

## **Is there a Mastodon in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Room?**

A response to Pat Hutchings', "Theory: The Elephant in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Room," *International Journal on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, Volume 1, Number 1 (January 2007)

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In her article Pat Hutchings makes an excellent case for more theory in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, particularly in relation to the discipline specific pedagogic area, as opposed to the generic area. It is, however, important to stress that these two areas are not wholly separate; there is a synergy between them. To give just one example – enquiry-based learning is very different in medicine (where it has grown out of problem-based learning) and in e.g. English literature (Hutchings and O'Rourke 2002), but there is also a commonality between the two in e.g. the transfer of authority from teacher to learner. Similarly, the research – teaching nexus (Elton 2005), which has to be seen as "learning in a research mode" in both research and teaching, requires a synthesis of both disciplinary and generic concepts. Underlying fundamental theory cannot then be restricted to theories relevant to generic and discipline specific pedagogy, but must include aspects of the general theory of Hegelian synthesis, going back to Kant (Elton 2006a).

Another very different area of relevant theory is the theory of change, or - more accurately – theories of change which go back to Lewin (1952). Academics as a tribe (Becher and Trowler 2001) resist change and at best may see it as doing something better that they are doing already; to see it as doing something different, as in the double loop model of change (Senge 1990), is rare indeed. Yet in a rapidly changing world, such double loop change is essential.

So far, we have only added elephants to the herd; the mastodon – which is a fundamental theory of faculty ('staff' in UK English) development is still to come. This area would appear to be treated differently on the two sides of the Atlantic. While in the United States it depends largely on initiatives from individuals and individual institutions, developed in the past ten years - there was no mention of faculty professional development in e.g. the writings of Boyer (1987, 1990) - in Britain it has been closely allied to change theory (Stefani and Elton 2002, Elton 2006b) and has been formalised through the Higher Education Academy and the Staff and Educational Development Association. So far, to the best of my knowledge, there has been no attempt to compare the two approaches, regarding their respective effectiveness. But while faculty (staff) development would appear to be firmly on the agenda in both countries, the subject is at present sadly deficient in fundamental theory.

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