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A REFUSAL TO DEFINE HRD

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Abstract: This article argues that although at times it is necessary to define HRD for political reasons, there is a strong case that HRD should not be defined on philosophical, theoretical and practical grounds. To proffer definitions of HRD is to misrepresent it as a thing of *being* rather than a process of *becoming*. Defining the field also runs the risk of disengaging from the moral dimension of HRD.

Keywords: Philosophical roots, definitions, moral responsibility

In almost any educational situation it is common practice to first define the area or subject that is to be studied. It is generally considered to be the *good practice* if the syllabus and content that are to be taught are derived from such definition, if the students are actively encouraged to study and revise in the light of this structure, and if the assessment and evaluation of students, staff and course reflect and reinforce the coherence of the whole. This notion of *good practice* holds some moral force. A *good* teacher, trainer, or HRD professional is someone who lays out the subject clearly and coherently. To fail to do so in the predominant western model of education, is to be a *bad* educator. In this article I shall argue that this approach does particular disservice to the development of those who wish to become HRD professionals, as the notion and practice of HRD is dynamic, ambiguous, and ill determined. Although the main thrust of this paper is conceptual, I firmly believe that philosophy and theory need to be rooted in practice, and thus I will draw upon the experience of the life-cycle of a Master's programme in my university, in order to illustrate my arguments.

Setting the scene

In the early 1990's I launched a MSc in HRD (by Research) at Lancaster University. The programme was designed to lead to both professional and academic qualifications for international cohorts of senior HRD professionals. In the first workshop of each cohort, the participants were getting their bearings – feeling what the course might be like. Two months later, after people had returned to work and started to reflect upon links between the academic and professional sides of their lives, they attended the second workshop. It was here that the defining of HRD became paramount in most people's minds. It was as if they believed that they could not progress until they knew what HRD 'is'. They believed that through this knowledge their future study and work roles would be laid out in front of them, such that so long as they knew where the path was, they could achieve excellence through sheer hard work. These traditional views shifted quite rapidly, but for a couple of days it was as if they thought that I, their programme designer and leader, was deliberately and maliciously preventing them from achieving, by refusing to define HRD for them.

This programme generated significant income and proved to be extremely successful with the students, many of whom keep in touch and say that it has fundamentally changed their lives. About 85 per cent obtained promotion or changed jobs during or directly after the programme. All participants had to have at least five years professional experience, and even though about a quarter came with little academic experience, the majority of students achieved exceptionally good academic results, with about a fifth subsequently registering for their PhD. On all the normal criteria it was considered to be an extremely successful programme, yet, despite this, the programme was short-lived and recruitment was terminated after only four cohorts. One reason for this might be because it adopted a philosophy and practice fundamentally different to that of normal academe.

The philosophical case for refusing to define HRD.

I designed the programme shortly after I joined Lancaster University, having previously spent twenty years working for others and myself in the field. Most of what had been written about HRD at that time did not really reflect my own professional experiences, and therefore I was cynical about regurgitating the literature in the knowledge that it was a chimera. I therefore designed my Master's programme to reflect the way in which I understood my role as an HRD professional, and as an educator of others. It seemed to me that in my professional life, whilst I carried a central core of understanding from each experience that came my way, I, and my understanding shifted and changed according to that experience – and each experience influenced, and was influenced by, future experiences. I could never say 'this is

the organisation', 'this is my role', and 'this is what I am doing' as I could never manage to complete or finalise any of these states.

Similarly, as an educator, I could not identify with any firm body of knowledge and say 'this is what is needed'. I could see that people needed knowledge, but that most of what they needed would be situation specific: the knowledge needed by an Angolan participant would be very different to that needed by someone working in Hong Kong; working multi-nationally required different knowledge and skills than working with small and medium-sized enterprises; working in the voluntary sector appeared fundamentally different to working with the corporate sector, and so on. I could see that people needed different knowledge and skills, and that they would need to shift and change to emerge into new roles and selves. There did seem to me to be some meta-level areas of activity in what I did, and it was these that I tried to capture as workshop topics.

I therefore designed a programme that avoided specification, or at least, the specification beyond basic structure and process. These were the areas of focus on the different workshops, the form, but not the content, of the assessed research projects and international placement, and the form of process that occurred over the different days of each workshop. The programme was not completely open as participants derived implicit delineations of the area to be studied from the brochure and the interviews. As I shall discuss later, it could be argued that there was an overriding definition in practice, but there was no set content or syllabus, and no area that had to be known to satisfy assessment criteria. Some details of the programme are contained within Appendix 1. I designed the course like this because it felt the best way to foster the growth of reflective practitioners able to develop and marry best practice with academic credibility and personal strength. This was, however, a challenge to the 'academic' mindset.

By 'academic mindset' I am referring to the academic world view – the archetype or myth of academe – the 'norm' (which is, of course, never really lived just because it is so 'normal'). Elsewhere (Lee 1988) I have discussed the nature of the archetype, and tried to convey its all-pervading influence. When we think of an academic person, or academe in general, we tend to envision ivory towers, theoretical debate, careful experimentation, scientific method and so on. These views even permeate applied areas of study such as management and HRD. As Boyacigiller and Adler (1991) point out, the bulk of early management research was done on (and in) white US Bureaucratic organisations and our current understandings of management theory and practice are derived from this culturally specific and non-representational sample, and the very nature of this compounded the bias. Early research was assumed to apply to all management, and assumed that management was a singular global concept without national or situation-specific boundaries, that there were right and wrong ways of managing and that it was possible to derive a single global set of tenets for best practice. These views are still around and actively promoted, despite ample evidence of their fallacy (Lee 1995).

More generally, academe is normally associated with 'scientism' – a belief in the supremacy of reductive rationalistic scientific thinking. This approach pervades academic theorising and shapes and influences all forms of knowledge considered acceptable by the academic community, and this becomes self-fulfilling. Those who do not conform to the control mechanisms of format, style, and scientific method are (normally quite politely) told that they are not sufficiently 'scholarly'. This is, however, just one way of looking at the world. It has an ancient and strong lineage, but there are other forms of world-view.

As Chia (1997) states:

'Contemporary Western modes of thought are circumscribed by two great and competing pre-Socratic cosmologies or 'world-views', which provided and continue to provide the most general conceptual categories for organizing thought and directing human effort. Heraclitus, a native of Ephesus in ancient Greece, emphasized the primacy of a changeable and emergent world while Parmenides, his successor, insisted upon the permanent and unchangeable nature of reality.'

Parmenides' view of reality is reflected in the continued dominance of the belief that science constitutes, by far, the most valuable part of human learning and accomplishment. He argues that this leads to an atomistic conception of reality in which clear-cut, definite things are deemed to occupy clear-cut definite places in space and time. Thus causality becomes the conceptual tool used for linking these isolates, and the state of rest is considered normal while movement is considered as a straightforward transition from one stable state to another.

'This being ontology is what provides the metaphysical basis for the organisation of modern thought and the perpetration of a system of classificatory taxonomies, hierarchies and categories which, in turn, serve as the institutionalised vocabulary for representing our experiences of reality. A representationalist epistemology thus ensues in which formal knowledge is deemed to be that which is produced by the rigorous application of the system of classifications on our phenomenal experiences in order to arrive at an accurate description of reality.' (Chia 1997, p 74).

A being ontology is conceptualised with one 'true' reality, the units of which are tied together in a causal system. The truth is out there, we just have to find it! In contrast the Heraclitean viewpoint offers a becoming ontology in which '*... how an entity becomes constitutes what the actual entity is; so the two descriptions of an actual entity are not independent. Its being is constituted by its becoming. This is the principle of process..... the flux of things is one ultimate generalisation around which we must weave our philosophical system'* (Whitehead, 1929: 28 & 240). Cooper (1976) suggests that within such a *process* epistemology the individuals involved feel themselves to be significant nodes in a dynamic network and are neither merely passive receivers nor dominant agents imposing their preconceived scheme of things on to that which they apprehend. All are the parts of the whole, and the parts, and the whole, change and develop together. From this point of view, there is both one and many realities, in which I myself come into being both through interacting with and being constituted within them, and the knowing of these realities is never final nor finished.

Integral to 'living' within a process epistemology is the personal quality of what might be called 'hanging loose', or 'negative capability', as described by the early Nineteenth Century English poet John Keats: '*And at once it struck me, what quality went to form a man of Achievement... meaning Negative Capability, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after facts and reason'* (Keats, letters of 21 December 1817). This quality is one of resisting conceptual closure, and thereby creating the necessary 'space' for the formulation of personal insights, and the development of foresight and intuition, is a quality that is vital for counselling and other helping professions, and one that '*should*' be within the remit of HRD professionals. All my experience in HRD and life (not that I can easily separate them) points me to the belief in a world of becoming, one of process epistemology and negative capability. It could be that I am out of step with the 'real world', but I suggest that the Parmenidean house of cards that we construct around us to provide clarity, certainty and delineation, will tumble in the wind of close examination. This house of cards stands on the strength of unique definitions by which every concept has its own, rightful and static place in the order of things. In contrast, from the Heraclitean perspective, the meaning and boundary of concepts is negotiable. In the following section I shall briefly report on previous work I have done with the notion of development, and illustrate that despite being central to our ideas of HRD, even that concept is debatable.

The theoretical case for refusing to define HRD

Most would agree that, to be meaningful, the definition of something needs to encapsulate the properties or qualities of that which is being defined, such that it can be recognised uniquely from the definition and thereby distinguished from those that are not being defined. This sort of description of what a definition might be, is, in itself, one of *being* rather than *becoming*. We could, however, say that a definition of something need not be fixed or permanent, but instead, it could take the form of a working definition. If enough people use a word in a particular way, and know what each other means by it, more or less, then there is tacit agreement about the meaning of that word and its qualities, such that it could be deemed to be *becoming* defined. We might, therefore, get a rough feeling for a word by looking at the way in which it is used. In Lee (1997a) I report an attempt I made to develop a working definition of the word 'development'. I examined promotional literature aimed at HRD professionals and found four different ways in which the word 'development' was used: *development as maturation; shaping, a voyage, and as emergent*.

In the first approach that I identified, *development as maturation* was used as if to refer to a pre-determined stage-like and inevitable progression of people and organisations. Development is seen as an inevitable unfolding, and thus the developmental force is the process itself, which, in turn, defines the end-point. The system, be it an individual, a group or an organisation, is seen as being a coherent entity with clearly defined boundaries existing within a predictable external environment. The organisation is discussed as if it were a single living element, whose structures, existence and change are capable of being completely understood through sufficient expert analysis. Concepts such as

empowerment and change-agency are irrelevant in an approach that is essentially founded upon social determinism, with no place for unpredictable events or freedom of individual choice.

In the second, *development as shaping*, people are seen as tools who can be shaped to fit the organisation. Here, development is still seen to have known end-points, but these are defined by someone or something external to the process of development. The organisation is stratified and senior management define the end point for junior management - the wishes of the corporate hierarchy create the developmental force. This approach assumes that there is something lacking, some weakness or gap, that can be added to or filled by the use of the appropriate tools or blueprint, and that such intervention is necessary. Individuals, including their aspirations and their values, as well as their skills, are malleable units that can be moulded to suit the wider system. Empowerment and individual agency can be part of the developmental agenda, but not in their own right. They are acceptable developmental end points only if ratified by senior management: empowerment becomes a tool to enhance performance and decision making.

Development as voyage is as a life long journey upon uncharted internal paths in which individuals construe their own frames of reference and place their view of self within this, such that each of us construct our own version of reality in which our identity is part of that construct. This is described as an active process in which the individual is continually re-analysing their role in the emergence of the processes of which they are part. In so doing they are also confronting their own ideas, unsurfaced assumptions, biases and fears whilst maintaining a core of ethicality and strong self concept (Adler, 1974). Development, involves a transformative shift in approach that enables critical observation and evaluation of the experience, such that the learner is able to distance themselves from it rather than replay it. Experiencing becomes a way of restoring meaning to life (Vasilyuk, 1984). The external world (including organisation and management) might mirror or catalyse development, but it is the individual who is the sole owner and clear driving force behind the process. Empowerment would be within the individual's own terms, and might have little regard for organisational objectives.

Development as emergent is the fourth approach that I identified. Here development is seen to arise out of the messy ways by which societal aspiration becomes transformed into societal reality. 'The individual's unique perceptions of themselves within a social reality which is continuously socially (re)constructed' (Checkland 1994); in which 'individuals dynamically alter their actions with respect to the ongoing and anticipated actions of their partners.' (Fogel, 1993:34), and; in which they negotiate a form of communication and meaning specific and new to the group and relatively un-accessible or un-describable to those who were not part of the process (Lee, 1994). Self-hood is a dynamic function of the wider social system, be it a family grouping, a small or medium sized enterprise, a large bureaucracy, or a Nation, or parts of each, and as that system transforms so do all the participants. Emergent development of the group-as-organisation is seen to be no different from the development of any social system, and is not consistently driven by any single sub-system, be it senior management or the shop-floor. Discussion about planned top-down or bottom-up change is irrelevant, as the words themselves imply some sort of structure to the change. This approach is, of course, in direct conflict with traditional ideas that organisational change is driven by senior management, however, Romanelli & Tushman (1994) offer empirical support for rapid, discontinuous transformation in organisations being driven by major environmental changes.

It would be very simple to place these in a nice two-by-two matrix, as in Figure 1. The two-by-two matrix is pervasive and well understood in management, but it is a tool of being, rather than becoming. The lines are solid and impermeable, the categories fixed. Instead, the Venn diagram in Figure 2, helps us imagine these different views of development as areas of concentration, in which it is as if the most concentrated 'essence' of that which we are examining is in the centre of the area, and, as it diffuses outward, it mingles with the essences of the other areas.

Despite finding alternative ways of representing these findings, which might help address the problem of how to represent the sorts of working definitions associated with becoming, we cannot avoid the fact that there appear to be four fundamentally different working definitions of development. Each of these carries with it a particular view of organisation, and of the nature and role of HRD, and is used under different circumstances. When talking of our own development we normally address it as if it is a voyage. When senior managers talk of organisational development they normally talk of it as if it were shaping. When social theorists talk of development they normally adopt a maturational or emergent perspective, depending upon their theoretical bent. Development is clearly not a unitary concept.

		IDENTITY	
		UNITARY	CO-REGULATED
END POINT	KNOWN	MATURATION Development through inevitable stages.	SHAPING: Development through planned steps
	UNKNOWN	VOYAGE: Development through internal discovery.	EMERGENT: Development through interaction with other

Figure 1. A Two-by-Two Matrix of ‘Development’

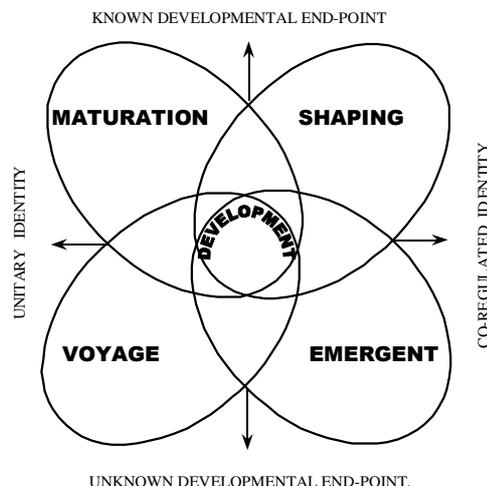


Figure 2. Four forms of ‘Development’, after Lee 1997a.

The professional case for refusing to define HRD

The many ways in which the word development can be used indicates the many different roles that the professional developer might adopt. For example the role of the developer in the maturational system has the sureness of the (relatively) uninvolved expert consultant who charts the inevitable unfolding of the stages. The developer within a shaped system is the process expert who can not only clearly help senior management identify an enhanced future, but can also apply the tools necessary to ensure that such a future is achieved. Such developers purport to sell a better, and otherwise unobtainable, view of the future to individuals, groups and organisations plus the blueprint to get there. Those that are being developed are encouraged or moulded to meet the end criteria, regardless of whether such criteria are enhanced skills, positive attitudes or the achievement of corporate objectives. The role of the developer within the system as voyage is one of helping others to help themselves (see, for example, Rogers 1951, 1959). In this case the developer brings expert skills that help the individual recognise their self-imposed bounds and widen their horizons, but does so without calling upon the power of expertise that describes a particular path and endpoint as best for the individual concerned. In emergent systems there is little role for a developer as the developer holds no unique or special status. Developers are as similar and as different as each other member is, and although they perhaps have fewer vested interests in political machinations (and thus might be able to view circumstances more objectively), they are as directly involved in the life of the organisation as any of the individuals they are supporting in co-development.

Let us step back for a bit, and take a Parmenidean view of the world, and examine what is meant by the definition of HRD. In this worldview we have the two-by-two matrix, and four different definitions of the word development, only one of which can be what we really mean, while the other three need to be renamed. When we talk about *Human Resource Development* however, the situation becomes clearer. A *human resource* is a commodity – something to be shaped and used at the will and needs of the more powerful. The role of the HRD professional is clear, and, by implication, so is the nature of organisation and management. Senior management set the objectives within a clearly defined organisational structure, in which HRD is a subset of the larger HRM function

If we accept the common meaning of the words then there is no alternative to HRD as an activity and profession in which development is about shaping individuals to fit the needs of the organisation, as defined by senior management. Integrity, ethics, and individual needs are not important within this conceptualisation, and need only be considered if the circumstances call for hypocritical lip-service to them. A Parmenidean definition of HRD, therefore, might be along the lines of ‘the shaping of the employees to fit the needs of the employer’. This approach is described as performance improvement by Weinberger (1998) in her examination of theories of HRD, derived mainly from US literature. It is less prevalent in other countries (Geppert and Merckens, 1999, Grieves and Redman, 1999) and, interestingly, most human resource professionals (including those in the US) do not describe their own work in this way (Claus, 1998; Sambrook, 2000). They, and the professional bodies are increasingly paying attention to the

ethical aspects of the profession. Some might still see HRD in this way, but for many, the profession has slowly moved on to incorporate notions of integrity and ethics, and also to reflect, at least in part, the notion that people are central to the organisation, and thus the strategic role that their development can play.

There is, however, a strong drive to define HRD, particularly within the professional and qualification awarding bodies in the field of practice. They need to do so for political reasons - in order to patrol their boundaries, maintain their standards, and bolster their power base. The professional bodies have, in general, abandoned (at least in part) theoretically derived definitions of HRD and instead adopted a practice-based view, in which they attempt to promote what they see as 'best practice' through the establishment of their professional standards. These standards do not necessarily reflect what is happening in practice, but instead mirror what the professional bodies would *like* to see happening. As illustrated in Lee et al (1996), standardisation across disparate systems of HRD is likely to have been achieved through cultural imposition, with the accepted standards or definition in practice, belonging to those cultures with the loudest voices. Even if the rhetoric is of the dominant culture, the practice often remains that of the hidden, or underlying culture (Lee, 1998). Clearly, professional and qualification awarding bodies do provide definitions of HRD, and these definitions are generally suitable to meet their political needs, but this localised and self-serving activity is fundamentally different to that of trying to understand or encapsulate the field of knowledge and activity that is HRD. Perhaps the only way to address the need to encapsulate what is meant by HRD is to draw permeable outlines around this complex of activities that we all know and, for want of any other term, choose to call HRD.

The practical reason for refusing to define HRD

The idea of a generally acceptable definition of HRD achieved via the processes of standardisation becomes particularly unrealistic when we look at the degree of variation in practice across the globe. As McLean and McLean in their article in this issue of *Human Resource Development International* (2001) demonstrate, it is simply not feasible to seek global standardisation or definition based upon current practice. They conclude that definitions of HRD are influenced by a country's value system, and the point of the life-cycle of the field of HRD in that country, and that the perception and practice of HRD differ according to the status of the organisation whether it be local or multi-national. We can proffer, with some accuracy and completeness, localised definitions in practice or working definitions. However, descriptions of current practice become increasingly meaningless as the variation in practice increases. Furthermore, as soon as these definitions are encased in course brochures, syllabi, professional standards, organisational literature, or other such statements of fact, they stop becoming and *are*. Thus the very act of defining the area runs the risk of strangling growth in the profession by stipulating so closely what the practice of HRD is, or should be. In consequence it is unable to become anything else, and so we reach the heart of the argument.

HRD theorists and professionals are increasingly talking and acting as if the process that we call HRD is dynamic and emergent. Organisational theory, and HRD theory, are starting to explore areas of complexity, and the notion of process itself. In order to accommodate the variation they found in definitions of HRD, McLean and McLean offer a global *processual* definition, namely: '*Human Resource Development is any process or activity that, either initially or over the long-term, has the potential to develop adult's work-based knowledge, expertise, productivity, and satisfaction, whether for personal or group/team gain, or for the benefit of an organisation, community, nation, or, ultimately, the whole of humanity.*' Even such a global definition, however, does not meet everybody's requirements - why is it limited to adults? What of all the child workers in the world? The authors did not include them in the definition as they considered the fact of child-labour to be one of the negative aspects of HRD practice. Thus the definition is really a statement of how the authors would like the field to become, and not how it *is*.

Heraclites and moral responsibility.

The views of Heraclitus and Parmenides could be seen merely as two philosophical stances, with little to do with the bottom line of teaching people about making money through managing people in organisations. However this is a limited view of the field, the theory, the practice and the role of HRD, as it focuses upon one particular culturally specific and dominant way of working and end product. From the Parmenidean perspective, no other viewpoint captures the essence of existence, yet from the Heraclitean perspective the Parmenidean view could be one among many - all of which together comprise existence. Therefore, despite the dominant focus, in the West, at least, on scientific definition and measurable outcomes, a broader view of the field shows that the practice or the 'doing' of whatever we mean by HRD is also a process of becoming. There are parallels here between this and the emergent

system of development I describe above. This system reflects the messy ways by which societal aspiration becomes transformed into societal reality. Society develops with no clear end-point and with its emergent activities as the drive behind change, rather than the edicts of the hierarchy (Lee, 1997b). From this perspective, HRD could be seen as that which is in the processual bindings of the system, which links the needs and aspirations of the shifting elements of the system, between and across different levels of aggregation, as they are in the process of becoming. Yet while these words are sufficiently general to describe the process of socialisation, per se, they are not a definition of HRD.

To summarise this point, acknowledgement of the Heraclitean cosmology as a descriptor of the metaphysical basis of existence carries with it a moral responsibility that is not entailed by the Parmenidean cosmology. The act of definition, for the followers of Parmenides, is that of clarifying what exists. This might be complicated or problematic, but its moral valency is no different to that of emphasising or copying the lines of a line drawing. It is just describing what already is. In contrast, the act of definition within the Heraclitean cosmology is equivalent to the act of creation. To define is to intervene in the process of becoming, it is to assert a right way, and what should occur. It is to make moral judgements about what is good and bad, and to state these is to attest not only to their legitimacy, but also to the superior power or higher status of the attester. To define is to take the moral high ground and to assert one's power, and, by doing so, it is to deny the right of others to impose their own view on the becoming of HRD.

The world in which we move is political – all our actions and inactions can be seen as statements of power, but in the Heraclitean cosmos we are responsible for the exercise of that power in a way that does not occur in the Parmenidean cosmos. My attempts to maintain a space of negative capability and lack of definition within the Masters programme in HRD that I described earlier, was more than an educative ploy. It was an attempt to ensure that each person developed their own, emergent view of HRD, rather than adopting the one propounded by teacher which they would end up wearing like an old ill-fitting raincoat. In this way, HRD was different for each person and emerged out of their experiences: *'It is not enough to insist upon the necessity of experience, nor even of activity in experience. Everything depends upon the quality of experience which is had.. every experience lives in further experiences'*. (Dewey, 1938)

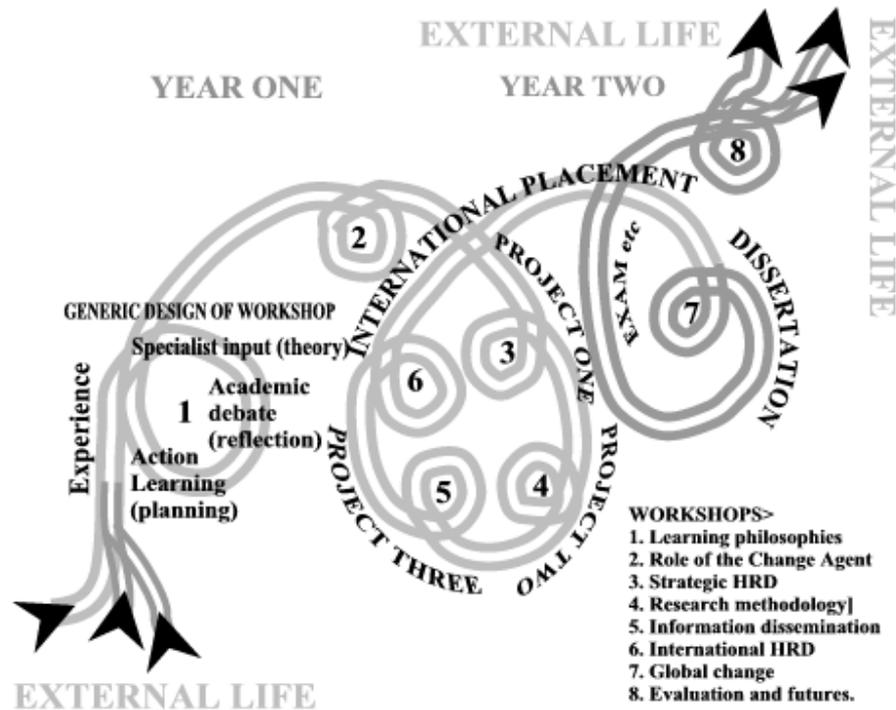
I was lucky to be able to run my Masters programme as I did for four cohorts. Many higher education institutions would not have countenanced it nor accepted its notion of self-generating content. Having ensured that its systems of verification and quality management were sufficient, the University was happy for it to continue indefinitely. However, its fate was sealed by a replay of the philosophical debate that took place two and a half thousand years ago in Ancient Greece. My Heraclitean vision for HRD lost out to a fear of difference and a desire to control the uncontrollable. Whilst acknowledging how very hard it is at times to live in a Heraclitean world, I wish to redress the balance and propose that, certainly as far as HRD is concerned, there is no alternative. I will not define HRD because it is indefinable, and to attempt to define it is only to serve the political or social needs of the minute – to give the appearance of being in control. Instead I suggest we seek to establish, in a moral and inclusive way, what we would like HRD to *become*, in the knowledge that it will never *be*, but that we might thus influence its *becoming*.

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Appendix 1. Outline of the MSC HRD (by research)

The programme consisted of eight four day workshops, over one and a half years, and was assessed through three guided work-based research projects, an international placement, a learning log, and a dissertation.



The process of each workshop followed the Kolb model, but shifted daily between a focus on the academic [theory], followed by [reflection] on the professional self within group, and then a return to the focus upon the individual [planning], before the return to work [experience]. Specialists were invited during the first two days of each workshop and were asked to present different views to the group about the workshop topic, with specific instructions to be controversial and to follow their pet theories. For each half day the group lived in the world of that specialist and, given the diversity of each group, there was lots of discussion and hard questioning. I would refuse to clarify, and insist that each person had to come to their own decisions on the differing views presented. I was very determined in ensuring that the third day shifted to one of no content. It was called ‘academic debate’ as it was set aside for the group to work with the ideas from the previous two days and with their own processes, contextualising theory with practice. This was, initially, hard for the participants, and proved to be particularly hard for those academic co-tutors with no counselling experience. The majority of participants came from pressured lives in the world of business where they had to be doing something. Quite often the group got stuck, and occasionally I would jump in with some exercise or idea to shift them, but despite the real pain sometimes associated with the processes of self within group, each group eventually came to value the creation of a reflective space in this way.

Whilst the whole programme was based on principles of Action Learning, (Lee 1996) the fourth day made this more explicit. The group split into sub-groups of about six people each, and these were run as a facilitative action learning set. Each person would have about an hour (even if they said they didn’t want it!) in which to address whatever issues they wished. These normally started as work issues, but quickly shifted to individual or group issues, and then, over the next year, moved increasingly towards issues associated with completing the dissertation.

This programme generated its own content, and whilst the process was structured the majority of the knowledge wasn’t. Participants had full responsibility for their own work, and the tutors acted as facilitators in order to enforce negative capability rather than closure.

