

'Discovering Teaching Excellence at Leicester' Conference

4th July, 2017

Belonging in higher education: 10 inter-connected questions (well, not strictly 10!)

The following questions are designed to stimulate reflection on some of the social and structural dimensions of belonging in HE. Their aim is to help shift the emphasis onto the assumptions we make about who is recognised as 'belonging' (or otherwise), as well as the reasons why. The term 'around here' might apply at numerous levels as appropriate.

- 1) How far do you feel like you belong around here? How did you come to be recognised as such? What did coming to 'belong' involve for you?
- 2) How do we recognise others as belonging (or not belonging)? What are our criteria for doing so? Who sets these criteria and why? Do we consider these criteria to be fixed and agreed on, or more fluid and contested?
- 3) Where do our criteria for recognition come from? What values, assumptions and relations of power might they encode and reproduce?
- 4) What identity work does coming to 'belong', and being recognised as such, demand of people? What, or whom, do people need to become 'more like' in order to secure recognition?
- 5) Conversely, what must people become 'less like' in order to secure recognition? What is it about themselves they may feel compelled to change or disguise?
- 6) How far is a sense of 'not belonging' a problem for individuals to 'resiliently' overcome, and how far is this a question for institutions, departments, curricula etc. to address?
- 7) How helpful is the common conjunction of 'belonging and retention'? What are the potential advantages and potential harms of this conjunction?
- 8) How open are we, in our values and practices, to alternative ways of being and belonging?
- 9) Are there contexts in which a 'sense of not-belonging' might offer radical and creative possibilities for critique and transformation?
- 10) To what ends do we encourage students to feel and act like they belong? Whose interests do these ends serve?

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