

HIGHER EDUCATION FOR THE FUTURE:

Flexible Pedagogies that Empower Learners for Complexity, Uncertainty and Change

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Highly Qualified but Misty-Eyed?

Lucy is a fairly new lecturer at a Million+ university. She has a PG Certificate in HE (gained during her PhD) and an enthusiasm for new pedagogies. She was attracted to the institution for its T&L strengths, including its large number of NTFs and its former CETL initiative.

Lucy is wondering what happened to the critically reflective practice and learning innovation she encountered in her PhD days...

Q. Is all this flexibility simply about efficiency and responding to new technologies?

Q. Where is the space for her to discuss how flexible learning relates to learning needs rather than delivery modes?

Flexible learning encounters in her first year:

- A review of course architecture to extend P/T pathways - requiring considerable effort in rewriting programme documentation
- A move to enable electronic assignment submission, accompanied by CPD workshops on how to use the new software involved
- A central directive and practical advice on doing student module evaluations via mobile devices - to help improve NSS participation and scores

Technological mist is overshadowing pedagogical conversations

Wifi Connected – yet strangely Disconnected?

John is a 2nd year student at a Russell group university, very interested in current affairs and engaged in a local community action group. He is working part-time to finance his studies and increase his job prospects.

At this mid point in his studies:

- John is an IT native - uses technology at home and to source and access material for his assignments as well as for submitting his coursework.
- His course is providing him with a range of professional skills – but not helping develop the skills needed to respond to real world issues.
- His experiences in student volunteering with the local community are being recorded as transferable skills on his CV and his HEAR
- His part-time job is giving him an insight into organisational politics and company ethics as well as the experiences of low status workers

John understands how his university experience is helping understand issues and prepare for work.. but he is disappointed that it is not equipping him to shape the society he will be living and working in.

Q. How can the University help John join up his motivations and aspirations?

Q. How can HE equip students to face uncertainty and complexity that they will encounter?

Q. How can HE help students shape societies, lead change and not just understand or contribute to current thinking and practice?

Flexible Learning to Flexible Pedagogy

Flexible Learning Tensions underpinning the scenarios:

First scenario:

- ***Focus of flexible learning is on new delivery pathways and efficiency***
- ***Technological mist is overshadowing pedagogical conversations***

Second scenario:

- ***Fragmented student experience means students are not connecting HE learning to interests and ambitions.***
- ***HE is not fulfilling its potential to respond to complex societal needs and create more positive futures.***

Viewing flexibility through pedagogical lenses...

Looking beyond practical and technological drivers for 'flexibility'

Flexibility as the ability to think, act, live and work differently in complex, uncertain and changeable scenarios



Flexible Learning Territory

The HEA approach to flexible learning recognises that

Flexible learning is about enabling choice and responsiveness in:

- **Pace** - part-time learning, recognition of prior learning and associated credit frameworks.
- **Place** - work based learning, employee learning and employer engagement.
- **Mode** - 'e-learning' or 'technology-enhanced learning'.

It understands that there are significant areas of overlap between these aspects, which brings the need for integrated strategies for institutional implementation.

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But experiences suggest that:

-The emphasis is primarily on student choice and curriculum delivery

-Pedagogical dimensions are easily obscured by technological 'mist'

-IT developments have dual and contradictory influence on pedagogical innovation

-The effect is to move attention away from renewal of learning and teaching approaches

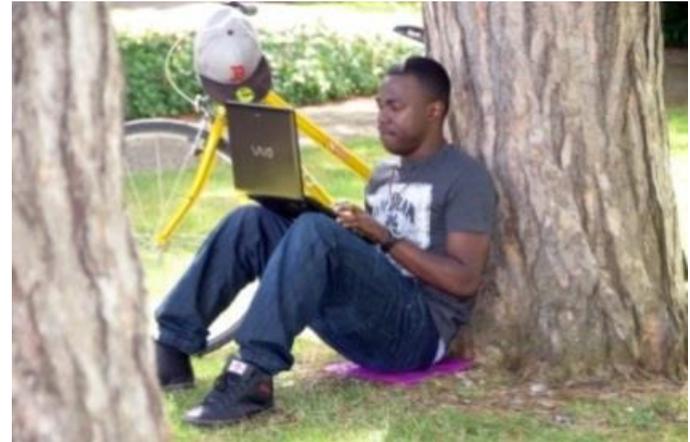
Overview of Presentation

1. The Research Project

2. 'New' Pedagogical Ideas

Learner Empowerment
Future-facing Education
Decolonising Education
Transformative Capabilities
Crossing Boundaries
Social Learning

3. Project Significance



Research Questions

- How do new pedagogical ideas underpin the *reimagining of universities* and their core purposes?
- How might we connect *pedagogical innovation* with the shift to increased flexibility in HE?
- How can flexible learning pathways support *new forms of thinking, debate and action* in HE?
- How can ideas of flexibility inform education to deal with *complexity, uncertainty and change*?
- How do 'flexible pedagogies' help us to rethink the *how, what and why of the HE experience*?



Project Scope and Process

HEA 'Flexible Pedagogies' project 2013 - 'New Pedagogical Ideas' strand:

- Considering the **relationship** between flexibility and pedagogy - focus on the capability of learners to deal with complexity, uncertainty and change
- Exploring **pedagogical implications** of technological change, globalisation of the sector, rising participation and changing employer expectations
- Grounding the exploration in the **realities of education practices** and HE systems and drawing out implications for key agencies and stakeholders

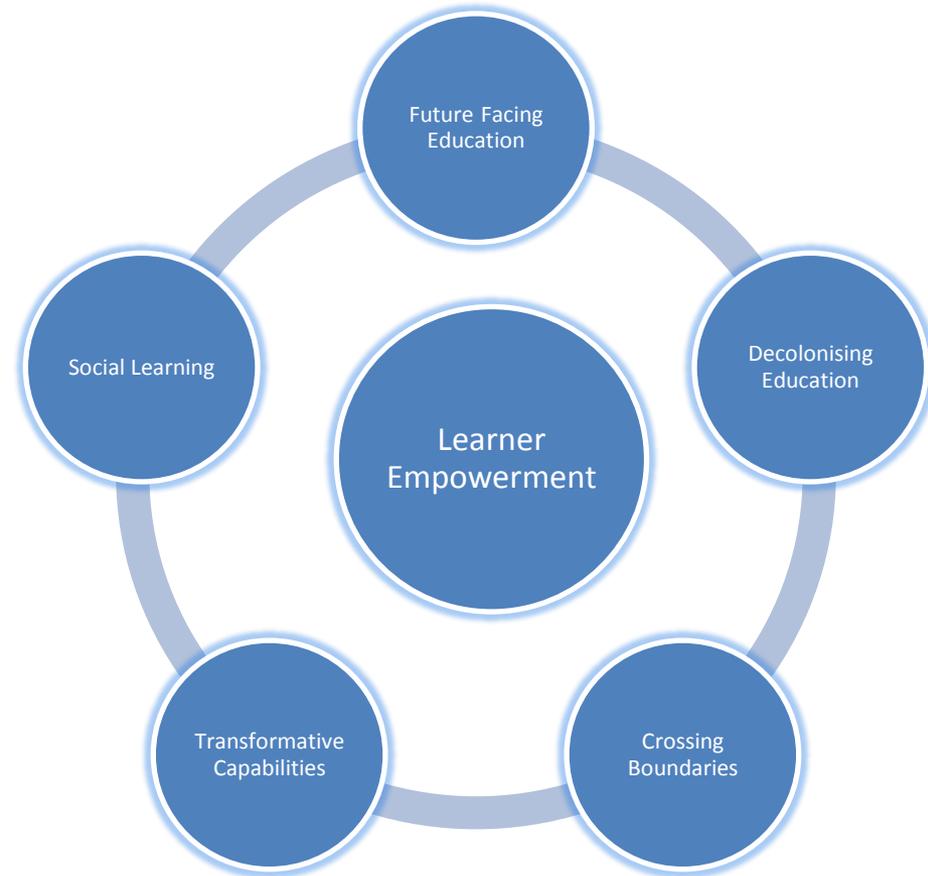
Study Timeframe: 4 months - March to mid July 2013

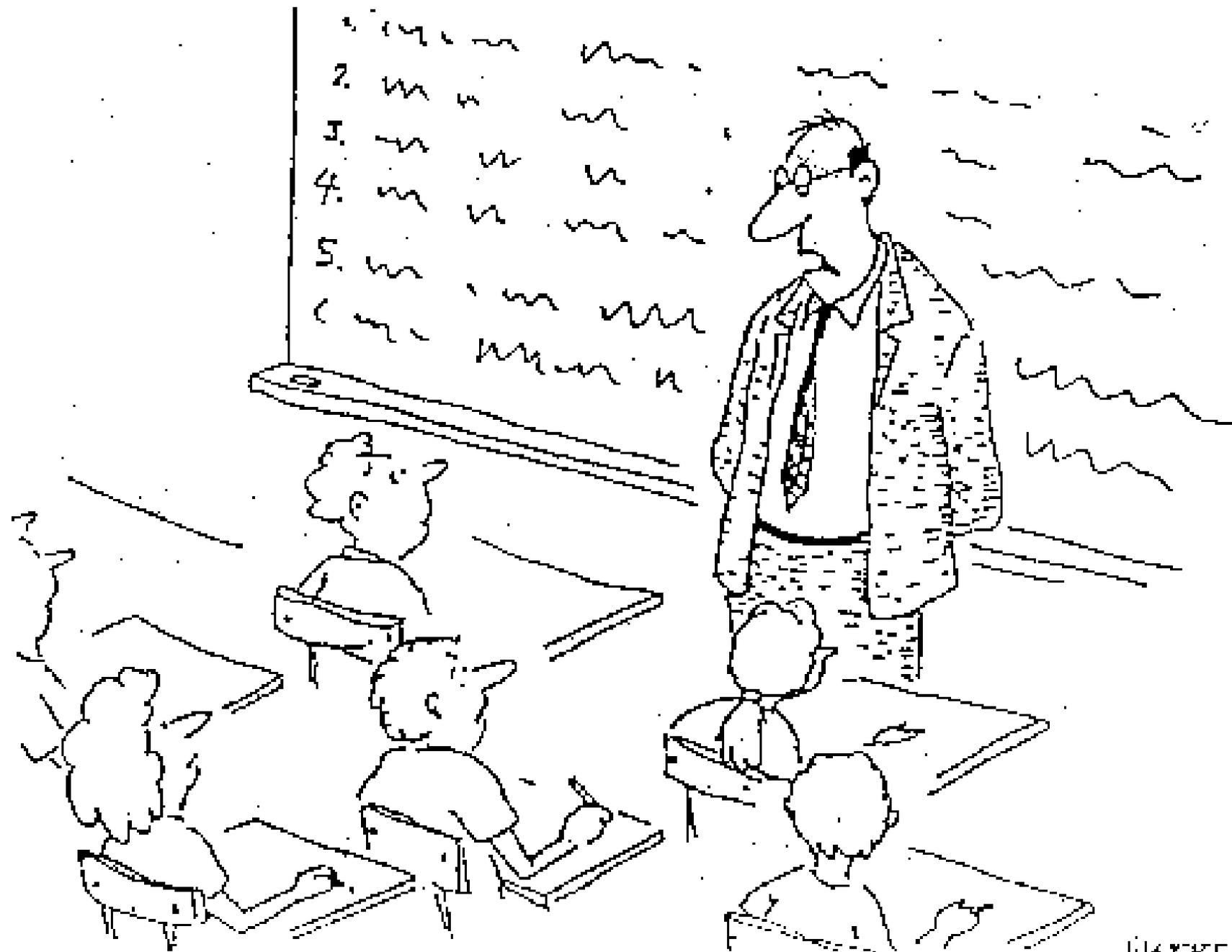
1. **Desk-based review:** to identify trends in pedagogical innovation and to situate them within recent policy and practice
2. **Consultation:** to discuss themes with key informants in HE T&L and contextualise the issues in relation to institutional realities

Nothing New Under the Sun?

'New' Ideas for Flexible Pedagogy are:

- *Geared to the bigger picture and strategic view - with application across disciplines*
- **Based in democratic and inclusive approaches – aiming to reposition and change education**
- *Informed by earlier education traditions but also recent pedagogical innovation*
- **Edging past dominant discourses and current paradigms – but not established or commonly practised across the HE curriculum**





WARKER

'I expect you all to be independent, innovative, critical thinkers, who will do exactly as I say.'

Learner Empowerment

Students becoming more actively involved in the development of learning, using 'co-creation' processes that challenge learning relationships and their power dynamics

Flexibility within the Pedagogy:

- Reframing existing academic relationships and the power frames behind them
- Connecting students and educators in co-creation of the intellectual commons
- Bringing diversity of student backgrounds and experiences into academic encounters

Taking it Forward:

QAA, HEA and NUS work with students to create pedagogical tools and guidance to support more powerful co-creation models that help people to construct and question the learning process

This theme of increasing student presence and influence has much currency in present HE policy landscape and with the move to increase entrepreneurship and recognise prior learning

GENTLEMEN...
charge your glasses
for a toast...!



gentlemen...
HERE'S TO
THE FUTURE



TO THE
FUTURE



"Whatever happened"
to...

"Remember
the time we..."

"We used"
to....

"I'll never
forget when
we..."



who was
the bloke...
who..

I used to
have....

Leung

(Leung 1990)

Future-facing Education

Using engagement and change processes that help people to consider different paths and prospects for the future and to work towards new scenarios

Flexibility within the Pedagogy:

- Imagining alternatives and thinking beyond present scenarios
- Developing skills of anticipation and the insight needed to lead change
- Increasing agency and the ability to challenge existing practices

Taking it Forward:

Establish a platform for dialogue and develop guidance on the pedagogy of futures education in HE

This theme is perhaps least common and least understood among all the new pedagogical ideas and presents an exciting pedagogical frontier for HE

Then....



Now....

COIN 
The Evolution



Decolonising Education

Deconstructing Western worldviews in the teaching and learning system to extend intercultural understanding and the ability to think and work using globally-sensitive frames and methods

Flexibility within the Pedagogy:

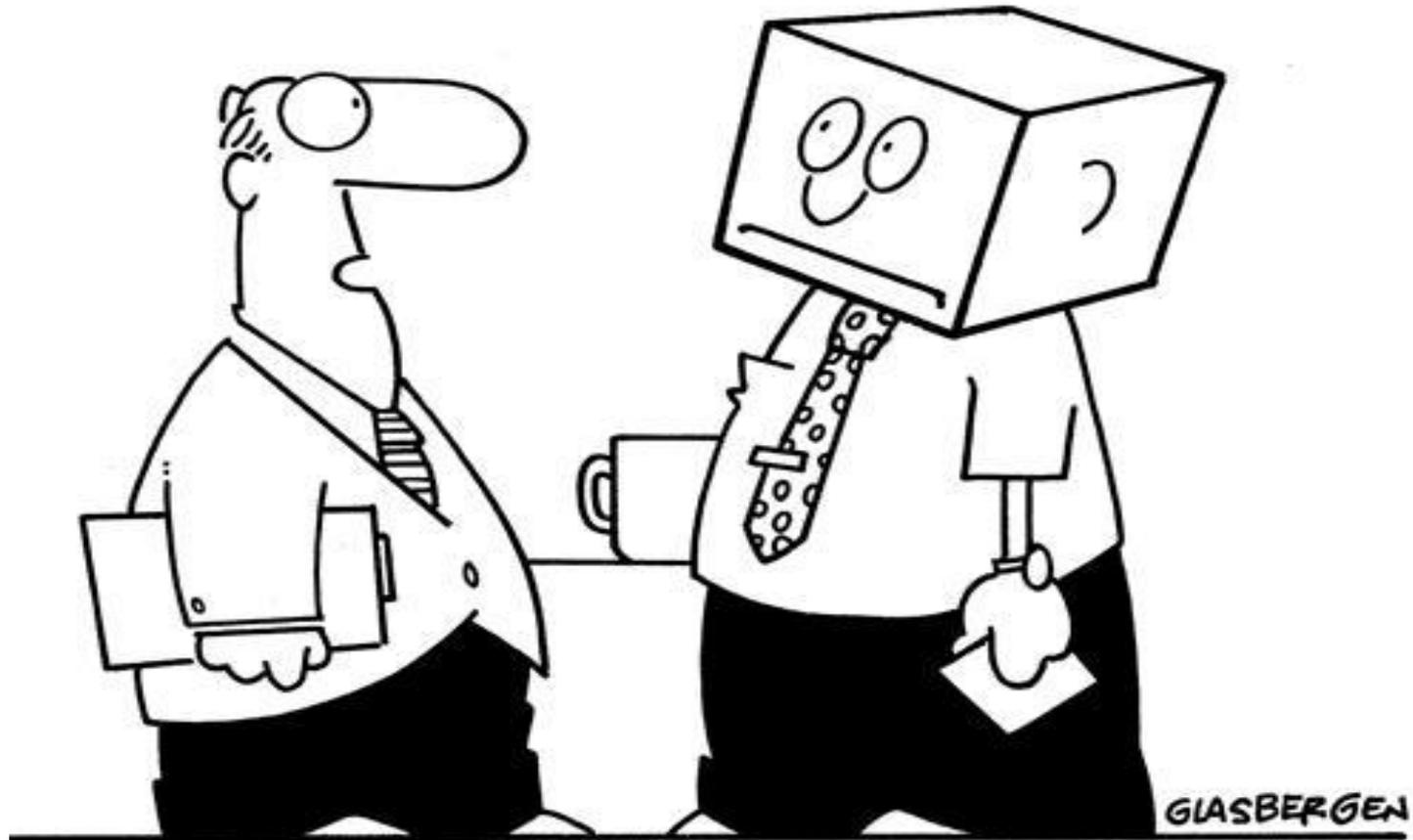
- Embedding 'diversity' beyond the mere inclusion of global examples
- Extending intercultural literacy and exposing divergent values
- Understanding global-local connections across the academia

Taking it Forward:

The UK Funding Councils could work with the HEA to fully scope the issues around the internationalisation of the sector and work with institutions to build staff capability in this area

This theme needs to be considered across the academic system and not just in the classroom but at all levels of the HE transaction and in transnational education provision

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**“Thinking outside of the box is difficult
for some people. Keep trying.”**

Transformative Capabilities

An educational focus beyond knowledge and understanding, towards agency, competence and transformative approaches to learning

Flexibility within the Pedagogy:

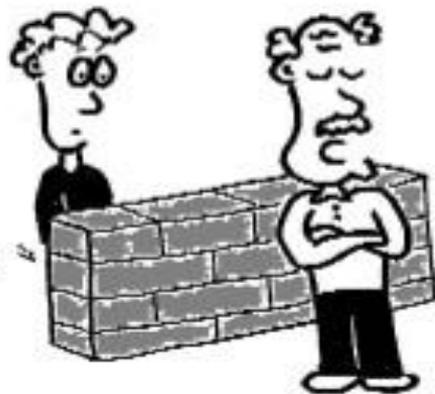
- Focusing on adaptive ability to apply knowledge and skills
- Drawing on learning from experience and unintended consequences
- Integrative frameworks and lifelong/life wide learning approaches

Taking it Forward:

The HEA could consider how the Professional Standards Framework could evolve to reflect more distinctive and ambitious capabilities for UK HE

Theoretical foundations for innovation have been laid through transformative learning theories but the tools are still lacking to realise the potential of the educator in modelling these approaches for the learner

It looks like we've
hit a brick wall.
I don't see any
way around it.



Jim.

Crossing Boundaries

Systemic approaches for inter-disciplinary, inter-professional and cross-sectoral learning, maximising collaboration and sharing perspective

Flexibility in the Pedagogy:

- Transcending specialist expertise to tackle bias and divergent perspectives
- Working with stakeholders to develop coherent responses to complex issues
- Refocusing on the application of knowledge in real-world scenarios

Taking it Forward:

Directors of Teaching and Learning could explore ways of reflecting cross-cutting themes in Learning and Teaching strategies and associated assurance processes and enhancement initiatives

Some of the major barriers to this type of learning in HE exist in the ways that academic institutions are managed and structured, as well as the disciplinary frameworks that exist at sector level and inhibit inter-disciplinary interaction



- YOU CAN
ENGAGE US
BETTER
DOWN HERE!

Simon
Kassabov

Social Learning

Developing learning cultures and environments that harness the emancipatory power of spaces and interactions outside the formal curriculum and beyond the campus walls

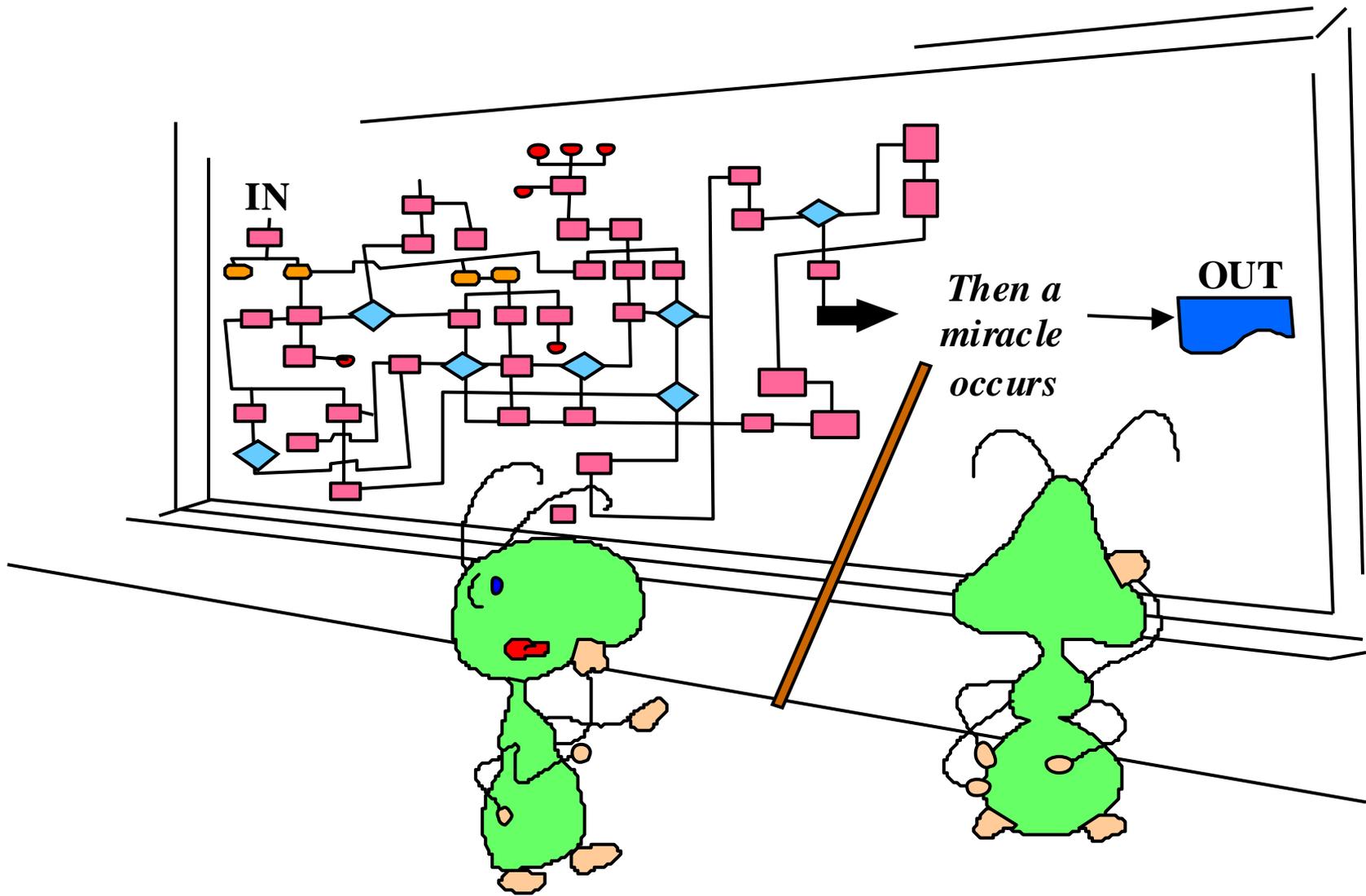
Flexibility within the Pedagogy:

- Extending the contexts in which learning happens
- Using new technologies and virtual spaces for interaction
- Learning outside the formal curriculum and in the community

Taking it Forward:

The UK Funding Councils could explore ways to incentivise social learning initiatives that use campus spaces, new technologies and involve local communities

Technological change has raised the stakes around this theme and made it a pressing institutional concern, providing an exciting opportunity to lever the kind of change that could embed new forms of interaction and learning in HE



“Good work but I think we need just a little more detail right here”

Institutional Implications

Institutions hold the key to the pace of transition towards flexible pedagogies and to realising their benefits

Embedding flexibility as a pedagogical principle in:

- **learning and teaching strategies**
- **digital literacy initiatives**
- **CPD activities for teaching staff**
- **senior management discussions**
- **enhancement priorities**

“It should be a benchmark skill across disciplines to help students develop that flexibility... not just doing the same thing differently, but getting at the core question of ‘what’s the different thing we need to be doing’ because the world has changed, the mind of students and the mind of employers.”
(Director of Studies)

“There is a bigger (and perennial) argument here about the purpose of education. How can emergent pedagogies serve critical reflexivity rather than (just) the skills debate? So education for what? Learning for what? There is a danger that flexible learning is restricted to a debate about effective means, and very little about ends.”
(Professor)

Sector Implications

The task of sector agencies will be to help articulate the 'big picture' and support innovation

Supporting flexible pedagogy by:

- Including the contributions and concerns of students and external HE stakeholders
- Promoting IT innovations with strong pedagogical grounding
- Working with UK Funding Councils to understand the institutional dimensions
- Collaborating on development of dialogues, practical guidance, resources and tools

"If you think about the transaction cost of change, there has to be a really strong driver for an institution to set off on change. Either the current financial model is collapsing (but that is embedded in a very commercial model of what the university is about), or it's about the big picture. But there is no big picture being sold, so why would an institution set off on change?"

(Director of Studies)

"The downside of this emphasis is that it offers flexibility within a paradigm of inflexibility... A radical overhaul about the structure and delivery of higher education is needed... and these sorts of discussions are likely to require institutional and policy backing at the highest levels."

(Senior Academic Co ordinator)

Teaching excellence in higher education: 2007-2013

Dr Vicky Gunn & Dr Anna Fisk

Specialism with specific context

Specialism within holistic context

Current focus

Providing a context in which disciplinary mastery is achieved by students

Providing a context in which student learning development (both discipline mastery and generic attributes) is achieved.

Future focus

Providing a context in which the students experience an education which enables fit for purpose entry into a determined career/ profession.

Providing a context for the development of ways of being, doing, and acting associated with life wide career opportunities as well as appropriate economic, financial, socio cultural, and ethical attitudes.