

Prefiguring higher education as action inquiry

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Metaphorically, Storytelling can be used as an approach for personal or group development. The process of re-telling is particularly important in challenging practice, and shaping new practices. I offer a re-telling here in my own context of mass higher education. About how it could be?

Moji glanced at her watch - she had a mentoring session at 2pm with Tom. She put down the latest issue of a leadership journal, and re-focused and re-framed her mind on Tom's learning journey. She found it difficult as she was frustrated that her field was still so positivistic and deterministic - it didn't feel like it had changed much since she was at university. Tom had already completed two years of his Honours degree. As Moji looked over his profile, she wished she had done Tom's programme at university. Tom had decided the structure of his degree, decided the contents, and decided the title of it. It truly was his degree. Moji remembered his last project at work... he had changed a workflow process in his department, using operations management theory, and wanted to know what impact it had made. It was fascinating. Tom had unleashed major controversy about the peoples' roles in that process - surely affected by the global economic crunch. He found it hard to deal with at the time... his learning emerged way beyond operations management, into how to draw on personal strength and resource in personally tough times. His use of motivation theory was inspired. A knock at the door disrupts Moji's reflections... Tom enters... Moji and Tom talk like friends that haven't spoken for years; they clearly know each other's life histories. Tom then gets straight in to his ideas about his next inquiry around change management. A natural progression from the last project... 3pm arrives, and Moji has to end the dialogue with Tom. She wants to be at the dialogue group. She won't say anything in the group, as usual, but she wants to be there in case the group wants her to action anything. It's a positive group, now, but they had a rocky start...

This paper visions the possibility of whole degrees through action inquires in a mass higher education system, and shares some of the lived opportunities and challenges this story holds, from practice across various UK universities. Questions will be asked of our practices, but new ones will be co-created.