

## Open Dialogue:

# Author's response to peer commentary

James Hartley

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**F**IRST OF ALL I wish to thank my colleagues for their thoughtful and interesting responses to my article.

I am pleased that most of them share some of my concerns about the lack of progress in the teaching of psychology over the last 50 years, and I welcome the fact that they then go on to raise individual points and discuss different ways forward. Eysenck, for instance, outlines some of the horrors that still exist as well as some of the others that have thankfully disappeared (and that I too had thankfully forgotten about). Entwistle, Knapper, Radford and Sternberg focus in different ways on new approaches to teaching and to students; and Jones expounds on how information technology can be developed and employed to better effect. All of these issues are important and I enjoyed reading and thinking about these reactions.

Reflecting now – some two years on from when I wrote the initial article, before the Browne Report and its subsequent consequences (!) – I want to reiterate four main points.

- The responses of Entwistle, Knapper, Radford, and Sternberg show that different models of effective teaching can and are being explored and that there is no single way to deal effectively with changing circumstances. Entwistle's and Knapper's comments on university teachers are salutary. Knapper's and Radford's suggestions for new courses are intriguing but fanciful (as they admit). Sternberg provides a practical illustration of what can be achieved. But to see what Entwistle has to say in more detail you will either have to read his book (Entwistle, 2009), or his splendid summary chapter in Christensen Hughes and Mighty (2010).
- Furthermore, although it is not perhaps apparent in my article and these responses, I want to emphasise here that the teaching of psychology is now shared much more between colleagues than it was in my day (see Macfarlane, 2011). Today separate and different members of staff in the Psychology Department at Keele – and no doubt elsewhere – are responsible for counselling students, helping students with disabilities, monitoring the performance of overseas students, dealing with academic misconduct, and so on. And, because there are so many of them, students now seem to be 'shoppers' rather than part of the family.
- Of course, this allocation of different roles and responsibilities stems from the increases in administration and managerialism over the last 50 years – the final point in my paper. Here Radford makes a pertinent comment when he reports that '...the (new) status of Polytechnic led to an increase of some 10 per cent in students and academic staff, and 100 per cent in administrators.' And more recently Ryan (2011) has noted that 'In the two decades from 1985 to 2005, student enrolment in the US rose by 56 per cent, faculty numbers increased by 50 per cent ... administrators rocketed by 85 per cent and their attendant staff by a whopping 240 per cent'. There is little if any freedom to do what one thinks best in circumstances such as these.
- Finally, in my article I sounded a warning about the idea that new information technologies will save the day. I still think that they have the power to do things differently and perhaps more efficiently,

but I am not sure that they *always* improve student learning. New technologies can be used to encourage both dependent and independent learning, and it is probably easier to do the first than the second. But I do agree with Jones that more resources should be put into ways of using information technology – particularly of the mobile kind – that will enable students to think for themselves, to work with others and to be independent learners. Since such technologies can be used around the clock and around the world, there are important implications here for course design, individual, group, and classroom learning, as well as different modes of assessment (self, peer and institutional). Indeed I am pleased to report that, at Keele, in the two years between writing my paper and this reply, we now have automated peer group assessment of first-year laboratory reports, and a third-year option on critical psychology that involves groups of students in various disciplines from 18 institutions in six countries taking part simultaneously (Estacio, 2012).

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## References

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