

**Is Tertiary Education in Dire Straits?
(Is it money for nothing of just another brick in the wall?)**

Much of my work is ‘at the coal face’ of university educational environments. This is because I am a Course Leader of a forward looking, experience and practice driven UG course in a large modern business school (although by the time I present I will actually have stepped down from this role). The course was set up 20 years ago and I have run it for the past 5 years and also for 4 years prior to this.

My overarching concern related to my work on this course, and our current situation, is the (potential) effect of the shifting space for business management education (esp. UK). Essentially, we see ourselves at a point in time of increased/increasing fees (subject to assessments of performance and a wider review) and, for example, a shifting role and/or position of students (E.g. as customers). The question here, in light/despite of current literature and research, is how we respond in practice (at a course, module and class level) and how this reflects/responds to wider and specific student needs (particularly if the latter needs are primarily evaluated via surveys and assessments of satisfaction – and changes and ‘improvements’ driven by responses to these). This is challenging/problematic as it assumes(?) that students (as the ‘customer’) are best placed to make such assessments and judgements on the learning approach/process, the course and module content etc – this approach also often misses the place of other stakeholders and, ultimately, the ‘outcomes’ too.

Although it is important to recognize, understand and seek to enhance student experience – one could argue that such assessments are only part of the picture here. One may also question if the/a student voice is too easily and readily attended to and heard. As such, can this approach and ‘set up’, in some way, undermine attempts to promote and support deeper engagement and wider learning – as, for example, assessments and surveys often capture feedback in the moment and can be influenced by emotion, perceptions and other factors too.

My interest is whether, and if, other colleagues (and researchers) are observing/witnessing a push back from learners. For example, because work which supports reflection (and the process of reflecting) is seen to be content less and led by the student themselves. This can lead to questions around – what am I paying for and what am I getting for my money if I am expected to do (all) the work? Or – so you expect me to teach/learn myself, I thought that was what I paid the fee for? With a focus here on outcome (the certificate) and not the process and journey (and notions of transactional learning interpreted in a very different way).

For me – there is a further challenge related to the above – as, for example, business schools are also being encouraged to build partnerships and ‘deliver’ courses for organisations/employers (and these are on the whole ‘regulated’ by professional bodies and associated standards etc). This comes under, for example, apprenticeship levy funding and, although apprenticeships are grounded in a learners ability to evidence their learning and development, the role of educators is (again?) placed after the needs of the customer (this time the employer) and the outcomes are also, potentially, undermined as a result.