**Interview #2 Transcript: Professor and Former Dean of Teaching and Learning (13.07.17) (University A)**

Interviewer (I): Okay, so as a senior lecturer, what would you consider to be your main responsibilities?

Participant (P): Oh right. Well I’m not a senior lecturer.

I: Oh okay.

P: I’m a *professor* of [discipline removed].

I: Right, yeah sorry, professor.

P: No don’t worry. Well I’m a professor of [discipline removed] so I research and I teach and I have some admin roles. In terms of this interview it’s probably relevant to say that I was the Dean of Teaching and Learning for the university, so I did that for 7 years and then I decided to revert back to being an academic again, or a full-time academic. And it might be interesting for you to – for me to tell you about that and why and just to say as well, a lot of what I’ll say we have written about with my colleagues, you might have seen it already so, both in reports and in articles. Have you seen the article in [journal removed]? [article removed]?

I: *Yes*, I have.

P: Okay. Good, good. So, good, so you’ve got a sense of the politics of it all and then why, after 7 years, I thought we’d gone as far as we could. So yeah, so when I was the Dean I was responsible for teaching and learning across the whole institution, mainly in a – not so much a compliance way but an enhancement way, so it was a very nice job actually, in that it was about supporting colleagues in the university to develop teaching and learning – what’s the other word, not compliance but, assur – enhancement that’s the word, in the literature. So yeah it was about enhancement, that’s what my job was about. And we set up Student Collaboration [policy name changed]. Okay.

I: Okay. [laughing]. Okay, how many undergraduate students do you teach in a term, roughly?

P: Well we have a degree – a [discipline removed] degree now, and there’s just a new degree and there’s, in the School of [removed for confidentiality], there’s about 150 students in the whole School and we’ve got 20 plus [discipline removed] students, so I’ll teach – they’ll be on various courses and combinations so they’re not all [discipline removed] students, but I teach on three. I teach on two undergraduate programmes, a Master’s programme and I have PhD students. How many, I’m not sure exactly. In each class, there’s probably somewhere between 10 and 20 students and I do three or four classes a term and then I have my PhD students, I have about eight of those.

I: Okay. Do you think it’s a manageable number?

P: That’s a good question. I’m not – I think there are – I think I have – for me it is, yeah. I think there are other colleagues who teach more undergrad than me, because I’m a professor, I don’t have as much undergrad teaching. At the moment, since I have been a professor here for the last 3 years, yes, it’s been manageable.

I: Okay. How do you attempt to engage your undergraduate students in your teaching?

P: Well I suppose it might be helpful if I said more about the institution rather than just – because that’s, I think, why you’re here as much as anything. Because the point about Student Collaboration [policy name changed] is that it’s not really about students, it’s about the institution and the meaning and purpose of higher education and therefore, how do we consider the meaning and purpose of higher education in terms of our relationship with our students? So, we don’t begin from the relationship with students, we begin from the meaning and purpose of higher education in a moment of turmoil and trauma for higher education which is part of a much *wider* social and political crisis, that we are in a particular moment, in terms of capitalist civilization, when there are a number of extraordinary problems and emergencies that we don’t seem to have any way of resolving and what is the role of the university in all of that? The university must have, because of the nature of what it is, it must have some important and significant contribution to make to this social and global crisis, which is the outcome of marketisation and businessification, or you might want to call it capitalism. So, the crisis is the crisis of capital. The university in the form in which it is constituted as a marketised neo-liberal institution, has no way of dealing with the problem because it’s part of the problem. Literally no way. In England and the UK generally, it just becomes more intensively marketised. So, what I’ve been involved with, for quite a long time now, when I was at [pre-1992 university], I was the [position removed], which was precisely about reinventing the university, from the inside out, by recalibrating the relationship between students and teachers in a more democratic way, so they – the students – become part of the production of knowledge, which is what university is and meaning and representations of meaning, like in the Humanities. So, the university’s not really about teaching and it’s not really about students. So, students can’t really be at the heart of the project because universities are about the production of knowledge and meaning and the representations of that. So, it’s an attempt to recover that project – have you read Angela Brew, Angela Brew’s work? If you haven’t read it, she’s an Australian academic – I’ll give you the – it’s called – I just mention this now because she talks about this issue in a good way, she makes the connection between research and teaching in terms of the whole nature of higher education and I think it’s called *Bridging the Divide*… *Bridging the Divide,* it means linking research and teaching. Of course, what’s very interesting is, you probably already know, is that the first European university, modern European university, that was created in 1810 in Berlin, was designed precisely on this model, Humboldt’s University. Now when people write about it, they tend to write about it in a rather teaching and learning, sort of, way, but it was much more than that, it was a political project, a liberal humanist political project, as a critique of the medieval university. So, it’s recovering that critical, political purpose of a university, is what we were thinking about when we designed Student Collaboration [policy name changed]. Or some of us were. But making a strong connection to what was already happening within the institution in terms of academics and students working together. So, the first thing we did in [removed for confidentiality] was do a, kind of, audit on this, kind of, activity, research-teaching, students collaborating with academics, and we found a lot of it, and based on *that* we developed a model of Student Collaboration [policy name changed], which I’d already been working on at [pre-1992 university], but in a much more ad hoc way. But here I – we had the opportunity because it was a new institution, it was in the process of inventing itself, so it was very amenable to some idea to make a link between – to make things a bit more coherent. So that’s what we did. [pause] And then allied to that is thinking about the role of students in the development of the history of the university’s been something very powerful and important. It’s not *how* do we engage students? Students already *are* engaged and *have* *been* engaged, not in the managerialist way that we’d like to think about them, therefore how do I engage them? But as political, unruly subjects. There’s a good, a nice book, I think it’s called *Unruly Subjects* written about the history of the student, the student movement for the last 200 years to call it that, so 1968 is a very important moment for the development of Student Collaboration [policy name changed] because in that moment students took over the university and reinvented it, in Paris and elsewhere, and the moment of occupation – I’m sorry, the student protest movement in 2010 is very important because that was the first really public demonstration against the politics of austerity, when they kicked in Millbank. I was there but I didn’t see Millbank get kicked in. But – and people *at the time* wrote about it, people like Claire Solomon, who was the head of the NUS Student Union. There were a number of books that came out very quickly at that time and they said this was the first moment of the politics of austerity and what’s so interesting about it is the rise of Corbynism and the movement against austerity and the role of students *in* the rise of Corbynism and particularly in the recent General Election. So, the reason I’m talking about this is because to get a sense of the very radical political project that sits behind Student Collaboration [policy name changed] and that’s quite unlike every other engagement, partnership, whatever you want to call it, initiative that there is, including *all* of them and I know all of them because these are my friends [laughing], I’m connected to them. But there’s no real sense of radical politics in any of them, it’s very much within the framework of the marketised system. So, when I’m thinking about, “How do I engage?” it’s at the level of the institution, but *through* the moment of the relationship between the student and the academic, so that’s the, kind of, theory and the history of it. And of course, Student Collaboration [policy name changed] comes from [removed], you maybe saw this, [critic removed] and how do radical intellectuals act in a moment? So, all that lies behind. Now, as you might know, there are very few revolutionary Marxists at [University A] apart from me. There’s one or two but not many. But that’s not the point, the point is we’ve created a language and a framework within which to think about all of this. It’s a non-dogmatic project, people are encouraged to, of course, think about it in whatever way they like, so people have different ideas about what it is and that’s a *good* thing, but the *framing* is clear and it certainly helps in the conversation if they engage with the framing while they’re not agreeing with it, that’s the most productive thing that can happen. It happens rarely but that’s when it gets very productive, so we all learn from each other. So that’s yeah, that’s the theory. I can tell you how we designed it at [University A] in a more practical way. [people walking past and talking]. Sorry about the noise. So, what we did at [University A] was we made research-engaged teaching the organising principle for everything so, that means research-like teaching in the curriculum from the get-go and the way in which we did that, is that we ran it through the Quality Assurance Processes. Again, over a period of 3 or 4 years working this out, it was something that happened slowly and it wasn’t something that was imposed, at all. We worked in collaboration with the quality officers, we worked in collaboration with the [removed for confidentiality], we worked in collaboration, and so it was put in to the, you know, the validation protocols when a new degree is – people have to write it up and we ask them questions and – to what extent is research…? All of this is in the report that we wrote for the [removed for confidentiality]. Just questions, “How much research-engaged teaching is in?” “Are students involved in the design and delivery of the teaching?” “How do you organise the classroom in terms of the architecture, technology?” And in terms of employability, we framed that in the, sort of, “How are students involved in creating the future?” That involves work but works only a part of it. So, they’re not very controversial, people can find ways to answer that, but even so, it’s not compulsory. We challenged and invite which actually, it still exists, one of the ironies of all of this, is that it’s still here after – and in some ways, it’s stronger than ever because the QAA, the new TEF, sort of, insists on an organisational process like, you know, a unified coherent strategy so, the university’s recovered it again and now it’s right at the front of everything. So yeah, so we ran it through and then we did some research and people like it, *a lot*, because it’s not asking them to do anything they’re not already – it’s research and teaching, it’s trying to find a way of resolving that dysfunctionality. That’s another strong point that Angela Brew makes in her books, she calls it the apartheid between research and teaching. So, we’re just trying to find a way of sorting that out, when almost everything else is driving it apart. And the REF and the TEF even more than it ever was. So, if people talk about research and teaching as being separated things, then they have no idea about what a university is, literally nothing, they don’t know a thing, about either the history of the modern university or what it works as. So, Student Collaboration [policy name changed] is based on the dysfunctionality of the two core activities, trying to re-engineer, reinvent the university in another form, not certain what that form is, where students and academics are working collaboratively, research-engaged teaching, and I suppose teaching-engaged research, and each subject area gets to define it their own way. So, you find that – so to answer your question, how do we do it? Just in one course that I teach on, [module removed], and the course was designed by my colleague and she was thinking about Student Collaboration [policy name changed] when she designed it, 4 or 5 years ago, is that the students work as groups on a Wiki page based on a heading and they design their own reading lists and they write annotated bibliographies and then they write an essay question, which individually, they get marked collectively for the Wiki and then they do an essay individually. So that’s just one small, very concrete, example. Another way in which I’m involved in a practical way of Student Collaboration [policy name changed], a lot of universities set up funding for students to apply for, one or two thousand pounds. At [pre-1992 university] they had the [funding board removed]. At [pre-1992 university], they’ve got [funding board removed]. It came out of MIT originally, I can’t remember what it’s called there. Here it’s called university something – I can’t remember what it’s called. Anyway, this last year I’ve been working with a student on a project, research project, and it was on studentification in the [location removed], you know, students living in a city and then changing the nature of a city, not always in a good way, so that was very nice. So that would be another very practical way. And then of course, students can have their work published, so thinking about when they’re involved in the work, there are quite a few student journals now in different subject areas and when I was at [pre-1992 university], we set up the [name removed] journal, which is now, if you look online, it’s a wonderful thing, nothing to do with me. We had the good intelligence to employ a person who was very smart and knew a lot about publishing and is a wonderful person, and her leadership, together with students and others, they’ve created an – it’s now an international journal [removed for confidentiality]. There’s also the [removed for confidentiality] you might know, have you heard of that?

I: Yeah.

P: And I was involved in that at the beginning and that’s very successful and is now international. So, when we’re thinking – so when I’m thinking about my teaching and in the classroom, I tell students, “You can get your work published” and, so trying to get it beyond just simply the mark and the grade. And students get a lot out of that I think.

I: Yeah, okay. So, what are your thoughts on the student as consumer in higher education?

P: Well, I think recently the situation’s been intensified by the new Consumer Rights Act. Students now are legally – legally consumers, with very clear consumer rights. And the law, as you know, creates an antagonistic relationship. In the law, we defend our own interests, that’s what the law is. That’s not a moral critique of the law, that’s just what it is. So, what has happened is, the very legal form of student as consumer, through the Consumer Rights Act, means that it completely undermines the concept of student engagement. People might like to work with students and do very many wonderful things, but the actual material relationship that underpins it, which is what I’m interested in, the institutional forms and the legal forms and the management and governance forms, means that actually, student engagement is finished, actually, in any real *material* way. So, student as consumer is – and the fee of course has made the relationship between students and academics and universities, very antagonistic, conflictual, it hasn’t destroyed the wonderful students who want to be as critical and as political as they ever were, but it’s made it much more difficult for them. So, I’m completely opposed to the fee, it’s *immoral*, so that – it hasn’t helped anything, it’s made things more difficult, it’s made students more instrumental, *of course*. The focus on employability is very problematic, but students are smart enough and complex enough, I’m not at all characterising all students as thinking like that, some do, some don’t. But it has made it more difficult for them, definitely. So, Student Collaboration [policy name changed] comes out – the idea is that it was set up very clearly in *opposition* to the concept of student as consumer, as a political project.

I: Yeah. Okay. In your opinion, how prevalent, if at all, is the concept of student as consumer in the university’s attempts to engage its undergraduates?

P: Well like I say, it’s completely, legally, at the heart of everything now. It’s not the students who are at the heart, it’s the legal relationship, even if you didn’t want to do it, you couldn’t not. It undercuts everything. It’s the legal framework, so the university thinks of that at the beginning because it *has* to, because legally it can get into a lot of problems if it’s *not*. So yeah, it’s – it undercuts everything, well it underpins *everything*.

I: Okay. In your opinion, are there elements of the student as consumer concept apparent in your interactions with undergraduates. So, do you ever get a sense of them feeling as though they’re consumers?

P: Yeah. We sometimes talk about it and they’ve said to me, “We’ve worked out this seminar is worth X number of pounds”, I can’t remember what it is, but yeah of course. For sure, yeah, *yes*. And in activities that I’ve ran with students, not knowing what they would *say*, I’ve been surprised how – I don’t want to overemphasise this, but I was surprised by *how* political their attitude was *against* the idea of the fee, for example. So that has come out of classroom conversations about youth crime and resistance, there’d be a seminar, I can’t remember, youth culture and resistance, something about rap music I think and I asked them to write some lyrics just as an exercise and quite a few of them were against the fee and I hadn’t expected that *at all* [laughing], I was pleased. But I hadn’t – it wasn’t like I’d said it’s about that, they could have written about anything, but they did some rap lyrics about the fee. So, I think we have to be very, *very* careful about generalising about students and characterising students. You get that *a lot*, all of the time, “Students are this”, “Students are that”, so I don’t begin from what students think, I begin from what is the meaning and purpose of higher education? What is the *idea* of the university in this moment? How can we work towards developing that very much based on the history of the modern European university in a way that is relevant to the current situation? That’s not what students think, not at all. I mean I say sometimes for [screaming from students rehearsing a play in another room] – sorry about this, they’re doing a play I think, I hope, not killing each other – in a, sort of, rhetorical way I’m not interested in what students think and in a way, I’m not. Of course, I *am*, but what I’m more interested in, as I’ve said before, is the institutional issue and then students join us and become part of that. I’m not expecting them to tell me what they think higher education should be like, I’m expecting academics and universities to know what it should be like and that by its nature, the university has to be critically-minded but in the current situation, it’s really struggling to be critically-minded because of the way it’s – it adheres to the logic of marketisation. I mean it probably has a choice about that but you very rarely hear any complaint or, from senior managers in universities about the fees or funding or, I don’t think they said anything in public, until they were threatened by the international issue when their funding was under *threat*, but I don’t think any Vice Chancellor complained about the fee, actually. So, one of the problems is, there is no *voice* for the university *sector*, it doesn’t – it’s divided up into silly little clubs as Peter Scott referred to them as, he writes in the Guardian on Tuesdays, you might know him, Peter Scott, he referred to them as silly little clubs, you know, the Alliance group and the Russell group and this group and that group. So – and I did some interviews recently and one of the points somebody said to me was, “As Vice Chancellors have got more powerful, universities have got less significant as social institutions – hi [waving to a student] – as social institutions” so there’s something about that I think.

I: Yeah, okay. In your opinion, do you think the introduction of fees has given students a greater sense of entitlement to higher grades?

P: Yeah. [shouting from students rehearsing a play in another room] [laughing] Well in my opinion… I don’t think my opinion is worth a lot, let me say. So, I haven’t done any research on this, so it would only be anecdotal. I think, I don’t know actually. I mean it may have had and one gets a sense of that, but – I’m just trying to think in my actual practice. There is a *sense* of that around and I know students are bringing universities to court and saying, “The teaching was inadequate therefore I only got a 2:1” and that is the logic of all of this. So, if I can answer it in this way, whatever students think, the *logic* of the process, because it’s a Consumer Rights Act, is that this is where it ends up. I would prefer to put it in that way, that because of the Consumer Rights Act, and because of the antagonistic relationship that is created, and because students are paying out a very inflated amount of money, then the whole context within which they are operating, *pushes* people into that direction. So again, it’s not just simply, what do students think? It’s the whole structure that creates that way of being and one does get a sense, from marking exams and things, that that might be an issue and it *probably* is, but I don’t know for sure. But I think the logic is, that yes entitlement comes with money, comes with rights. That’s what rights means, they are literally entitled to make a claim against the outcome of their exchange relationship with the university.

I: Okay. Okay, so moving on to learning. In your opinion are lectures useful for engaging undergraduates?

P: Well it can be yeah, if it’s a good lecture. They can be fabulous, you know, really one of – they can be the most exciting thing you ever did for 50 minutes. On the other hand, I think the model of transmission teaching generally, is not a – it’s not a great model for higher education, because I think that, again as I’ve said, the university according to the way in which it was invented, the modern European university, is about production of knowledge, so it’s a collaborative relationship, it’s about working on things together, it’s about doing research with methodologies and theories, students learning by doing with others, and there’s quite a lot of, you know, social theory or critical pedagogy, do you know about that, people like Paolo Freire?

I: Yeah. I’ve read his work.

P: And of course, his model is all about collaboration, Jacque Rousseau, have you read that?

I: No…

P: Yeah, that’s very fascinating. The *Ignorant Schoolmaster*, he’s a French guy, he’s still alive, he’s one of the biggest French philosophers around. You might get asked in your PhD, you probably won’t, what about Jacque Rousseau? So, you might as well just know about him. His idea is that there’s a quality of intelligence in the classroom that’s *assumed.* So, it’s a critique of Bourdieu. Bourdieu says the purpose of higher education, or higher education policy, should be about creating a society that’s equal and it never happens, it never happens. Rousseau says it never happens because the whole process of education is actually designed to keep people in a position of inequality and the teacher tells the student, “You are never going to be me” but, so what Rousseau assumes is that there is already in the classroom, in the moment in which you teach, it’s quite a good strategy actually and I use it myself sometimes, in the moment in which you teach, there’s an equality of intelligence as a collective equality of intelligence in the room and the point of the teaching exercise is to generate some new knowledge. Anyway, the book’s called *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, if you get time you should have a look at it. So yeah, critical pedagogy would be very much against that transmission knowledge although, I think it has its place. But not four lectures, four seminars a week, that’s for – you might have been taught in that way – it’s pretty dry bread and it’s not very inspiring and – but then that has impact on the way the classroom is designed and different models to develop interactive forms of teaching. So then that principle of engaged teaching has an impact on the architecture of the institution, which you might have thought about, and lecture theatres are *hopeless* for engaging anybody, you know, the whole idea is that there is no engagement. And of course, with online and web and all that business, that has an impact as well.

I: Yeah. Okay. So, in the same vein, are seminars useful for engaging undergraduates?

P: Well again, they can be, depending on how they’re organised. I find that the most effective seminars are when students have a role in [pause] delivering the teaching, so when they’re engaged in organising the seminar with the tutor, deciding on the reading, leading the seminar, then you can have a feedback afterwards with them and the others. That’s when it works really well. I think asking students to read two articles in a week when they’ve got six other bits of work they have to do by a deadline means they sometimes come underprepared, which means the whole thing doesn’t really work terribly well. Attendance is an issue. There are many issues to do with seminars, they don’t really have to do with the seminar itself, which could work wonderfully well and sometimes *do*, if everybody’s read something and the teacher’s on point, again it’s the context around the seminar. To what extent is the academic – to what extent are they a teacher? Have they been supported in developing teaching? Is there a programme in the institution? Up to 10 years ago there was nothing in universities, you went in and you sat there and looked at each other and the academic – it might have happened to you – tended to do most of the talking because it was just *easier* that way and that’s the *last* thing that should be happening in a seminar, but *now* there’s much more thought about teaching in higher ed [sic], so hopefully they are better and I’m sure they work well, often, but they need a lot of support to work really well, a lot of thought and resources and timing. So, they *could*, but – and then the other point, which is about engaging students, there’s a couple of – there’s two guys called Harney and Moten, have you heard of these guys, Harney and Moten? And they wrote one of the most terrifying and frightening books about higher education, called *The Undercommons*, it’s online, you can find it. And the first line in the book – they’re American academics, I think one actually is a professor of English, so he writes poetry, he’s a black guy, he’s a very fascinating person, you would be interested in him. And he’s got a lot to say about all of this, that would be in a very *non-mainstream way*, like, frightening thought-provoking way and in an article they wrote called, ‘Doing Academic Labour’, doing academic labour, their point is that students are already involved in the production of the event, you see? But it’s not recognised. The very fact that they’re sitting in the room, they’re part of the production of the teaching event and they conceptualise the process as being a form of academic labour and this actually leads into your question about identity, which I’ll say something about in a minute. Most academic literature thinks about this issue in terms of identity, academic identity, student identity, which creates a, sort of, sense of hopelessness about everything, neoliberalism, [inaudible], marketisation, what am I going to do? Nothing. Nothing ever happens, just a lot of articles get written, a lot of complaints, it generates a sense of helplessness. I and my colleague, [name removed] have written about these things. But if you think about it, and this is what I mean by power, if you think about the whole thing as a process of academic labour, with university, kind of, a factory, then we’re all workers in the factory, but as workers we have a lot of power, we organise and collaborate, and with other workers outside of the university – we don’t have to call ourselves workers but that’s what we are, in a process of capitalist production – but if we see ourselves in that more generalised way, so Harney and Moten, they actually use the concept Student Collaboration [policy name changed], I hadn’t been aware that they’d used the concept, or even who *they* were when we first kicked off with all of this, but they use it but only in a small way, in one line, it’s not like the idea, and that’s the point, we don’t have engaged students because they already are, rather we need to recognise the importance of what they contribute to the event just by the fact of being there and contributing. So, I think that’s a very nice critique of engagement because all the time, we’re still going to engage, but in fact if we change the way in which we think about the situation, then we could think of students as *part* of the production, not only of research but also of teaching, do you see? Yeah, so I forget what the question was now, but…

I: Seminars being useful.

P: Oh yeah. So yeah, so they already *are*. So, if you adopt that Rousseau, there’s an equality of intelligence in the room, and the role of the teacher is to generate – is to develop the capacity of that intelligence, to create something that wasn’t there when you began the session, there might be a learning outcome you want to get to, but who knows where it’s going to go? So, I think that’s a much more – a much more productive way of thinking and a more *critical* way. And then as workers, we can collaborate and we can redesign the institution, for the people who work there. That’s the idea.

I: Yeah. Okay. On a side note, you mentioned attendance. What are your thoughts on attendance being compulsory because this has come up quite a lot.

P: I don’t think it should be at all. Not at all, no. University is a, you know, it’s a – well people should be able to choose. I know universities now have got contracts and they insist on – and I keep a record, they sign a record and I think it was introduced initially because of international students on Tier 4, so as a way of not discriminating because of – do you know about Tier 4 and international students?

I: No.

P: It’s a huge issue in universities. All international students have got to show that they’re attending regularly otherwise they might lose their visas, and universities have had to develop processes to know where these students are because the consequences of the students not attending are *catastrophic* for the institution because they might lose their international student license. In fact, it nearly happened, or it did happen to [post-1992 University] and if students – if universities lose their international students, then that’s a huge income stream gone. So, universities very quickly had to develop a very *tight* attendance structure and then international students kicked off, as did the other students, because they were monitoring the attendance of the international students and not the – so the home students were walking out the door and the other – so it was not good. Anyway, it allowed, and maybe the universities prefer to have it like this I’m not sure, there now are monitoring systems pretty much, I think everywhere, and computerised clocking in and out cards. But no, my own view is students can work, they can come to a lecture, they can attend. I think it’s no secret that the more they engage, the better they do. But being compulsory, no. No. But I want to know where my students *are*, and if they’re not there I’ll be concerned about them, so some sense of *knowing*. So, one would keep an attendance record and if they weren’t there 2 or 3 weeks you’d want to know *why* and there might be some issue, but not in that contractual way that it currently is and monitored. And of course, as you know now there’s – I mean I, if I wanted to, could look online and see whether my students are engaging with the library or not. I don’t want to look at that, there’s no way I’m going to look at that. So, it’s huge implications for monitoring the student generally and *why*, what is the point? What is the point?

I: Okay. What about one-to-one sessions being useful for engaging students?

P: Yes, of course, yeah. Or if I could put it this way, the more you can develop a relationship with students, that’s a more research-like relationship as you would with a research student, of course there are many more students to have but… Yeah so, when giving back essays you’d of course be available for students to see, you might actually ask to see students one-to-one, and then it’s up to them whether they want to attend or not. And not all of them will, for all sorts of reasons. But then, the general point is, as I said, the more that research relationship you can develop, it’s for the better. So, if that’s one-to-one, yeah – and personal tutees I think is a good system, where you have, sort of, responsibility for 10 or 20 students, not only academic but pastoral, as an advocate for that student, that’s a very good thing.

I: Okay. Which of the above teaching methods do *you* think that undergraduates find the most engaging?

P: Have you got a list?

I: Out of those three.

P: Which ones?

I: Lectures, seminars, one-to-one.

P: Well you see, what I think is not really important. I think, again, I try and – it’s like I tell students, “I don’t really care what you think” and I don’t, it’s how do you frame it? So, they’re all important, the real issue is how is the curriculum designed? So, is the curriculum designed in order to encourage students being involved in the production of knowledge and meaning? And that will link to assessment, it will link to a lot of things. But just one-to-one, it doesn’t really mean a lot. So, I think variety is important, not just for the sake of it or choice, but… so, that’s how I’d answer that question.

I: Okay. Is there anything you think is particularly good about the style of learning that takes place at university compared to compulsory education?

P: Well not good, but the nature of it is different. So, if I could put it this way, if – and this is a bit of a crude caricature – but if school is about *learning* the book, university is about *writing* the book so, most activities in schools, not exclusively, are [inaudible] for an exam, I know there is some research going on in the sixth form these days. So, I think university has a different purpose and therefore, the basis of the teaching is different but again, for me, teaching is not the central aspect of the university, it’s only a *part* of the overall project.

I: Okay. From your own experience of teaching, is there anything you would change to improve student learning, in terms of either your own teaching, resources, curriculum and assessment or anything else?

P: Well in the way in which I’ve described. We did that, we had the opportunity to redesign the way in which teaching and learning is delivered through our research-engaged teaching so I think we’d do more of that. I think the way in which more would be helped would be at the beginning to really have a process where students are, almost trained, into what the university is *doing*, what the purpose of it is, what their roles, so they’re not just coming into it and not knowing what it is. And I know they do that in one or two places which have similar models. They spend a few weeks, if not longer, literally just training students *and academics*, to know how the whole system works. I mention one place, Maastricht university which has a system of problem-based learning for the whole institution. It spends the first month with students and they just do what their roles are, how seminars work and every student in the seminar will have a role and a *named* role and they know what that role is and they’re meant to perform. So just putting students into a room and just saying, “Let’s work as a group” or “Let’s do this collaboratively” is, kind of, rigorous. You don’t just know how to do that. Group work – people need roles and they need to know what they’re doing. So, I think more of that actually. More, not just the activity of *doing* teaching, but a way of making it more apparent what the whole process is and *why* we’re doing it the way we’re doing it, and what’s the role of students? And what do students think about that? And how would they make that the same or different? From their own experience of being taught. So, it’s more about bring a, I think the term is *scaffolding* or what the structure of it is, more upfront. Actually, I find by telling students that, it’s more helpful, “I’m doing this because…” So, they get a sense of there’s been a bit of thought about this and it’s not just something that happens. So more of that.

I: Yeah. Okay. Okay, so I sent you the document that refers to the university’s teaching and learning strategy. I have it here, do you want to have a look?

P: No, I think I read it. Is that the whole strategy, or…? It’s only two bits which I read. The paragraph, the long paragraphs, yeah.

I: Yeah.

P: Yeah, yeah. It’s amazing it’s still there, I can’t believe it.

I: So, this one. [hands over document]

P: When I saw it recently, I went looking for it and to see it, you know, quite so upfront.

I: So, do you think this strategy is successful for engaging undergraduates?

P: I think – well we interviewed 150 students in that report and students said they liked it, and the academics said they liked it, generally. That’s one. So, it’s, kind of, popular, is it successful? I think, if I can put it this way, I think it has very substantial *meaning* for teaching and learning in a higher education institute. I can’t really imagine you’d do it any other way, actually. It’s what is the nature. I don’t begin from, is it going to engage students? It’s called research-engaged teaching, it’s not *about* engaging students, it’s about reinventing the university. So that’s my starting point. Students *are* engaged and they *do* get involved and they do have a lot of positive things to say about it, but it doesn’t set out with the purpose of engaging students. That’s maybe what makes the, kind of, hard-core line you’re getting from me about what Student Collaboration [policy name changed] is and I think when you are writing things up, it’s helpful and important to know what the difference is, otherwise everything is just the same. It’s really about engaging the university in a discussion about what is the – what are we doing here? So yeah, so it does engage students but the point is not simply to engage students, it’s a much bigger question that we’re trying to find the answer to.

I: Okay. So, do you think the purpose of the Student Collaboration [policy name changed] policy has been fulfilled in this institution?

P: I’m, kind of, pleasantly surprised by the way in which it’s still so much in the forefront of things, but as you’ll know from the article that I wrote with [name removed], there’s also an important sense in which the politics of it is being recuperated into the neoliberal marketised model. So, I’ve already said it’s a non-dogmatic project in that people really are free to make up their minds about what they think it is and put it into practice in a way, and that works well when it’s engaged with what I’m telling you Student Collaboration [policy name changed] *is*, and we’ve written about it and it’s not controversial, that’s *it*. It’s a [removed for confidentiality], so that’s *clear*. So, has it – so no it hasn’t become an anti-capitalist institution by any means, I mean it’s a wonderful place and I support it completely, I’m not against [University A], I’m against the *policy* of higher education and you’d find very many academics the same way. The thing is we tried to communicate it in a very practical way that was theoretically informed. So, has it fulfilled? Well *no*. So, what we did then, was that we took it outside of the university and [removed for confidentiality], do you know about that?

I: No.

P: Okay, well this is – the logic of Student Collaboration [policy name changed] is a cooperative university. A cooperative university meaning an enterprise ran by its members, who are all equal and decisions are made in a democratic way, for the *benefit* of the members. So, in [date removed], we set up [removed for confidentiality].

I: Yes, I have read this.

P: That’s right yeah. Sorry I call it [removed for confidentiality]. Yeah so, we set it up and that was to carry out, to realise the point of Student Collaboration [policy name changed] in a way that was unconstrained by the – well *relatively* unconstrained – by the marketised model and that’s been going for 6 years, it’s still around and *now*, [removed for confidentiality]. Currently, the [removed for confidentiality]. One of them – actually I examined a PhD by [name removed], do you know her?

I: It rings a bell that name.

P: She’s at [pre-1992 university]. She did her PhD in [pre-1992 university], you might want to have a look at it. She actually works at [pre-1992 university] in a, kind of, student support way and she pulls out a lot of the criticisms of student engagement and its, sort of, contain, and control management system. Students, they don’t know whose side they’re on and, you know, sitting in meetings and all that probably, that level of student engagement, not just in the classroom. Are you focusing in the classroom?

I: Yeah, mainly, yeah.

P: Okay, well there’s the other level where they’re on committees and…

I: Yeah.

P: Anyway, as you know there’s a lot of critiques. Have you seen the book – by the way, just thinking, by Nick Zepke? He’s an Australian guy.

I: I’ve read a lot of his work, but I don’t know…

P: Okay, he’s just written a book.

I: Oh, has he?

P: On student engagement. And he writes quite a lot about Student Collaboration [policy name changed] and what’s interesting is that, about Student Collaboration [policy name changed] he says, the rhetoric is very radical but when you look at the strategy it’s very not radical and he’s right. Because we’ve been trying to work inside an institution and we got as far as we could but then the thing gets recuperated so then we went outside and [removed for confidentiality], there are more than 600 cooperative schools in England now that have emerged in the last 5 or 6 years, as a critique of the academy process initially, although quite a lot of them have become academies now, so they’re cooperative academies. But they run on models of cooperative *learning* and the issue of cooperative learning and student engagement are very close together actually. You might need to have a look at some of that literature. So, yeah, [removed for confidentiality]. And there is one co-op university in the world, Mondragon university in the Basque country in Spain, it’s been there for 50 years, one way or another, very successful, very modern, fabulous place. Four faculties: Engineering, Education, Business, and Gastronomy. 9,000 students. In Spain they pay a fee, a smaller fee, but what’s so interesting is that in their co-op, they have three constituencies: the academics and the admin workers, the students, and external members, their three constituencies. All of those three have an equal say in how the university is ran, including students get a vote on fees and they get a vote on salaries and they have – they still have problems with student engagement, getting them to turn up, same way so it’s interesting. We met some students and spoke, I’ve just written something up, I’ll send it to you, and so, [removed for confidentiality]. So, there are various parts of the UK where academics, for various reasons, are setting up co-ops in Adult Ed [sic], Music, Trade Union and Labour degrees, Art, Fine Art and these will be, if it all works out, will become autonomous co-ops and then they’ll be linked in a federated way to the co-op college, who will validate the degrees through the new legislation, you know all about that new stuff that is enhancing… [removed for confidentiality] So that’s the real logic, because the real logic of engagement is in the process of *governance*, that’s my point. It’s in the *governance*, it’s not in the classroom. Engaging students is great, of course, and it’s got lots of good things about it, but to have any *real* effect on student life, or even academic life, is about redesigning the governance model and the co-op model is a very good model, so that’s the logic of *our* student engagement. And for *me*, clearly, the model is *not* to create jobs, the model is to abolish work. Work is *part* of the problem of the marketisation issue, work is already collapsing, work is being abolished. We’re now very aware of that and people are getting very concerned about it, many people have for a long time, but since the Luddites it’s been a problem, but now the automisation of everything, more and more work is being abolished. And people have written about this, are writing, there’s a couple of books currently by – one by Paul Mason, you know the Channel 4 journalist, *Post-Capitalism: A guide to the Future*, you’d get a lot out of that if you want it. And he talks – and so how do redesign this future without any work? A different model of growth and value is required and the co-op movement has *always* had that idea in its most radical roots, to designing a new common wealth, a new form of value. So that brings us back to the question of how do we redesign university to cope with the emergencies? Well, the emergencies are exclusively about the model of economic growth, so we design a new model of, we don’t call it growth, but we might want to call it human value or social value, or a new common wealth, something beyond capital, beyond capitalism, beyond a world that is dominated by labour and work. And of course, that hasn’t been invented yet, but that’s the point of the university is to *invent* things and to create new models and it can’t be beyond us to think of it and all over the world people are thinking about it, they’re not universities, but it’s called lots of different things in lots of different places. So, all these experiments are going on, not to say reclaiming indigenous knowledges and things we forgot a long time ago were wiped out and destroyed, there’s all that to reclaim. This is the project. So, what happened was, maybe, so the student engagement process, which is fascinating and interesting, is all a way of containing all of this. It’s not at all about stretching anything, it’s very much within the marketised system and like I say, the marketised system is all built on *debt*, student debt, institutional debt, particularly as you’re very aware, the post-92’s because they don’t have financial security. So, the whole thing is based on *sand*. So, we’re trying to build a more sustainable model from the inside out, supporting the institutions we’re a part of, realising the model doesn’t have any future, based on students with massive amount of debt, institutions with massive amount of debt, the growth model has negative consequences beyond the human imagination, you know, we know all of this, so let’s try and fix it. So that takes away the sense of helplessness, do you see? It’s not about identity, it’s about *work*, what, kind of, work do we do? How can we reorganise work based on a different model of value?

I: Okay. Should undergraduate students have greater control over, or input in, the curriculum and or assessment design –

P: *Yes, yes*. They should have a co-op model, they should. Like Paolo Freire, we’ll work it out together.

I: It’s interesting because a lot of academics don’t agree, they don’t think they should have control.

P: Yeah, no I think they should have – the authority is in the subject if that makes sense. The authority is in the subject so yes, I’m – they should certainly be involved in the design and development, in fact that’s a principle of Student Collaboration [policy name changed] and the delivery, not just the – do you know Cathy Bovill? She’s written a lot about all of this, she’s very supportive of all this I think, she’s a good person to refer to.

I: Okay. In recent government policy on higher education, students have been placed at the heart of the system. In your opinion, to what extent are students positioned centrally within this university?

P: Yeah, well, they *aren’t* at the heart of the system, whatever way you think about it. People – the university pays a lot of attention to students, of course, and that’s a *good* thing. And the rhetoric might be that they’re at the heart of the system, but they’re not at the heart of the system. The heart of the system is the idea of the university, which is students and academics collaborating and Student Collaboration [policy name changed] implies that, in fact it more than implies it, it *says* it. To what extent that’s actually carried out in practice, as policy, is complex and messy, you’d find it working in *differen*t ways in different departments so it will be interesting to see how the English academics talk about it, or *are* talking about it. So yes, the university will say students are at the heart of the system but again, it’s not my opinion, it’s the *nature* of the institutions, they can’t be. And putting them there causes lots of problems in terms of, which you’ve asked me questions about, in terms of students being *forced* into a particular position, an antagonistic position. So, they might be at the heart but it’s an antagonistic relationship of entitlement through their legal right. It’s not just an attitude of entitlement, they have got a right.

I: Yeah, okay. Do you think positioning students centrally works to separate them from the rest of the university, the academics and the administrators?

P: Yeah, for the reasons I stated, yeah.

I: Okay. What meaning does the word relationship have for you in the context of interacting with undergraduates?

P: Yeah, that’s a good question, yeah. I think I prefer collaboration. So, collaborative, because to make the institution work, we are already collaborating and to make that more, to recognise that and to reward that, rather than all the time struggling to find ways of engaging. If we change the purpose of the institution in the way I’ve described, then I think we can recognise that collaborative – the collaborative nature. Not only of university life, but of social life more generally.

I: Yeah, okay. Do you think there is a link between the relationships undergraduates have with their tutors and their levels of engagement?

P: I don’t know.

I: [laughing] Fair enough. Okay. So, can you describe to me a typical face-to-face encounter with an undergraduate? So, if they come and meet you to discuss an essay or something.

P: Yeah. They might be interested in something that they heard about in the lecture and they want to write a dissertation about it, so they’ll come to discuss the research question and the methods, and I’ll encourage them and give them some reading, that would be one. Another one, they might come and be very upset because they have got some caring responsibility and they’re unable to attend and they’re getting letters from the university, and they’ve got to find a way of making it all work, they’re committed to the work, so we help them to do – or I’d help them to do that, it’d be part of my job. So, there’s lot of different – there’s some pastoral, some academic. I think students – when we’re sitting talking to each other, I get a sense that they’re surprised about how much they get out of it and if we could, like I said before, if we could have more of that, I think that would be a good thing. But because of the pressure of numbers, it’s not always easy to do that. Yeah.

I: Do you ever notice any implications of a hierarchy in your interactions with students?

P: *Oh yes of course*, yeah. Well it’s that power relation, is that what you’re getting at?

I: Yeah.

P: Of course, yeah. [pause] Of course, are you looking for examples of how does it work in practice?

I: Yeah, so do you have a, kind of…

P: So, there might be a, kind of, nervousness or lack of confidence or, like I’m the *authority*, like I *know* everything, and yet everything in my critical pedagogy is trying to undermine that sense of *hierarchy*, but maintaining *authority*. But the authority is the subject, it’s not my *personal* authority. I’m a *representation* of Sociology, so it’s not personally *me*, it’s – I like this idea of representation and forms of – so the authority’s in the subject, that’s what I do, that’s where my authority comes from, and trying to – and helping students to understand that and therefore, the collaborative issue comes into that side of things. But yes, the hierarchical relationship is problematic, *of course*. And so, [removed for confidentiality]. Interestingly at Mondragon, they don’t have titles, so again, literally recognising the problem, trying to do something about it by creating a co-op, that’s how problematic it is, actually create a different structure to deal with that issue. So, the power’s in the structure, not in the relationship. That’s a more sociological way of thinking about it. The power’s in the governance, *and* the fee, yeah, so it’s a very important issue. That’s what I mean about power, power as the result of a particular set of social relationships, yeah.

I: Do you think it’s possible to get rid of the teacher-student dynamic because it is so ingrained in people?

P: Yeah it is in a co-op. Yeah, in the – it’s not, it’s very difficult, you know, [removed for confidentiality], I think that’s what gives you the place to try and dissolve it. It’s not just an interpersonal problem, [removed for confidentiality]. Interestingly, Freire says that the teacher still is in the position of authority, but I don’t think that’s quite the right way of thinking about it. As I’ve explained, authority is what we represent, so I’m not in authority, I represent the authority of the subject and I don’t want to get rid of that, because that’s the method, that’s the science, that’s what we *know* of ourselves, that’s what we *know* about ourselves, and then recognising that we each have a contribution to make to that *knowing*. I think I called it somewhere once in a book chapter, ‘social knowing’, we have a contribution to make to the social *knowing*. Our titles are the result of our job titles, which is a result of a particular way of organising work, so if we get rid of that way of organising work, and that’s called communism, just to give it a nice straight forward title. Communism is the critique of capitalism. I don’t mean communism as in the Soviet Union communism, which was just another form of capitalism, where work was still the organising principle, but if communism is a critique of capitalism, towards a new form of social value, then organising the labour process and the work relation, then yes, we will get rid of a hierarchy, for sure. So yes, it is possible.

I: Okay. [pause] Okay. Can you think of any particularly good relationships that you have with any undergraduates without giving away their identity?

P: Yes, of course, yeah. I had a lot of very good relationships. That was my *thing* really. That’s what I – I have mainly good, well – not exclusively – but they’re always based on work, and the nature of work, or they’re based on some institutional process or, democratising something or changing something or giving them more input into something. Just to give you a concrete example, one guy walked in the door once, when I’d just arrived here actually and he said he wanted to get involved in stuff, he was in Management, Management Science or something? And I ended up working with him for 3 or 4 years and he became the [removed for confidentiality] and now works somewhere in a university in a job. But there’s *a lot*, I’m just giving you some examples. You know, people do well and it’s lovely to see, and yeah of course I’ve had things that haven’t gone so well. It’s nice when PhD students – you know, this is – what about postgrad? They get left out of everything.

I: I know.

P: I mean that would be something – a point to make in all of this, that the focus is so much on undergrad, with the TEF and the QAA. The QAA was a bit more int – that was the Quality Audit, when they used to come round, they would ask questions about postgrad. I don’t see any postgrad measures, maybe they are employability, but I don’t know. It’s very focused on the undergrad. But PhD can be very rewarding when they get through and I’ve been doing it, you know, for 25 years so there’s been a lot of stuff, mainly good. And the most – the best thing that happened to me, actually it’s very clear, was when the [removed for confidentiality], so that was very nice. So, I must be doing something right with them.

I: Yeah, okay. Okay, so if I give you this piece of paper, can you draw for me your conception of a good relationship with a student? So, it can be anything you like…

P: Yeah well, you know, yeah. I don’t begin from the relationship with the student, like I said, I begin with the institution. So, Student Collaboration [policy name changed] is really not about students. It’s about – I begin from the *totality*, that’s a particular way of thinking in critical social science. Most social science, and the nature of your question implies it, begins from the relationship between people, that’s Sociology, Politics, Economics, but it leaves out the wider totality of how that relationship was created in the first place. So, I absolutely don’t start from there, I start from the institution, and then what is the function, or the role, of the student *and* the academic, in terms of that overall idea of what the university is? And that’s – so that’s how it works. So that’s what I mean, that’s a very different theoretical framework to almost – it’s basically a Marxist framework, that’s where Marx begins from and that’s why it’s so different from all other social theory. So that’s how I look at it.

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I: Okay. Okay, thank you.

P: If that makes any sense [laughing].

I: Yeah. Okay, so there’s a lot of encouragement for students to engage with different experiences that the university offers – joining societies, volunteering, getting involved with the Student’s Union. What are your thoughts on this?

P: Yes, of course. Yeah do as much as – Student Union very important. Not to be focussed exclusively on the degree subject area, do as much as they can. Certainly.

I: What are your thoughts on the role of the Student’s Union, in terms of engaging undergraduates?

P: Yeah, it’s very, very important. And the NUS is *very* important. And of course, it was recently become a bit more radical in the last few years [sic]. It went through a period during the student protests in 2010, do you remember Aaron Porter was the…?

I: Yeah, I’ve met him yeah.

P: [laughing] He didn’t come out very well did he?

I: No. [laughing]

P: So… But I think more recently, it’s got much more radical and there was the woman whose name I can’t remember, who was the President recently, who lost actually, which I really was – liked her and her position against the NSS was very important. So yes, it’s a massively – so as I said earlier, the power of students generally, the student, not just the student voice but student politics is very important and we need to find ways of encouraging that actually. Whatever way it goes, you know, left or right, it’s very important that it’s a strong voice inside institutions and *nationally*.

I: Okay. Do you think the majority of undergraduates value the Student’s Union as a space dedicated to them?

P: I don’t really know. I think – I do know students who work very closely with it and they get a lot out of it, both in terms of providing *services* and more politically and running for elections and yeah, they get a lot out of it, so yeah, it *can be* very – well it isvery important and students who are involved with it, I think the Unions would probably prefer if more people were involved than are, and I tend – I think some Student’s Unions now tend to focus on their role being a consumer service, rather than a political form of critique and then there are implications to what extent Unions have become *captured* again by the institutions they’re a part of, and I think there is a view that there’s rather too much of that. Yeah.

I: Okay. What are your thoughts on the university’s attempts to engage its current and prospective undergraduates?

P: Yeah well, I think, what I said before, it’s – when I think about this, I have a bigger picture in my head which I think I explained earlier so, of course the university has to do everything it can to facilitate and encourage and attract students yeah, but that’s only one level, but then there’s a much bigger issue going on behind all of this.

I: Okay. Okay, that’s – you’ve answered the last question, so thank you very much.

P: Oh, thank you, they were good questions.

I: That was really, really insightful. Really interesting. Different way of looking at it that a lot of people don’t consider.

P: No, but there is literature around and you might want to go and have a look at it.

I: Yeah, definitely. But it’s – in my experience of the interviews I’ve done so far, it’s definitely not the usual way that academics view it.

P: No, no and I think it would be helpful if you could bring that out, because it often, when it gets written about, everything’s, like, flattened and people don’t really take the trouble to really understand it, it’s like a lot of people quote a book that they haven’t read or they read a book that was written 8 years ago and things have moved on a lot in those 8 years. I mean you make your own mind up about it, but it would be important, I think, to just say exactly what it is, rather than assume it’s like most, because it’s not.

I: No, definitely.

P: Good.

I: Okay, well thank you very much.

**[End of Recording]**