

Passing through Faking Authenticity

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Abstract

Trust, according to Rempel et al., is “one of the most desired qualities in any close relationship” – which must surely include our “close up” research, as well as our teaching and other practices in a HE context. And yet, as Macfarlane highlights in his thinkpiece, our own practices may be “fak[ing] it – or perhaps caus[ing] others to do so”. This paper grapples with that question by reflecting critically on the values and norms we embody in our practices and in turn demand from our students. Our previous work revealed that some students appeared to be producing reflective writing of the desired depth and focus, without deriving the expected benefits, which we concluded was a mimetic and inauthentic enactment of “penitent performance”. We made sense of this through drawing on the work of Stenhouse, and his distinction between initiation and induction. Applying this insight to the context of student engagement, we concluded that for students to be engaging both congruently and authentically, rather than mimetically, along the socio-cultural facet, they would need to have undergone induction rather than merely initiation, in Stenhouse’s terms.

As their teachers, we assume students construct their imagined communities to look rather like... us. We project onto them the aspiration to achieve membership of our discipline, our profession, our institution – and yet the imagined communities they construct may look nothing like us at all, especially where the students don’t see themselves reflected in our various subjectivities. Ashwin has argued that the goal of HE is to be transformative, which we’ve noted elsewhere accords with Stenhouse’s “induction”. Yet transformative HE assumes that students want to be transformed – which is not always the case, as many students’ HE ambitions are entirely instrumental. Macfarlane calls on us to interrogate critically our own authenticity in our practices, to consider both how we “fake it” and how in turn we cause our students to do so. As close-up HE researchers, we turn our gaze with alacrity onto the values and cultures our students bring with them to HE. It is perhaps time to examine as critically the values and cultures we ourselves bring, and the ethnocentrism to which that gives rise.

Keywords

Authenticity, student reflection, student engagement, imagined communities.