Abstract 4A

Taking it personally: Feedback and the development of Graduate Attributes

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This presentation adds to a growing body of higher education research promoting the importance of a more holistic understanding of students, including their emotional responses to learning situations (e.g. Barnett 1997, 2007, Brockbank and McGill 1998, Mann 2001, Ashworth 2004, Beard et al 2005, Jarvis 2005, 2006, Carless 2006, Hanscomb 2007, Värlander 2008, Christie *et al* 2008, Ashworth and Greasley 2009). Taken to task is the view that tutors should be careful to separate the 'product and the person' when giving feedback on assignments. It is argued instead that in several important respects a student's work and a more holistic understanding of them as person are closely and relevantly related. More precisely, a student's strengths, weaknesses and idiosyncrasies as a personality can be detected in their work; examples most of us will be familiar with are over or under-confidence in the assertion of arguments; wilful (and potentially creative) nonconformity to standards and norms of essay writing; overly rigid adherence to perceived norms; unwillingness to consider opposing views; willingness to take responsibility for positions taken (vs. abstraction, or fence-sitting), and excessive defensiveness in the face of criticism. It is not being suggested that we psychoanalyze our students, but that attention to these patterns could play a significant part in the development of graduate attributes. Arenas for raising discussion of such qualities might include subject-based 'feedback vivas', and meetings with advisers of study. Advantages of this approach include congruence with the primary purpose of being at university, and the personal and immediate relevance of the process leading to increased motivation to engage with developing attributes. Also, assuming feedback matters, such an approach ought to improve academic performance, itself a potential motivator for engaging with personal development at university. Despite these advantages, the talk/discussion must also address the significant ethical issues associated with such an approach.