The Integrity of Academic Enquiry
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Stephen Rowland
University College London

Introduction
How are we to conduct academic enquiry with integrity? This is the question I want to address in this talk.

In their discussions aimed at exploring closer links between teaching and research, participants at the last Marwell Colloquium in 2004 indicated a strong preference for forms of higher education that are enquiry based.

It was doubted whether higher education that is not enquiry based can even be regarded as ‘higher education’ (Brown 2004: 46 v). Underlying such a statement there is an appreciation of the idea, usually attributed to Wilhelm von Humboldt, of which we shall hear more in later presentations. But the idea of education through discovery, enquiry or research has roots in Enlightenment thinking of the 17th Century and arguably links back to trends in ancient Greece. We may now wish to include knowledge transfer and service among the list of academic activities which could also be characterised by enquiry processes. And perhaps higher education management itself should be founded upon principles of enquiry.

But we need to be more clear about the nature of such enquiry and how it might serve to integrate academic activities.

The problem arises, however, as soon as we start to speak of academic enquiry in terms of these ‘core activities’ of teaching, research and knowledge transfer. Since Bourdieu, in 1988, observed that teaching and research were inappropriate categories to describe academic activity (Bourdieu 1988), arguments have developed to identify different forms of research and scholarship (Boyer 1994); to articulate more clearly what is meant by research led teaching and the scholarship of learning and teaching; and to debate the generic and the subject specific dimensions of pedagogical understanding.

Such attempts to organise our thinking about an already complicated issue often seem to lead to yet more complexity, more categories, more uncertainty and greater difficulties in communicating these ideas to a wider audience. The term ‘supercomplexity’ (Barnett 2000) has been coined to describe the fluidity of academic practices and identities amidst such uncertainty.

The last Marwell Colloquium made progress towards exploring more integrative approaches to teaching and research, yet much of the valuable discussion reflected such differences of understanding (e.g. Brown 2004: 17) and the need for more clarity.
In order to address these it was ‘suggested that a starting point is to reclaim the university as a site of scholarly inquiry’ (para. 51). But how?

In this introductory talk I want to suggest an approach to this by conceiving of the project of higher education in a way which brings together two rather different uses of the term ‘integrity’. Its first meaning indicates a bringing together, a making whole. The second meaning of the word refers to soundness of moral principle or virtue. Both senses of integrity are implied by Humboldt’s notion that higher education should be directed towards edification or the formation of the person: the German idea of Bildung (Simons 2006: 38).

A recent survey of university teachers in UK suggested that the integrity of higher education is open to question. In that, albeit limited, survey 72 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement that ‘higher education has lost its role as conscience and critic of society’ (Bone and McNay 2006: 76).

Such a statement might seem to have little to do with the relationships between teaching and research. My argument, however, will suggest that integrity is closely linked with the integration of core academic activities. The loss of higher education’s moral integrity is related to its loss of connectedness: its fragmentation.

My aim then is to conceive of academic enquiry in a way that gives integrity to the conduct of teaching, research and knowledge transfer thereby serving to integrate these forms of academic practice more closely. To do this I will develop two themes.

The first is the idea that academic enquiry, in any of its forms, involves working within a tension between compliance and contestation. Students and researchers need to learn, or comply with, the basic knowledge and skills of their disciplinary or professional practice; yet the ability to critique – arguably an objective of all research and higher learning - demands that they be prepared to subject such knowledge to reasoned contestation at every stage. This was the insight of Humboldt: that higher education is a process of learning in which all knowledge is seen as being tentative or open to contestation. This idea is more than an enquiry based teaching method, but constitutes the basis of a conception of higher learning. University knowledge is seen to be, of its nature, contestable.

The second theme concerns the way in which academic staff relate to their subject matter. Despite feelings of demoralisation and stress, there is evidence to support the apparently obvious claim that most academics enjoy intellectual work (Kinman and Jones 2004). Many factors, as well as limited resources, may constrain the opportunity for staff to pursue their intellectual engagement but, in general, the idea of teaching and research is attractive to today’s ‘knowledge workers’. They commonly say they love their subject, even if they don’t love the institutional conditions in which they pursue it. But what does it mean to love one’s subject?
I hope to show how the concept of intellectual love enables a dialectical, rather than fragmented, relationship between different forms of academic enquiry, including teaching and research. My conception of ‘intellectual love’ draws upon the ideas of Spinoza, who was a prominent Enlightenment philosopher of the seventeenth century, in whose tradition Humboldt was writing a hundred years later. Indeed, Humboldt’s ideas about the relationship between reason and freedom – important features of academic enquiry as I understand it - have been likened to those of Spinoza (Geismann 1991)

The tension between compliance and contestation
Let me start, then, with the first theme: that academic enquiry involves working within the tension between compliance and contestation. This tension expresses itself in academic learning by setting up a dichotomy between instruction and exploration. Instruction demands compliance; exploration requires contestation. Does learning follow better from the instruction of teachers or from the exploration of learners?

Since the earliest educational writings there has been dispute between those who wanted to emphasise instruction and those who would emphasise exploration. Through a brief historical sketch I want to indicate how this tension relates to more contemporary themes about higher learning. In order not to dwell too long on the historical details, I will proceed in a loose and rather unscholarly fashion.

Some historical notes
Plato – writing through the voice of his teacher, Socrates - is perhaps the earliest exponent of the importance of and exploratory approach to learning. The Socratic Method, as it came to be known, was based upon the teacher posing questions, rather than solutions, in order to lead the student towards a better understanding. Much of Socrates’ questioning led his students to confront their own ignorance. That’s important. For acknowledging one’s ignorance is often a precondition for entertaining a new idea. It creates the space for new knowledge.

The Socratic Method was based upon Plato’s belief that life has a pre-bodily form in which the individual is fully acquainted with knowledge. Thus learning, for Plato, was not so much a matter of teaching as of being reminded, or brought to an awareness, of this innate knowledge. The teacher’s task is then to prompt reminiscence through a process that is dialectical and exploratory: learning is, as it were, born through a process of argument. The term ‘maieutic’ (from the Greek maievtikos, meaning midwifery) is sometimes used to describe this Socratic Method, in which innate wisdom is elicited through critical questioning.

While Plato’s ideas about pre-bodily life seem odd today, there are some interesting parallels with modern thinking. The American linguist and psychologist Chomsky claimed, 25 years ago, that the brain is genetically programmed with the ability to learn languages (Chomsky 1983). This contains the Platonic idea of innateness, which has implications for teaching. Carl Rogers, a psychotherapist who was perhaps the first to coin the term
‘student or client centred learning’, emphasized the role of teacher as facilitator of the learner’s critical explorations (Rogers 1969). This also owes much to Socrates’ maieutic method. And today there is much talk, in relation to professional learning, of ‘reflective practice’, which draws upon Plato’s idea that knowledge and understanding are gained by questioning and thinking about what we know, rather than by being presented with new facts.

At the same time as Plato lived Isocrates, who was also a pupil of Socrates. Isocrates was interested not so much in encouraging learners to explore for themselves as in persuasion or rhetoric. Rhetoric - a persuasive argument designed to bring an audience over to the speaker’s point of view - was a central part of the Ancient Greek curriculum.

Rhetoricians were not so much scholars as powerful lawyers, diplomats and advisers. Their ‘learners’ were often those in positions of political power whom they persuaded through their smooth talk. Perhaps more akin to the many political advisers who advise government about education, rather than those who actually teach and research. Their rhetoric was primarily practical and competitive – like in a court of law - rather than reflective or contemplative. In contrast to opening up questions through dialectical critique, as Plato recommended, rhetoric was concerned to conclude the argument. It was oriented towards instruction and decision making rather than exploration.

Again, the present day context is very different, but we can see how rhetoric also plays an important role in teaching today, and how knowledge is socially determined, as well as in the formulation of policy. A lecture, like this one I am giving now, is primarily a rhetorical device. I am not being ‘learner centred’. I’m not helping you explore or discover something for yourself in a maieutic fashion. Rather I’m attempting to persuade you concerning the subject matter at hand. Taking this further, the idea of a discipline can be seen as a structure of thinking formulated through persuasive rhetorical argument.

There was thus a conflict of views in ancient Greece between those who emphasised exploration through critical dialogue and those for whom practical needs are best served by instruction and rhetoric. This dispute has many parallels with the modern debates. On the one hand are those who value a curriculum which involves exploration which, though potentially critical, is inevitably somewhat risky and unpredictable. On the other, are those who think a curriculum has to be conceived in terms of outcomes to be defined at the start. We see this same tension in relation to the learning that is a consequence of research. Researchers complain that Research Councils and other funding agencies require the outcomes to be identified in detail, as a condition of funding, before the research has even started. This encourages safe predictability rather than risky work at the frontiers of knowledge. In this way the quality of research is being undermined by the very procedures which are intended to ensure that the best research is funded.

Two thousand years later, in the sixteenth century, we see a similar debate. The French writer Montaigne came from a wealthy family and, lucky man, could afford to retire at 37. He then devoted his life to scholarship (Robertson
At that time in Europe formal education was highly structured by doctrinaire scholastic approaches. Students recited passages from ancient texts and learnt their grammar and logic by memorising rules. Classics had become the subject of drill and conformity.

Now Montaigne loved classical texts. He adorned his library by carving quotations from ancient writers all over its wooden beams. But he was appalled by the way teaching had become little more than drill which killed the love of Classics or anything else.

Montaigne reacted against this, rather as Plato reacted against the rhetoricians and Sophists of classical times. Scholastic education, Montaigne said, produced people who knew a lot but didn't know how to use their knowledge wisely. He put forward a radically different view in which the learner's interests and activity were the starting point of the curriculum. This looked very much like what we now call problem or enquiry based learning (Montaigne 1935: 142-178).

The theme is taken up in the early eighteenth century, when the philosopher Rousseau argued that students should learn to think for themselves and teachers should not just hand down inherited orthodoxies. Again, this sounds very much like the kind of criticism that has been made of so-called ‘traditional’ methods of instruction in present day universities.

A hundred years ago John Dewey developed the point further. He would have been familiar with the caricature of Mr Gradgrind, from Dickens' *Hard Times*, for whom the disciplines of knowledge were intimately related to the brutal discipline of a rigidly hierarchical society. In contrast, Dewey argued, education should serve to enhance democracy. For him, forms of learning which emphasised enquiry, exploration and discovery were not simply better ways of learning the subject matter, but better ways of inculcating democratic values in students. In the present context, we might say that the agenda for citizenship is, from Dewey's perspective, not just about teaching students a particular subject matter but about developing a learning environment in which the values of democratic citizenship - choice, debate, contestation rational argument and respect for our fellows – underpin all academic enquiry.

Of course there were great differences between these thinkers: the idealism of Plato, the romanticism of Rousseau, the pragmatism of Dewey; and they were the products of very different cultures. But underneath these differences lies a similar concern to free students from cramped didactic instruction and create the space to explore through shared critical participation.

The conclusion to be drawn from these thinkers is that academic learning – whether from teaching or research - involves contesting knowledge as well as complying with its demands. These writers all spoke out against those social forces that sought to exercise control over knowledge and could not tolerate the risky and often subversive nature of exploration. This was the problem Galileo faced when control was exercised by the Church. We are in danger of
facing the same problem as the market takes the place that the church once had as the dominant force upon higher education.

**Holding together compliance and contestation**

I have so far used the word ‘exploration’ rather than discovery, for exploration does not always lead to discoveries which are new to society nor even to the individual. That is the nature of its risk. Courage is needed to entertain the possibility of failure. Discovery can never be assured.

Contesting the limits of knowledge is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of academic enquiry. Not everything is, as it were, discovered anew, even in the most specialized research. Having argued for the importance of exploration in academic enquiry, I now want to extend the concept of enquiry to incorporate the need for compliance and instruction.

Enquiry - from the Latin, *quaere* – means to seek. Perhaps the most important attribute for the learner, teacher or researcher is curiosity. Like in the Socratic dialogue, enquiry leads to the generation of questions as we become aware of what we don’t know, but need to know. This need might be met by instruction from a web site, lecture or demonstration. Or it may lead to experimentation and discovery. Or enquiry may simply lead to further open questioning. The important issue here is not so much the old question of whether instruction or discovery best promotes learning, but that *either* should emerge from genuine seeking. Even rhetoric plays a valuable part in such an environment of enquiry.

Many have argued that university teaching is too limited by the lecture as the dominant mode of teaching. There is much truth in this; and many lectures are, no doubt, poor examples of the rhetorical art. But the problem is not simply one of addressing the performance of lecturing. Nor one of doing away with this tradition. What needs to be developed is a context of enquiry which gives the instructional or rhetorical performance significance for the learner. And this is not possible unless the learner’s curiosity is engaged.

But what stimulates and sustains curiosity? Why do researchers and students enquire and is it reasonable to expect them to do so? What is so attractive about enquiry? How can we hold together both the compliance demanded by disciplinary instruction and with the requirement for critical contestation that is an essential feature of exploration?

I want to suggest that intellectual love might function as the ‘glue’ which holds compliance and contestation together in tension and forms the core of academic enquiry.

**Intellectual love**

A dentist colleague of mine wrote about how his aim in teaching was to inspire a love of dentistry (Carrotte 1994). Now as someone for whom the pleasures of the dentist’s surgery are little short of masochistic, his love of the subject was intriguing. But it was soon clear to me that this was no different from the love of the historian or physicist, with which I find it easier to identify. Such
love characterizes their enquiry, whether that enquiry be directed at discovering new knowledge, or becoming more acquainted with what is already known, or imparting that knowledge to students.

It's difficult to speak of love. Poetry seems more appropriate than definition. Sometimes the word means no more than a positive sentiment. At others it represents the most significant form of human commitment. Its meaning is highly context dependent. But the readiness with which many academics speak of their love of their subject might suggest that we take it seriously.

The seventeenth century philosopher Spinoza (1955) wrote much about intellectual love. For him, it combined what modern-day psychologists would call the cognitive and the affective: both intellectual thought and emotion. Spinoza disagreed with the Puritans at the time, who scorned the passions as being the source of human evil. He did, however, distinguish between passions which are active (such as compassion) and those in relation to which we are passive (such as lust).

My colleague’s love of dentistry was of the former, active, sort. Indeed, it would have seemed very peculiar to say ‘he just can’t help loving dentistry’, like one might say ‘he just can’t help loving cream buns’! Loving dentistry is conceivable – just! Lusting after it isn’t.

Spinoza’s intellectual love is the desire for knowledge of God. He was a pantheist and so for him ‘God’ meant all that exists. Thus, the desire to know more about dentistry is, from Spinoza’s point of view, a desire to know more about these aspects of God. Since God is infinite, this search for knowledge is never complete. The more we know, however, the closer we come to God. And the closer we come to God, the more we become identified with Him and take on His characteristics, in particular, His capacity for intellectual love. Intellectual love therefore gives rise, in principle, to a virtuous cycle of increasing knowledge of God leading to increasing intellectual love. Intellectual love breeds intellectual love. An excellent basis, indeed, for lifelong learning.

Let’s put Spinoza’s thoughts into secular terms. This is easy to do, and some modern scholars, like his contemporaries who expelled him from his Jewish community, consider that atheism rather than pantheism more aptly describes Spinoza’s philosophy.

The object of intellectual love’s desire – dentistry, history or whatever - is never fully known. We may come to know better, but we can never know completely; we can find out what we wanted, but this leaves further questions for enquiry, further knowledge desired. Just as lovers desire greater intimacy with their beloved, so intellectual love always wants a more intimate acquaintance with its subject matter. Intellectual love, like personal love, is strengthened, rather than exhausted, by being expressed.

It thus provides an excellent basis for academic enquiry. Unlike other forms of enquiry (such as criminal investigation) it suggests a developing interest
rather than one which concludes once an objective has been met. It continually focuses our attention on what we have yet to learn. It emphasises learning that is ongoing rather than outcomes based.

Knowledge from such enquiry always remains open to further interpretation, further questioning and new ways of knowing. The philosopher Karl Popper adopts this view of the progress of science as the asking of ever more significant questions. He calls this his Searchlight Theory of Science and contrasts it with the Bucket Theory which views research as the cumulative addition of truths (Popper 1979). A parallel distinction was made by Paolo Freire (1972), who contrasted a questioning approach with the more traditional ‘banking theory’ of learning. Our metaphors for educational technologies should be quests and searchlights rather than buckets and banks.

For Spinoza, intellectual love is necessarily inclusive: it seeks to share rather than hoard. Collaboration, from this point of view, is not merely a technique to improve the effectiveness of learning. It is built into its very fabric: it conceives of learning to be essentially social rather than individual.

The idea of academics loving their subject but not wanting to share it with others would be incongruous. Of course, many are, like Isaac Newton, shy people (Gleick 2004) and many don’t like talking about their work in large lecture halls - indeed, I feel a little intrepid talking here - but it is inconceivable to imagine that, in circumstances of their choosing, they would not want to share their knowledge with others.

Wanting to hoard, rather than share one’s knowledge, could not arise from a love of the subject. It would be what Freud has called ‘epistemophilia’ or Derrida described as ‘archive fever’ (Newman 2003): an obsessive-compulsive disorder, sometimes observed in the collection of ever longer research publication lists; more akin to lust than love; these days associated with a narrow compliance to the demands of research assessment, rather than a vibrant intellectual community.

Teaching that is driven by intellectual love does not necessarily mean teaching one’s research, but teaching with the passion that underlies it. Nor does it mean that the best researchers will necessarily be the best teachers, but rather that teaching and research are both enlivened by the intellectual love which forms the basis of the community.

Enquiry of this sort should underpin the learning of students as they study, the learning of teachers as they teach, and the learning of researchers as they research. Furthermore, a community which celebrates such learning would be managed by managers who saw their task of one of enquiry rather than simply control. And policies which drive higher education would be evaluated in terms of their ability to enhance and sustain such enquiry rather than in terms of their meeting targets.
In Conclusion

Knowledge gained through compliance without contestation leads to the narrowest forms of training or closed-minded fundamentalism; contestation without compliance leads to meaningless disorder. Both have to be held together.

I have suggested that this tension between compliance and contestation has been a feature of educational thinking since the classical age. Educational thinkers at various points in history, however, have attempted to resist the forces of compliance when these become overbearing. We are at present at such a point. Resistance may now be needed.

I have also suggested that in order to work productively within the tension between compliance and contestation we need to pay attention to the academic’s love of knowledge. It is this intellectual love that both motivates and integrates, or gives integrity, to work in the diverse activities of teaching, research and knowledge transfer. It is significant that, at a time when compliance has the upper hand over contestation, academic enquiry becomes fragmented and loses its integrity. Intellectual love, which forms the basis of academic identity and motivation, is then starved. We are at present at a point where the one most valuable resource of higher education – the intellectual love of those involved – is being squandered.

Lest it be thought that a love of knowledge may be appropriate for students preparing for a life in academia, but not for wider employment, it is worth considering the views of an employer interviewed in a national magazine who spoke of the most important outcomes of higher education in terms of ‘passion’, ‘integrity’, ‘enthusiasm’ and ‘openness’ (Miller Smith 2002:10). Such a view also appears to be supported by a partnership of UK, Japanese, European, Australian and American HE-Business forums (CIHE 2003, Bok 2003) which urges universities not to relinquish scholarly values.

Ministers of State of Education, who in UK at least appear to have little time for the kind of idealism I have expressed, should be challenged on their own ground. Do they know what employers really want? Do employers? Do they all want the same thing anyway? We need to be wary of those who claim that employers, students or others in the wider society, want higher education to produce something less than it can aspire to. But perhaps the failure here should not totally be left at the door of government or even the market. Has the academic community made clear its own aspirations regarding academic enquiry and how it can contribute, with integrity, to the wellbeing of society?

As we address this question over the next few days my opening comments leave me to consider such questions as:

- How do we manage the tension between compliance and contestation in academic activities?
- What are the major threats to the integrity of academic enquiry and how can we address them?
- What is the role of intellectual love and how can we foster it?
• What are the implications of these ideas for policy makers and managers?
• How can the academic community articulate its aspirations?
And finally
• How should we resist overbearing demands for compliance where these undermine academic enquiry?

References


Carrotte, P. (1994) An action research cycle in the teaching of restorative dentistry: how my students respond to an invitation to take control and involvement in their own learning. Unpublished MEd dissertation, University of Sheffield.


**The argument of this paper is developed in detail in my book:**