Partnerships and Parents – Relationships in tutorial programmes

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Abstract

The tutorial system is considered to be a useful pedagogical intervention that can improve student retention, particularly in the context of a first year student's experience of entering university. For these novice students to achieve academic success, it is important that they are given access to the subject specific knowledge and practices in their different disciplines, that is, that they acquire 'epistemological access'. A recent study of the tutorial system in a South African university (Layton, 2013), sought to discover to what extent tutorials were constructed as being for the enablement of epistemological access. This paper focuses on two discourses that emerged from the study – the parent discourse and the partnership discourse. Both discourses were concerned with relationships between the key stakeholders in the tutorial programme structure, namely, academics, tutors and students. Given that tutorials are considered to be spaces in which more intimate learning can take place than in the anonymous environment of the large lecture hall, an interrogation of the relationships fostered in tutorials is important. The parent discourse, in which students were positioned as 'kids' needing care, was sympathetic and supportive of new students but ran the risk of being patronising and reductionist. The partnerships discourse, in which tutors and academics were seen to be working together towards the common goal of student success, was seen to be enabling of epistemological access. But it required a commitment of time and energy to teaching endeavours that was found to be in tension with the institutional focus on research. Through a social realist analysis of the two discourses constructing relationships in the tutorial system, we conclude that these discourses have the power to both constrain and enable the extent to which the tutorial system can be a site of epistemological access.

Keywords:

Tutorials; social realism; throughput; first year experience; academic success; academic support; epistemological access; discourses; relationships.

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Introduction

Against a background of poor academic success and high attrition rates, especially in the first-year of studies (CHE 2013, McKay & Devlin 2014), the issue of how to improve student throughput is a topical one for many universities. Student success relies largely on their gaining access to the specific knowledge and practices of the target academic fields and disciplines. This constitutes *epistemological access:*

> Learning how to become a participant in an academic practice might also be described in terms of '*gaining access*' to the practice in question [and since these practices have] developed around the search for knowledge, we might say that what we have in view here is '*epistemological access*' (Morrow, 2009:77).

In the interests of social justice, all students need to have a fair chance of gaining epistemological access if they are to make sense of powerful disciplinary knowledge and generate new knowledge. Such access is also a prerequisite to being able to critique and challenge existing knowledge and practices.

Many universities use the tutorial system as an intervention to directly address this concern and thereby improve the throughput rate. A recent study of the tutorial system in a South African university, the University of Johannesburg (UJ) (Layton, 2013) sought to discover to what extent tutorials were constructed as being for the enablement of epistemological access. The study identified discourses that enabled or constrained access to disciplinary knowledge.

This paper focuses on just two of the ten discourses identified in the larger study as these were both about relationships. Relationships are held in the literature to be central to the ways in which tutorials differ from lectures in that tutorials allow for closer relationships to be fostered between stakeholders than those that are possible in large lecture venues. The two discourses reported on in this article were that of a 'partnership' between the tutors and the academics responsible for the course, and 'parenting', which related to the ways in which the tutors, who were senior students, discursively constructed the students in their tutorials.

The paper uses Margaret Archer's notion of situational logics (1988, 2000) to consider what the implications of these discourses might be. Archer argues that ideas and values (as made evident through discourses) have emergent properties and therefore can constrain or enable events in the world (2000). Furthermore, the interplay of different ideas can have different

emergent effects. Some ideas might be in contradiction and some might be complementary and this leads to different situational logics. As Archer explains: 'maintenance of ideas which stand in manifest logical contradiction or complementarity to others, places their holders in different ideational positions. The logical properties of their theories or beliefs create entirely different situational logics for them' (1988: 145).

Literature Review

The issue of relationships is central in tutorials. Within the tutorial classroom, relationships have the potential to have a greater impact than in lectures because of the smaller size and the more interactive nature of tutorials. It has been argued that small-group work is a vital part of academic learning (Gillies & Ashman, 2003). Furthermore, Cartney and Rouse (2006:88) maintain that 'in the current educational landscape many students have an increasingly fragmented experience of university life…[so that] sites of small-group learning may represent one of the few points of personal contact between the student and the university'. In addition, Hafford-Letchfield (2007:178) argues that role modelling by tutors as well as students' relationships with their tutors are important enabling factors that help students develop effective communication skills, awareness and academic self-confidence. Lowman (1995:29) emphasises that 'interpersonal rapport' where teachers know who their students are and show that they care about them and their learning, is an important aspect of effective teaching. Similarly, Martin and Dowson (2009:329) assert that 'relatedness in the academic domain teaches students the beliefs, orientations, and values needed to function effectively in academic environments'. It can thus be argued that the pedagogical effectiveness of the tutorial is largely determined by the quality of the relationship between students, tutor and academic.

Watson and West (2003:142) maintain that the tutorial should by its very nature create the kind of relationship between tutors and students that empowers students by encouraging them to actively participate in their own learning rather than being controlled by 'powerful others, i.e. tutors'. Gosling (2000:296) cites the ideas of Habermas who argues that 'to be successful, educational practices must permit and encourage forms of communication which are not distorted by imbalances of power or other blocks to open and rational discussion'.

Cook, Macintosh and Rushton (2006:8) maintain that teaching in small groups such as tutorials helps to fulfil Chickering and Gamson's (1987) seven principles for good practice in undergraduate teaching in that this:

- encourages contacts between students and staff
- develops reciprocity and cooperation among students

- uses active learning techniques
- gives prompt feedback
- emphasises time on task
- communicates high expectations, and
- respects diverse talents and ways of learning.

A tutorial can be defined as 'a session of intensive tuition led by a tutor' (UJ tutor policy); as 'a period of tuition given by a university or college tutor to an individual or very small group' (Oxford English Dictionary); or 'a small class of a few students in which the tutor gives individual attention to each student' (Srivasta & Waghmare, 2014). In most understandings of what it means to conduct a tutorial, there is some notion of student engagement with learning in the context of a small group. However, in the study reported on here, the size of the tutorial is usually within a range of 25 to 50 students, which is what some countries would consider to be an average size for a lecture, rather than a tutorial. This size may stretch the traditional definition of the tutorial somewhat. Nevertheless, this larger conception of what constitutes a tutorial is becoming increasingly common across the world as the higher education sector seeks to massify and accommodate a much broader section of the population.

While the nature of what constitutes a 'tutorial' is therefore quite varied across contexts, they are still generally characterised in very similar ways as 'safe spaces' that are smaller than the lecture hall and where students can engage in more depth with the content covered in the larger classes of the lectures. According to the UJ tutorial policy, the tutorial 'aims to promote an enabling learning environment which facilitates the development of discipline-specific skills and enhances the academic success of students' – in other words, tutorials are conceptualised as safe places in which epistemological access can be gained.

The wider international context of the shift from elite to more massified systems of higher education (see Baker & Wiseman, eds. 2008; Calderon, 2012; Urs & Ivan, 2011) has raised the issue of broader access to the goods of the university (Boughey, 2004; Badat, 2009) and how we can ensure that all students, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds, have a reasonable chance of higher education success. Tutorials have emerged as one potential pedagogical structure to facilitate this.

Methodology

The primary method of data collection in the study from which this article arises was through conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with both individuals and focus groups to gain a direct insight into the ways in which the tutorial system was being constructed by the

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various role-players (Layton, 2013). At this institution, tutorials are generally compulsory for first year students and work in parallel to large class lectures. A mainstream student attends one 45 minute tutorial a week for each subject and an extended degree[1] student attends two tutorials per subject per week.

In this case study, tutors were usually post-graduate students or 3rd year students who had good academic records. Students are usually allocated to tutorial groups on a random basis, but some departments allow students to choose their tutorial group by 'signing up' for it using the university's online facility.

Thirty-nine tutors from five different departments in three faculties were interviewed in focus groups; and individual interviews were conducted with three academic development practitioners[2], a faculty administrator, and eleven academics, four of whom are also tutor coordinators. The data was analysed using a realist methodological framework that sought to identify the mechanisms underpinning the empirical events and experiences as discursively constructed by the research participants.

All fifty-four participants responded to an invitation to contribute to this study. They did so voluntarily and their informed consent was obtained verbally and in writing. Their rights to withdraw at any stage were explained as were issues around anonymity and the recording of the focus group and individual interviews. Prior to the obtaining of such informed consent, ethical clearance for the project was obtained from the institution where the study took place and from the institution where the research project was lodged.

In this framework, discourses are understood to be mechanisms that have the power to affect the way we think and act (Fairclough, 1995). As Kress (1989: 7) explains, discourses are:

> ... systematically organised sets of statements which give expression to the meanings and values of an institution. Beyond that, they define, describe and delimit what it is possible to say and not possible to say (and by extension – what it is possible to do or not to do) with respect to the area of concern of that institution, whether marginally or centrally.

While acknowledging that discourses alone do not constitute the world, the study sought to identify what discourses constructed the tutorial system, because it is 'through discursive

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[1] Certain students whose entry marks are just below the required level may be granted access to the extended degree programme in which the normal three year Bachelor's degree is extended over a four-year period.

[2] An academic development practitioner (ADP) is employed by the Academic Development Centre (ADC) to provide theoretically based, and practical interventions and developmental opportunities and academic support to both Academic staff and students.

practices [that] organisation members engage in the construction of a complex and diverse system of meanings' (Fairclough, 2005:918). We then sought to identify the 'situational logic' (Archer 1988, 2000) of the identified discourses and used Archer to posit what the implications might then be.

Findings and Discussion

Discourse of Partnership

A key discourse about relationships in the tutorial system that emerged from the data related to the academic and tutor relationship which was constructed as being a 'partnership' where they worked together in collaboration. This was identified as being a way to equip tutors to support students in their acquisition of epistemological access. It should be noted that this discourse was not uniformly called upon by all participants in this study, as will be discussed later.

The enabling of epistemological access necessitates a certain kind of engagement with the content of the syllabus such that students are then able to generate academically appropriate knowledge. This entails tutors understanding that their role extends beyond imparting so-called autonomous 'skills' or 'strategies' to cope with the practices of the academy (Boughey, 2005:240). We found that in departments where there was greater involvement by the academics who were the tutor co-ordinators and on-going support provided by all the academics, the tutors seemed to be more confident and clear in their understanding of their role in helping students to access the disciplinary knowledge, as opposed to simply getting through the syllabus or preparing for the exams. The partnership discourse between tutors and academics was thus clearly identified in the data as an enabling mechanism that enhanced the effectiveness of the tutorial in providing epistemological access.

This notion of a 'partnership' between lecturers and tutors was sometimes expressed in terms of the importance of having a good level of communication between the tutor and lecturer. For example:

'they have to have good consultation with the lecturer – but that's a two-way street, because if the lecturer's not involved, then they really are hanging out there by themselves with no support' (A&TC)[3].

The partnership discourse was frequently called upon to describe an 'ideal' lecturer-tutor relationship. One academic development practitioner maintained that for tutorials to work there needs to be 'a collaborative effort between the staff, the lecturer and the tutor' which needs to be initiated by the lecturer. This discourse was also expressed by another academic development practitioner:

'they work together, they work in tandem ... the lecturer's the expert, the tutor will basically ... on a level that's more understandable for the students, explain a concept or give them a practical example ... so they really complement and supplement each other' (ADP).

An A&TC called on this discourse when she talked about the importance of a 'proper working relationship' between the first-year lecturers and their tutors – which she saw as impacting on the pass rate:

'I think that ... if all first-year lecturers – had a proper working relationship with their tutors then I think that we'd have a greater throughput rate – a pass rate ... tutors need the support and they need to know that there's acknowledgement, that the lecturer knows how valuable they are, and I think that needs to be stressed more. Because I think that the link between the lecturer and the tutor is not acknowledged enough' (A&TC).

An academic development practitioner believed that the 'partnership between the lecturer and the tutors to try and achieve very specific goals', was central to 'better academic success and better academic integration of the student'. A faculty administrator suggested that the Teaching and Learning committee should include the promotion of a mutually beneficial relationship between lecturers and tutors through a reward system and 'to make departments aware that we see lecturing and tutoring as a partnership' (FA).

The partnership discourse was also regularly used in reference to a collaborative tutorial project that took place between the Academic Development Centre and one department. In this project, the academic development practitioner suggested to the academic staff that it

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[3] The source of the anonymised data quotes are indicated by letters as follows: A = Academic; A&TC = Academic and Tutor Co-ordinator; T = Tutor; ADP = Academic Development Practitioner; FA = Faculty Administrator.

was important for them to form partnerships in the form of 'mentorships' with their tutors[4]. The thinking behind this is that in order for tutors to be able to guide students into an engagement with the disciplinary norms and practices by establishing a learning community, tutors first have to be able to function as members of such a community themselves (Underhill & MacDonald, 2010:101).

There was thus a view that the power dynamic between lecturers and tutors (themselves senior students) needed to be one that could enable a partnership. This was seen to be necessary if lecturers and tutors were to share an understanding that the function of the tutorial system is to facilitate access to knowledge. This discourse therefore seems to be enabling of epistemological access, but there were also examples of academics resisting a more egalitarian relationship between themselves and tutors.

While all the tutors spoke of the need for a close partnership with the relevant academic if they were to ensure meaningful tutorial content, the academics had mixed views. Most of the academics interviewed valued the tutorial system and felt that a close partnership with tutors enhanced the benefits of the system for first-year students because they were able to discuss in depth with the tutors what the purpose of each tutorial was and to ensure that they had shared understandings of what the expectations of the students should be for that particular content area. But there was also evidence in the data of an underlying tension and resistance to the notion of the lecturer-tutor relationship being a partnership:

> 'We do say to the lecturers, can you come on board, but there's definitely a stigma attached to the idea of lowering yourself to deal with tutor issues' (A&TC).

The data indicated that some lecturers were less willing to engage with the potential value of the tutorial system and saw discussions with tutors as being a primarily administrative concern that was beyond the scope of their role as provider of traditional lectures.

> 'They are over-burdened in terms of the amount of work... they have to lecture, they have to do marking, they don't really understand the role of the tutorial, they just simply get given this added portfolio' (ADP).

One issue that initially seemed unrelated to the focus of this study may help to account for the resistance, by some academics, to extensive involvement with the tutorial system. There was regular reference by academics interviewed to the increased emphasis in the institution on research output. There was evidence of a dualism being constructed between research and teaching. Lecturers indicated that they felt 'overwhelmed' and one academic

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[4] This project has also been documented by Underhill and MacDonald (2010).

development practitioner maintained that many lecturers are 'pressured specifically in terms of research output' and that 'to set up tutorials will take extra time…for many people, that's just too much'. Because of their workloads and other pressures, it was evident that many lecturers were not open to the idea of becoming actively involved in the tutorial system in their departments, and especially to engaging with it in the more intensive way that being in a 'partnership' would suggest. Another academic development practitioner felt that 'generally there's resistance' by academics to become involved in the tutorial system because 'they're undervalued, they're disinterested, it's yet another thing they have to do'.

Discourses, we have argued here, have the ability to constrain or enable the actions of individuals. But individuals are not 'cultural dopes' (Vandenberghe, 2008: 2), living and acting entirely at the mercy of these discourses. Indeed individuals can passively accept, strongly support, or vehemently reject the discursive constructions available to them. Furthermore, when a discourse is in tension with other discourses, individuals have to face the inherent contradictions and make decisions. Archer (1995) suggests that there are 'constraining contradictions' when there is no logical consistency in cultural systems, such as when there are competing discourses that are invariably invoked together.

In this case, the data suggested that some academics experience tension due to the emphasis on conducting research that is exerted by the university management structures and feel that the weight of this expectation is so great that they themselves undervalue their role as teacher and the related roles of working with tutors. The contradiction is created because while the management structures of the university give conceptual support to the tutorial system, within policies and through funding, at the same time the experience of academics is that there is a disproportionate focus on the importance of research. For instance, Cretchley et al (2013:2) argue that while there are obvious rewards both in financial terms and for their professional status for conducting research, there is less evidence of rewards being provided for 'heightened teaching performance' in universities, and this disparity has a direct effect on how academics prioritise their time. Because there is greater financial and other reward given to academics who publish, than those who achieve excellence in teaching, this was felt to send a message to the lecturing staff that their involvement in teaching and learning (and by implication, in the tutorial system) is less valued.

> 'There is no real pressure, *no real reward*, no real opportunity for them to get professional development *in terms of becoming better lecturers'* (ADP).

> 'Teaching well is not as important as researching well in this department and in this university. Tutoring is simply another thing added on to teaching' (A).

Because the tutorial system was seen to be under-valued, some academics apparently felt that they would rather spend their time on research which was valued more by the academy. Relationships of the kind being described here - partnerships with deep engagement around the target knowledge and around issues of teaching and learning - require extensive time and commitment to teaching and to the idea of tutorials in particular.

This was a contradiction to the discourses about research also available in the institutional cultural milieu and such a constraining contradiction would, according to Archer (1995), likely result in 'correction'. It is generally not possible for academics to choose only to do teaching (and by extension to be involved in tutorials) or research. They have to do both, despite there being some tensions evident in the data between the discourses constructing each set of practices. Thus the 'actors [in this case the academics] were driven to cope with ideas that contradicted their own through compromising, conciliating and usually conceding' (Archer, 1995: 240). Those who sought to focus on research were thus faced with the choice of using their agency to avoid being involved in tutorials or to participate compliantly but without engaging with them in the time-consuming ways that a full partnership relationship with the tutors would require.

The partnership discourse was thus found to be an enablement in the extent to which tutorials could enhance epistemological access. Forging such partnerships, however, required input from academics through regular discussions with tutors about the course content and the form and function of tutorials. A discourse privileging research over teaching meant that some academics were less likely to construct their relationship with the tutors in terms of a partnership.

Parental Discourse

The discourse of parenting was called upon by both academics and tutors and constructed first-year students as children or 'kids'. The discourse centred on the notion of teaching and learning as parenting, both with regard to lecturers and tutors playing a nurturing role and in terms of lecturers and tutors needing to ensure control over the class. One of the co-ordinators argued that the first-year students were in need of 'nannying'. Other examples of this discourse from different tutors were:

> 'The kids actually don't know how to cope' (T)
>
> '[The tutorial] is more relaxed, you can make the kids more relaxed' (T),
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> 'Some children write very well and some children don't, I just didn't think that children at a lower kind of level got into university' (T),
>
> 'You have to be patient, you have noisy students who will annoy you to the core and you need to be able to keep your cool and speak to them properly like adults and tell

them to keep quiet, very, very politely, and you need to be caring, you need to understand where they're coming from, you know, it's very sad to look a child in the face and see that they're not understanding' (T).

This discourse, which infantilised the students, placed the tutor in the position of a parent whose role was more than educational and included attending to students' psychological needs and even chiding them about their responsibilities.

'It's almost like a mother, somebody who is there, who helps, who is strict, who moans, who complains, who says 'good, good, ja'. It's really somebody who runs around helping the students to catch all the balls, 'You must remember this, remember this [tapping on desk]', you know? 'Do you still know about this?' It's very much a mother role and they see it, I mean they don't necessarily like you, but they'll come to you running if something goes wrong' (A&TC).

A student entering into higher education undergoes a transition that has been described as entering an 'alien environment' (Ashkam, 2008:85). As McKay and Devlin write, 'Uni has a different language…to the real world' (2014:1). This new and unfamiliar academic world presents many challenges to first year students who need to negotiate multiple factors including the course curriculum, the assessment criteria, timetables, venues and the many different rules and expectations (whether obvious or implicit) of their particular disciplines or fields of study (McKay & Devlin, 2014:4). While the university may for some feel like a foreign space with its socially constructed, discipline-specific norms and practices, a parental discourse may indicate a desire to nurture in ways that make the 'mysteries' of academic knowledge more accessible. First-year students' epistemological access can be enabled or constrained by their prior access (or lack of access) to the kinds of 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1986) valued at university. A student who has excelled in a poverty-stricken rural school may be recognised as a high achiever in that environment, but she may then find that the practices expected of her in the university are foreign, mysterious and alienating (De Kadt & Mathonsi, 2003; McKenna, 2004). The potential for a tutorial system to enable the acquisition and critique of these practices is enormous and perhaps an empathetic, parental discourse can facilitate the tutor's ability to provide students with a nurturing and safe space for this to take place.

The nurturing perspective (Pratt et al, 1998) is commonly held to be an ideal in teaching and in particular in small group education settings such as tutorials. However, this should not be conflated with the parent discourse. The nurturing perspective is premised on the understanding that although the nurturer has an 'enhanced command of the content area, … this should not translate into a disparate power relationship' (T'Kenje, 1998:170). While the

parent discourse emerged from tutors' genuine care for the students, it often took a patronising tone which exaggerated the gap between tutor and tutee, a gap that was typically only a few years difference in both age and education level.

A parental discourse suggests a significant power differential between the student and the tutor or lecturer which can be patronising. Foucault (1980) pointed out that the education system is inherently hierarchical and that it is through discourses that such hierarchies are maintained. The power imbalance between student and tutor is foregrounded by this discourse and this has the potential to prevent student interaction or to diminish the likelihood of students taking up the agency of active learners (Morrow, 2009).

The tutors in this study were students themselves, often only a few years further along than those in the tutorials they were referring to as 'children'. This tutorial system, with its system of using senior students as tutors, has the potential to reduce the power differential of the university system and enable a relationship of near-equals where students can grapple with epistemological access in a less threatening space. The parent discourse, however, potentially reclaims the power differential by positioning the tutor as bearing responsibility for the less capable offspring.

The tutors calling on this discourse often did so in a caring way and used it to indicate the closeness of their relationship with the students in the tutorials as well as their deep concern for these 'kids'. But this discourse nonetheless has the potential to position students in a more passive role in which they require support and instruction from the more experienced 'parent' tutor.

While the tutorial is the ideal structure for the careful unpacking of concepts and induction into the discipline, there is also the concern that if the parental discourse leads to the over-simplification of course material, it can act as a constraint. Hayes and Wynyard (2002) go so far as to call this the 'infantilization of education', and argue that it is part of a broader neo-liberal project whereby the academic has to spell everything out so that the 'intellectual horizon of the learner is restricted to the assimilation of information and the acquisition of skills' (2002:41).

Janks (2010) argues that discourses are powerful mechanisms for maintaining and reproducing relations of domination. By discursively constructing students as being 'children', this positions them in a particular way that could exclude them from access to powerful knowledge. 'Language is not a neutral form of communication' (Janks, 2010:60) or an 'autonomous construct' (Fairclough, 1989:vi) rather, language is imbued with discourses carrying ideological or semiotic power. In the context of the tutorial system, these ideologies are powerful ways to construct a particular view of student identity and agency. Norton

(2010:2) argues that it is through language that an individual can negotiate a sense of self or gain access to a particular (dominant) linguistic community and we would argue that positioning students as children reduces this possibility.

The parental discourse as it emerged in the data thus gives some cause for concern as it constructed the student as being under-developed or diminished in capacity. While it was evident in the data that this language was well-meaning, it had the potential for a number of unintended consequences because it drew on a notion of the student as needing remediation.

Boughey (2002, 2005) has looked at how difficulties encountered by students are named and raises concerns about discursively constructing students as the 'problem' and in need of remediation. She further challenges the ways in which the ability to characterise such difficulties as inherent in the student absolves us of more critical considerations of the curriculum or of pedagogy.

The discourse in which the tutors construct themselves as parents taking care of more dependent and less capable children may be drawing on complementary discourses available more broadly, which position students as being underdeveloped and in need of remediation (Niven 2012, Boughey 2002, Scott et al 2007).

When discourses work together in this way, Archer terms them 'concomitant complementarities' and states that such complementarity leads to the reproduction of ideas. When the two discourses, in this case the parenting discourse of the tutorials and the broader discourse of students as needing remediation, align in complementary ways, 'their truths are not challenged only reinforced … they confront no ideational problems' (Archer 1988: 157).

Conclusion

The tutorial system is constructed, both in the literature and in the institutional documentation, as being an intervention to improve student throughput, such that it empowers students to critically engage with the knowledge domain and practices of their particular discipline. Furthermore, the tutorial is a pedagogicial structure that is deeply embedded in the notion of relationships.

For the partnership between academics and tutors to be enabling of epistemological access, it is important for academics to understand the pedagogical potential of the tutorials and for tutors to be inducted into the functioning of the target knowledge and the purpose of each tutorial. Commitment to the tutorial system was not always apparent in the data, as academics sometimes experienced a tension between teaching and research and the situational logic of the discourses related to these two activities was one of contradiction.

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Because excellence in teaching was generally perceived to be less valued in the academy in comparison to research achievements, time-intensive teaching interventions, such as the tutorial, were sometimes also undervalued by academics. This meant that many lecturers were not interested in fostering partnership relationship with tutors in their departments.

In the second discourse analysed in this paper, the importance of a good relationship between tutors and students where tutors are seen to be caring, nurturing and compassionate was held to be an enablement of epistemological access, but the tendency to infantilise students through the parental discourse was found to constrain the potential of tutorials to provide disciplinary access. Additionally, the creation of an uneven power dynamic between tutors and students can serve to limit students' ability to take ownership of their own learning.

The parenting discourse was, like the partnership discourse, found to work alongside a discourse available in the broader institutional cultural milieu, but in this case the discourses were found to be complementary. The discourse of the students as 'kids' draws on and is aligned with the commonly found 'remedial discourse' which also places students in positions of inadequacy. In Archer's terms, the situational logic was one of 'concomitant complementarity' as the parenting discourse then reinforces the remedial student discourse.

Through the discussion of two discourses constructing relationships in the tutorial system, parents and partnerships, we have argued that these discourses act as mechanisms with the potential to constrain or enable the efficacy of the tutorial system. It was evident that while institutional structures can enhance the capacity of tutorial systems to enable epistemological access, it is at the cultural level of discourses, ideas and beliefs that work needs to be done. This could entail more intensive development of both academics and tutors. If tutorials are to fulfil their potential to improve epistemological access, then attention needs to be paid to how we understand and talk about them.

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