started to set up a framework for the mentoring scheme. To find mentors posed some problems. Post graduate mentors, coming from diverse disciplines, had not yet confronted social issues. She decided to implement Paolo Freire’s teacher/learner approach. Communication sessions were held weekly where mentors and students discussed good practice and successful scenarios, as well as training needs for both. On the positive side Wilkinson noted student integration and interaction, but she wanted to develop independent learning and critical thinking. Some mentors felt there was a lack of structure in the programme. Because the mentoring scheme was not compulsory, student attendance became a problem, and mentors felt guilty when students did not attend sessions. Students that did not attend regularly were the ones most likely to drop out of the programme. The whole staff in the department did not support the programme, and one mentor commented that “post input and endorsement is needed to ensure students see the importance and relevance (of the programme)” (Wilkinson 2001:70). Wilkinson contends that mentoring had helped students in the transition from school to university. By providing a channel of communication, students could now air their grievances to the mentor. It also started to create an atmosphere where students felt that they could influence the teaching infrastructure. The mentors could draw the attention of staff to problem areas in the curriculum.

The second year of the programme was more organisational. Data continued to be collected through reflections and discussions. Mentors were enjoying their groups, but the staff on the whole did not engage in dialogue directly with the students. Wilkinson (2001:77) states: “I began to feel that the mentoring programme was in some sense patching up a system that was technocratic and hence, perhaps, inherently unsound”. She quotes Freire who writes that “education is always an action either for the domestification of people or for their liberation”. In her words, “If it (education) is not part of a reflective and critical educational culture, mentoring can help in the domestication of students ...” (Wilkinson 2001:77).

”Designing a new course”: Judy Wilkinson’s second voice

In redesigning the mathematics course for engineers, Judy and colleagues had to consider the arguments of some lecturers who hold that a mathematics course should concentrate on students developing a basic tool kit in mathematics, based on straightforward manipulations, and those who favour an approach starting from engineering problems. Secondly, they were influenced by six styles of teaching mathematics, which, although based on work in schools, is equally valid for university practice and include an emphasis on: (1) exposition by the teacher; (2) discussion between teacher and student and between students themselves; (3) appropriate practical work; (4) consolidation and practice of fundamental skills and routines; (5) problem solving, including the application of mathematics to engineering situations; and (6) investigational work (Wilkinson 2001:74).

Two courses in mathematics were run. The original mathematics course was retained for the more able students. For the less well qualified students, a course which concentrated on basic manipulations and containing a large number of examples based on the application of mathematics to engineering was developed. This course did not significantly improve the students’ understanding and pass rate. With the success of this newly designed model, it was decided to amalgamate the two courses as from 1998/99. The new course is divided into “four six week cycles based on different kinds of mathematical techniques the students need to master. In each of the cycles there is a project, an assigned tutorial and a class test... followed by a typical degree exam” (Wilkinson 2001:155). Students are divided into tutorial groups of six to eight and meet with an academic weekly for a one hour session. Research has shown that students will work with the assessment in mind with the following four components fulfilling the aims of the course: (1) four class tests, each fifty minutes long (20%); (2) four assessed tutorials (10%); (3) four mini projects with an oral assessment in term three (20%); and a degree examination of three hours long (50%).

In trying to minimise teacher exposition, students were required to critically read the relevant section before the lecture. It was found that students have
never read a mathematics book before. Even tutorials given at the beginning of the block were not completed until the material was covered in the lectures. Wilkinson (2001:157) concludes that students’ passivity and lack of critical thinking could possibly be ascribed to the fact that lecturers have “never created an environment in which the students want to know more about mathematics”. Moreover, the tutorial groups were much smaller and thus teacher/student discussion was more than adequate. However, a number of problems surfaced. Tutors remarked: “Too much time is spent on student contact which creates problems in future years” (Wilkinson 2001:158). Tutors also found it difficult to stand back and allow the students to articulate and explore their difficulties because, in mathematics, there is perceived to be a “right answer” (Wilkinson 2001:158). It was also found that being required to work in groups led to copying from one another. There was also the usual problem when one student does not appear with the work s/he had been delegated to do. As far as the practical work was concerned, many students and tutors felt that too much time was spent playing with various software and “wanted formal instruction” (Wilkinson 2001:162).

In addition, Wilkinson (2001:162) reports that “most teachers of mathematics believe that students need to practise fundamental mathematical skills and routines (and) ... students must be able to read and understand engineering texts without being held up by the interpretation of the mathematics”. In designing the course the group decided that “students must be able to perform simple manipulations automatically” and at the end of the formal teaching in each block, they have a test. Most of the tutors and lecturers are in broad agreement that it was a good course. In essence, Wilkinson (2001:167) asserts that she designed learning environments and, as an engineer, held the view that that there should be a social dimension to all our courses. This view is supported by Ryan (1999) for whom a commitment to community entails inculcating in students an enjoyment of “the pursuit of difficulty” and the social dimension which would enable them to reach the highest intellectual level of which they are capable.

“Using debates in developing students’ critical thinking”: Chris Warhurst’s voice

Changes in countries’ economic and political organisational structures required the need for universities to adjust and change their higher education policies. Government and employers in the emerging “new” economy, driven by information technology which focuses on problem identification and problem solving, felt that higher education should provide thinking skills and more critical thinking among students.

As part of the “Barcelona” group, Chris Warhurst adopted an action research approach in an attempt to use debates as a learning/teaching tool to develop critical thinking among his undergraduates in an International Management course. Warhurst acknowledges his introduction to Perry’s (1979) model of intellectual development as being one of the catalysts for introducing class debates into his own teaching. In brief, Perry states that students’ intellectual development moves along a continuum, A to C. First year students, classified as type A students, typically employ a right wrong approach to learning with the role of the lecturer being one who imparts knowledge to receiving students. Later students come to appreciate that much knowledge is unknown and that a process of discovery exists which supports the construction of knowledge. The role required of the lecturer is to direct students on that path of knowledge construction by means of discovery. Students come to accept that knowledge is complex and contextual, so that no absolute understanding of knowledge constructs exists; “right and wrong” only make sense within specified contexts. Warhurst’s students know that they must exercise judgement, and in so doing modify and expand existing knowledge (Warhurst 2001:82 83). Thus, ideally, following Perry, Warhurst argues that students should move from a type A student to a type C student, that is, critical thinking student. For Warhurst (2001:83) critical thinking is not enough and that higher education’s purpose is to develop a “critical person” the distinction being between “reflection” that characterises a critical thinker, and the action, that characterises the “a critical person”.

Moreover, Warhurst (2001:87) posits that the action research approach “encompasses a repositioning of the relationship between students and lecturer, with the students learning to question received authority not just in course content but in method of content delivery”. The research evidence included the reflective conversations between Walker and Warhurst during the planning and implementation of the critical debates. Debates were videotaped and students had to hand in written evaluations. It was found that students progressed on the continuum to a type C student. Feedback from the students included comments such as having; learnt to read more; prepared for debates which made them to absorb more and enabled them to speak in front of an audience; debated which helped them to learn to become more engaged which led to more questioning or adjudicating, and thinking and talking on their feet thus developing their capacities to deal with people; learnt to communicate their comprehension of the issues in a coherent and convincing manner; and developed a capacity to reflect on their and others’ understanding, to construct arguments and deconstruct those of others.

According to Perry (1979) and Barnett (1997)
debating students should come to regard their peers as sources of learning and the lecturers as sources of guidance rather than judgement. According to Warhurst (2001:87) one dilemma that emerged was that while the lecturer encouraged the student to challenge existing knowledge, to develop critical thinking and to generate new understandings, it was still necessary for the lecturer to remain in a position of expert authority for assessment purposes. Another finding revealed that some students found the preparation for the debates too demanding and the outcomes too “discomfitting”. They still looked to the lecturer for the “right wrong” type of knowledge, which may even mean they regressed back to type A students. Even for the type C students, one issue that remained unresolved was the assessment factor. The lack of formal assessment of the debates led to limited student efforts especially when faced with deadlines for submission of other essays and reports. They also had a problem when it came to formally assessing their peers’ performances. In essence, Warhurst (2001) maintains that he sees debates as a tool in developing students’ critical thinking that is worth while exploring. However, he left his university for another and could thus not evaluate the effect that the use of debates had upon students’ formative assessment.

“Engaging a large first-year class”: Quintin Cutts’ voice

This chapter is based around the research project that Quintin Cutts took on as a member of the “Barcelona” group. He was the module co-ordinator of over 450 first year computer programming students. Quintin was a scientist by training and grew up in a family of medical practitioners. Throughout his school career he was steered in a science direction. His under graduate years in the science of computation had limited training in critical and reflective thinking. His first formal university teaching was based on the models he had as a student. He was aware that the existing teaching methods were not very popular with the students. His first introduction to a reflective practice of teaching was when he joined a course run by Vicky Gunn and Melanie Walker. As a member of the “Barcelona” group he became more aware of his own personal and pedagogical development. The class of over 450 was divided into groups of 20 students each with 20 tutors staffing the tutorials and laboratory sessions. Data about the students and their progress was constructed in focus group sessions, staff student meetings, email exchanges and discussions with tutors. One of the dilemmas in engaging a large first year class was that a lack of specific entry requirements resulted in a wide range of abilities among the students that entered the course from those who had no programming experience, to those who had written programs at home or school already.

Cutts also worked with Judy Wilkinson on the relationships between her teaching of mathematics to engineers, and his teaching of computing. There were many similarities which suggested that they could share teaching methods. Like mathematics, computing is based on problem solving and most computer scientists contend that the ability to write computer programs is innate, rather than learned. According to Cutts programming is a learned ability with problems being solved using a set of “tools”. In this case, computational concepts can be expressed using a programming language. Very significant was the fact that “language” was an important tool in teaching, whether it be mathematics, computing or modern languages. Students “new” to computing could not understand why they had to learn a new language first in order to solve computing problems.

Of the problems that were encountered is that programming was a skill and therefore required repeated practice. But, supervised laboratory time for large classes was expensive. On trying to engage students by handing out exercises, it was found that they would rather wait for the answers to be given to them than trying it on their own. Many a time students at the back of the lecture room were noisy and disruptive, as can be expected with over 450 students in the class. Although Cutts tried to discern a “right way” of teaching programming to his large class, he conceded that there probably is no “right way”. Instead, he focused on teaching as “best” as he could, particularly focusing on the use of a “language” of computing in solving computer programming problems in a large class supported by focus group sessions, staff student meetings, email exchanges and discussions with tutors.

“Measuring performance: Some alternative indicators”: Alison Phipps’ voice

As a member of the “Barcelona” group of researchers drawn from different disciplines, Alison Phipps used an action research methodology in her honours level course of Popular German Culture at Glasgow University to assess student performance. Action research, Phipps states, “has been about knowing and viewing the everyday experiences of student learning and of (her) own practices more critically” (Phipps 2001:131). The “Barcelona” group of researchers’ evaluation and reflections assisted her in developing her course. The course requires students to watch contemporary German films and read contemporary bestsellers. They also had to read, understand and apply theories of popular culture. “Data was collected in the form of focus group transcripts, transcripts of class plenaries and student group discussions both in and outside the classroom” (Phipps 2001:129).

Throughout the chapter, Phipps refers to Ben Okri’s
embraces language, literature and an option between

The second year of a Hispanic Studies course

work’’: Mike Gonzalez’s voice

would never be afraid to love, and we would love

learning are best described in the words of Okri

everything. Phipps’ experiences of teaching and

needless to say they enjoyed the acting and dancing

had studied. They had to write their own scripts and

presentation was to prepare a celebration of the

individual assignment and a group presentation. The

Student performances were assessed by means of an

embody theories and content of the course students

of values and principles’’ (Phipps 2001:135).

An apparent incongruity to the rest of the ‘‘Barcelo-

na’’ group was the fact that the students preferred to

call Alison, ‘‘Dr Phipps’’. All the other researchers

were called on their first names. Phipps states,

‘‘relationships and respect within the learning context

were the key elements for the students’’ (Phipps

2001:139). For her the relationship between teacher

and taught is a dialogical one — quality of experience

is what counts (Phipps 2001:139).

 fluoride dancer who, she says has challenged and

inspired her. Once while being interviewed she was

questioned as to why students seemed to enjoy her
course so much whereas they sometimes were

frightened and angst ridden at others. She replied

that it was painful for her to listen to such comments

but that she tried to give students a positive

experience about university education. Therefore,
she danced for and with them. With the group’s

assistance she came to understand her own practice,

her students’ learning and the increasing reflexivity

which led her to become the ‘‘dancer’’: ‘‘When the

music starts she begins her dance, with ritual

slowness. Then she stamps out the dampness from

her soul. Then she stamps fire into her loins. She takes

on a strange enchanted glow. With a dark tragic rage,

shouting, she hurls her hunger, her doubts, her

terrors, and her secular prayer for more light into the

spaces around her. All fire and fate, she spins her

enigma around us, and pulls us into the awesome risk

of the dance’’ (Okri in Phipps 2001:134). The reason

why she dwells on the ‘‘dancer’’ is because ‘‘she

represents for me (Phipps) the courage to go beyond

ourselves’’ (Phipps 2001:137). Phipps also draws on

what Griffiths (1998) terms the theory of the ‘‘patch

work’’ self — ‘‘neither a unity nor fragment’’ (Phipps

2001:135). She identifies her own body as being the

‘‘patchwork’’ self, ‘‘striving to find ways of being a

critical professional, reflecting on practice, refining

approaches, collecting stories and discovering a creed

of values and principles’’ (Phipps 2001:135).

‘‘Learning independently through project

work’’: Mike Gonzalez’s voice

The second year of a Hispanic Studies course

embraces language, literature and an option between

history of language or a history project. This chapter

explores how Mike Gonzalez conducted the history

project with about 30 students. ‘‘The point is to

develop the creative and imaginative possibilities of

this learning process alongside and within the

fulfillment of institutional objectives, but without

being entirely shaped or conditioned by those

purposes’’ (Gonzalez 2001:177). He proposed to his

students to ‘‘embark on a process without defined

objectives’’ (Gonzalez 2001:173).

The class meets for the first and only time as a whole,

for sixty minutes, in which he introduces them to the

active learning process. He draws out of them

elements of the Hispanic culture that they are

interested in. They are arranged into groups of five

or six students who share the same interest, and from

then on he meets each group separately. In the first

group meeting, Gonzalez created the opportunity for

students to exchange knowledge and understand
ings. They discovered, firstly, that their own knowl

dge had value, secondly, recognised that they shared

interests, and thirdly, though not pre selected, the

group forges some kind of collective identity, a

learning community. The next stage was their

appointment with the Audio Visual Services of the

University of Glasgow. They were introduced to the

technology of editing, advised on the kinds of

material they might seek out and provided with a

producer to guide them. In the weeks that followed,

students learnt to organise, distribute the work in the

group and develop their new technical and creative

skills. Gonzalez states, ‘‘that the business of group

work and collaboration by discovery and negotiation

(rather than by external regulation) is something more

than merely the condition or context for the acquisi-
tion of knowledge; it is itself a knowledge which in

turn enriches, informs and shapes other modes of

knowing’’ (Gonzalez 2001:183).

After a period of quietness, students became en-
grossed in researching their various topics. Gonzalez

heard them arguing their views, saw them going on

cursions to various locations, and they hardly ever

requested his help. At the end of the year gathering,

they viewed the videos and shared a glass of wine.

The learning that they had engaged in could only be

expressed qualitatively. According to Gonzalez, ‘‘in

this procedure, the learner is in the innate object of

knowledge distribution; in the critical process, she

becomes the subject, the protagonist (since knowing

is an active process and not mere recognition)’’

(Gonzalez 2001:187).

Conclusion: ‘‘Reconstructing professionalism in

university teaching – Doing other/wise’’

Melanie Walker acknowledges that the work of Ron

Barnett influenced the entire ‘‘Barcelona’’ group in

one way or the other. According to Barnett (in Walker
the three aspects of a “critical being” comprise knowledge, self and action. The chapters in this book have offered a view of the processes of knowledge about the different disciplines and pedagogy, the researchers’ self knowledge and the action in their classes. The researchers have tried to practise their professionalism in a changing higher education environment and for a changing economic climate. What they never intended to produce was a “check list” of “effective learning” or “effective teaching” (Walker 2001:192).

Walker herself played the role of facilitator only. Undoubtedly, the students experienced a “new” teaching practice. Lecturers have learnt that they could share teaching methods. The outcomes of the research were mixed. Moreover, Walker’s group debated their concept of “critical companionship” and Judyth Sachs’ (2000) notion of “activist professional”, an idea she borrows from Giddens (1994) (Walker 2001:196). A second key concept Sachs (2000) adopts from Giddens (1994) in developing her view of the “activist professional” is that of “generative politics”, which allows and encourages individuals and groups “to make things happen rather than to let things happen to them” (Sachs 2000:85).

Sachs’s (2000:93) summing up of what is involved in “activist professionalism” is worth quoting at some length since it epitomizes the work of the “Barcelona” group:

Activist professionalism is not for the fainthearted. It requires risk taking and working collectively and strategically with others. Like any form of action, it demands conviction and strategy. However, the benefits outweigh the demands. The activist professional creates new spaces for action and debate, and in so doing, improves the learning opportunities for all those who are recipients or providers of education.

This notion of the “activist professional” according to Walker brings us back to Barnett and his notion of “critical being” incorporating self, knowledge and action. What Walker and colleagues wanted to avoid was to offer “prescriptions” for “good” practice that might read (or be read) like checklists which if implemented would unproblematically “improve” practice or point to the “right” way to act (Walker 2001:199).

Any higher education educator/learner serious about critical pedagogical practices, as well as integrating research, teaching and learning should consider reading Reconstructing professionalism in university teaching. This book is a modest attempt to transcend the dichotomy between what counts as “good” research praxis and effective teaching/learning. It certainly brings to surface the value of publishing thoughts on practices, particularly personal and critical reflections related to university teaching and learning a practice of reporting research not too many educators in South African universities find worth pursuing.

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REFERENCES