

Cardinal John Henry Newman and ‘the ideal state and purpose of a university’: nurse education, research and practice development for the twenty-first century

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Cardinal John Henry Newman and ‘the ideal state and purpose of a university’: nurse education, research and practice development for the twenty-first century

Cardinal John Henry Newman’s book, *The Idea of a University*, first published in the mid nineteenth century, is often invoked as the epitome of the liberal Enlightenment University in discussions and debates about the role and purpose of nurse education. In this article I will examine Newman’s book in greater detail and with a more critical eye than is generally the case in the writing of nurse academics. In particular, I will focus on the claims that Newman was a champion of the Enlightenment University of the nineteenth century, that he promoted the idea of ‘disinterested’ universal knowledge for its own sake, that he was an early advocate of the pursuit of knowledge through scientific research, and the supposition that he would have welcomed the discipline of nursing into the University. In each case, I will suggest that these claims are based on an extremely selective reading of Newman’s work. I will conclude by employing the example of practice development to propose an alternative way for nursing to find its place in the modern University that does not involve a retreat into what I will argue is an outdated and nostalgic view of the aims and purpose of higher education.

Key words: nurse education, practice development, textual analysis.

Whenever the concept of liberal education and the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake is discussed in relation to nursing, it is almost invariably accompanied by a reference to Cardinal John Newman and his book *The Idea of a University* (Newman 1852/1982). To take but a few examples, Brodie (1986) invokes Newman in relation to doctoral programmes in nursing; (Haggerty 1992) cites Newman’s work in a discussion of the influence of liberal education on nursing practice in the USA; Symes et al. (2000) refer to the distinction in Newman’s book between liberal education and professional training in Australian universities; and Drennan and Hyde

(2009) discuss Newman on the tension between practical knowledge and knowledge for its own sake in Master’s in Nursing programmes in Ireland.

In the UK, Roger Watson and David Thompson have cited Newman’s work in a series of papers in support of their vision for nurse education and nursing research in the modern University (Thompson and Watson 2006; Watson 2006; Watson and Thompson 2008a,b, 2010; Thompson 2009). In their most recent contribution to the debate, Watson and Thompson refer to Newman in support of their argument for ‘the ideal state and purpose of a university: the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake: nothing more; nothing less’ (Watson and Thompson 2010, 320). This call for the single-minded pursuit of knowledge ‘for its own sake’ is a restatement of an earlier appeal by the same authors to the writing

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of Newman in support of their idea for institutes of nursing research in the image of the world-renown *Institute for Advanced Study* at Princeton University, in which 'there are no students, curricula, lectures, tutoring, committees or research programmes. Enlightenment is the only mission' (Thompson and Watson 2006, 125).

Newman is commonly held up as a champion of the Enlightenment and of liberal university education, and the selective use of quotes from his work, stripped of their context, can certainly give the impression that he was dedicated to disinterested and impartial scholarship for its own sake. As Svalic (1959) points out in his introduction to Newman's book, there can be few academics 'who do not ... connect Newman at least hazily with the affirmation that knowledge is capable of being its own end' (in Newman 1852/1982, vii). Thompson, for example, reiterates Svalic's words in his observation that: 'Newman noted that knowledge is capable of being its own end. Newman insisted that the fundamental role of universities is to teach their students to think, or as he put it "a cultivated, philosophical habit of mind"' (Thompson 2009, 694). Whilst this somewhat cursory summary of Newman's position on 'the fundamental role of universities' is broadly accurate, a closer and more comprehensive reading of *The Idea of a University* suggests a somewhat different interpretation of Newman's vision as neither particularly liberal in the modern understanding of the term (nor, as we shall see, in the understanding of Newman's contemporaries), nor supportive of the Enlightenment ideal of secular rationality.

The primary purpose of this article is therefore to examine Newman's book *The Idea of a University* in greater detail and with a more critical eye than is generally the case in the writing of nurse academics. In particular, I will focus on the claims that Newman was a champion of the Enlightenment University of the nineteenth century, that he promoted the idea of 'disinterested' universal knowledge for its own sake, that he was an early advocate of the pursuit of knowledge through scientific research, and the supposition that he would have welcomed the discipline of nursing into the University. I will compare the image generally advocated by current nurse academics of Newman as a proponent of liberal Enlightenment education with the contrasting and sometimes contradictory view found in Newman's own writing. I will conclude by employing the example of practice development to propose an alternative way for nursing to find its place in the modern University that does not involve a retreat into what I will argue is an outdated and nostalgic view of the aims and purpose of higher education. In doing so, I will draw mainly on the work of David Thompson and Roger Watson as two of the most prolific and consistent

advocates of Newman's work in relation to nurse education and research.

NEWMAN AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT MISSION

It is rather curious that Newman is so often cited (at least in the English-speaking world) as one of the founding fathers of the modern Enlightenment University. Although Newman advocated the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, he was by no means the first to do so. The philosophical origins of the liberal Enlightenment University can be found in the work of Karl Wilhelm von Humboldt, the Prussian Minister of Education, more than half a century before Newman's book, and the practical origins can be seen in Humboldt's University of Berlin, founded in 1810, whose purpose was (and still is) to offer 'a unity of teaching and research and provide students with an all-round humanist education' (University of Berlin 2010).

Furthermore, whilst Newman's book tends to be held up by certain writers as the touchstone of liberal, free-thinking nurse education and research, it is debatable whether it could be described either as integrating teaching and research, or as advocating a 'humanist education' in the mould of the University of Berlin. In contrast to Humboldt's secular, humanist project, Newman's book is a transcription of a series of lectures given to the Catholic University in Dublin, whose primary purpose 'was providing a theoretical defence of the Catholic Hierarchy's objection to the secular university colleges established in Ireland by the British Government in 1845' (Graham 2008, 1). The focus of Newman's lectures and for his book was therefore to rehabilitate the teaching of Catholic doctrine in the newly secularised Enlightenment University of the mid-nineteenth century by pointing out 'the impossibility of a secular, non-religious university education' (Graham 2008, 1).

If the Enlightenment is defined as the struggle of scientific reason over unquestioning faith, then Newman's work could fairly be regarded as arguing *against* Enlightenment values rather than as part of the Enlightenment project. In addition, I will suggest that Newman's concept of 'universal knowledge' was not particularly humanist and did not concur with the values of the Enlightenment educational project of 'the modern university as a non-denominational institution in which natural science played a significant part and where theology and history were subject to critical intellectual scrutiny' (Graham 2008). Finally, unlike Humboldt's University of Berlin, I

will suggest that Newman's idea of a University did not regard scientific research as one of its primary functions, and that Newman considered empirical scientific knowledge to be in abeyance to the 'revealed truth' of the scriptures.

NEWMAN AND LIBERAL EDUCATION

Newman's conversion from Anglicanism to Catholicism in 1845 is often thought to be the catalyst for his lectures and his book, although the extent to which his newly adopted religion altered his thinking on higher education is debatable. Thus, whilst the lectures published in *The Idea of a University* were intended to showcase the newly created and privately funded Catholic University of Ireland, of which Newman was the first rector, his primary aim was 'to do henceforth for the Catholics of England much the same kind of work he had previously been doing for the Anglicans' (Svalic 1959, ix). In other words, the purpose of Newman's work was to counter the influence of the non-denominational 'mixed' education provided by the Queen's Colleges in Belfast, Cork and Limerick rather than directly to challenge the Protestant Trinity College Dublin, from which Catholics were mostly barred (Svalic 1959). It is therefore likely that Newman's objection was not so much to the education provided by other denominations of the Christian Church than to the prospect of secular universities, a threat 'so special as to have a claim upon the attention of *all educated Christians*' (Newman, unpublished manuscript cited in Tristram 1952, 11).

Thus, whilst Newman advocated the idea of 'Liberal or Philosophical Knowledge', he nevertheless strongly resisted what he called 'Liberalism in religion' (Newman 1879, 7). Newman's idea of liberal education therefore ran counter to what was more generally regarded at the time as the liberal turn of the University in Ireland towards a curriculum largely devoid of theology and religious training (Svalic 1959) in which Protestants and Catholics were taught together and which promoted freedom of thought and rational secularism. Newman, then, was strongly opposed to the liberal view which:

teaches that all [religions] must be tolerated, but all are matters of opinion. Revealed religion is not a truth, but a sentiment and a taste; not an objective fact; not miraculous; and it is the right of each individual to make it say just what strikes his fancy (Newman 1879, 7).

When Newman used the term 'liberal education' he was referring to a programme of education for its own sake,

which argued that a curriculum which does not include the teaching of Catholic doctrine is incomplete, but which was also strongly opposed to the idea 'that all religions must be tolerated' (7). When applied to nurse education, as Watson and Thompson each appear to suggest it could or should be, Newman's brand of educational liberalism can therefore be seen as worryingly regressive, even when judged by the prevailing criteria of the mid-nineteenth century (cf. the view of Benjamin Jowett in Abbott and Campbell 1897). Whatever one may think of Thompson and Watson's vision of the University without students, dedicated to disinterested blue skies research, I will endeavour to show that it is very far from the role and function of the University advocated by Newman.

NEWMAN'S CONCEPTION OF UNIVERSAL KNOWLEDGE

In the first sentence of the Preface to his book, Newman stated in unequivocal terms:

The view taken of a University in these Discourses is the following:- That it is a place of *teaching universal knowledge*. This implies that its object is, on the one hand, intellectual, not moral; and, on the other, that it is the diffusion and extension of knowledge rather than the advancement. If its object were scientific and philosophical discovery, I do not see why a university should have students; if religious training, I do not see how it can be the seat of literature and science (Newman 1852/1982, xxxvii; his punctuation and emphasis).

If Newman's mission was indeed to argue against the very possibility of secular, non-religious university education, his acknowledgement that the object of the University is 'intellectual, not moral', and that its purpose is the pursuit of science rather than religious training might appear odd. However, when Newman advocated the pursuit of *universal knowledge*, he did so primarily to ensure that the study of Catholic doctrine remained on the syllabus in the secular, non-denominational University. He further argued that *all knowledge*, including theology, should be accorded the same epistemological status. Thus, 'religious doctrine is knowledge, in as full a sense as Newton's doctrine is knowledge' (Newman 1852/1982, 31). This assertion that religious doctrine should have the same status as knowledge about the natural world might be regarded as a fore-runner of the current creationist argument for teaching the theological account of creation as a theory on par with Darwinist evolution theory, and hardly conforms to the Enlightenment mission that Watson, Thompson and other advocates of Newman are so keen to promote.

Newman's argument that religious knowledge and scientific or philosophical knowledge are equal but different is

subsequently developed more fully and, to some extent, revised. In the later chapters of his book, Newman explored what happens when 'Revealed Truth', that is, truth handed down by God through the scriptures, comes into conflict with 'Philosophical Truth', which includes 'experimental philosophy' (what Newman called 'the Method of [Francis] Bacon' and what we would now refer to as scientific research). Newman pointed out that, in such cases of conflict, 'truth cannot be contrary to truth' (Newman 1852/1982, 347); one must give way to the other. Newman resolved this conundrum by distinguishing between the 'elementary methods of reasoning and inquiring used in Theology and Physics' (331). He continued: 'The argumentative method of Theology is that of a strict science, such as Geometry, or deductive; the method of Physics, at least on starting, is that of an empirical pursuit, or inductive' (Newman 1852/1982, 331).

Newman appears to be making the distinction here between a priori knowledge which is arrived at through the 'strict science' of deductive reasoning and which is independent of experience, and a posteriori or empirical knowledge, which comes to us inductively through our senses. In emphasising the point that the method of physics is inductive, Newman was making a clear if implicit reference to what David Hume called the 'problem of induction' (Hume 1777/1999). Thus, Newman was making the point that something known a priori through reasoning such as Pythagoras' theorem appears self-evidently true, whereas something known a posteriori through our senses or through empirical research is always open to dispute and disproof. When the two types of knowledge come into conflict, for example, if we measure the sides of a triangle and find that they do not conform to what Pythagoras' theorem tells us, we cast doubt on our measurements rather than the theorem. Similarly for Newman, if the a priori 'Revealed Truth' about the creation of the universe comes into conflict with experimental scientific truth, then we question the scientific findings rather than the scriptures. The a posteriori knowledge from 'experimental philosophy' is therefore subservient to 'Revealed Truth' which 'is gained, not by any research into facts, but simply by appealing to the authoritative keepers of them' (Newman 1852/1982, 335).

We can see, then, that Newman's call for universities to teach 'universal knowledge' achieves two objectives. First, it enables the re-introduction of theology and 'Revealed Truth' into the recently secularised Enlightenment University. Second, by associating revealed truth with the a priori knowledge of geometry and mathematics, Newman was able to make a strong claim for its superiority over the inductive methods of the empirical sciences.

NEWMAN AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

We have seen above that Newman's vision of the University was as 'a place of *teaching universal knowledge* (Newman 1852/1982, xxxvii; his emphasis) and that he rejected the idea that it should be a place of 'scientific and philosophical discovery'. Newman regarded empirical scientific research as having limited scope: '[physical science] ascertains, catalogues, compares, combines, arranges ... [but] never travels beyond the examination of cause and effect' (324), that is, it has no real part to play in the process of discovery. Newman then listed a catalogue of 'big' questions:

what that ultimate element is, which we call matter, how it came to be, whether it can cease to be, whether it ever was not, whether it will ever come to nought, in what its laws really consist, whether they can cease to be, whether they can be suspended, what causation is, what time is, what the relations of time to cause and effect, and a hundred other questions of a similar character (Newman 1852/1982, 326).

These questions, posed in the mid-nineteenth century, remain pertinent and largely unanswered today, although in the intervening century-and-a-half they have come to fall primarily under the remit of the physicist. For Newman, however, these were questions solely for the 'Revealed Truth' of theology, which the physicist 'will not come near' (326). Had universities followed the Newmanesque route, these 'big' questions would have remained solely within in the realm of theological speculation, and organisations such as the *Institute for Advanced Study* at Princeton, which Thompson and Watson (2006) hold up as a model for nursing research, would never have come into being.

I am suggesting, then, that Newman would have had little time for Thompson and Watson's self-confessed 'pipe dream' of the University without students, nor with their notion of the research-led University (and, by extension, the research-driven professor) in pursuit of answers to fundamental questions about the universe through speculative blue skies scientific research. Universities, Newman clearly and unequivocally states above, are places of teaching, and their role is the *diffusion* and *extension* of knowledge rather than the *advancement* of knowledge. The function of the University is therefore to extend and disseminate what is already known, primarily the classics, philosophy and theology, rather than to produce new knowledge through research. Whilst Newman clearly expressed the ideal of knowledge as an end in itself, it would be misleading to translate this into support for blue skies research, or even blue skies thinking. When he identified the function of the University as the disinterested pursuit of knowledge, Newman was referring to students in pursuit of *existing* knowledge, including universal

and unchanging religious knowledge, rather than researchers in pursuit of *new* knowledge.

My claim, then, is that when nurse academics promote Newman as a champion of liberal Enlightenment education and 'blue-skies' research, they are basing their claim on a very selective reading of his work, and in particular, of his book *The Idea of a University*. I have argued that Newman's motivation for defining the University in terms of the disinterested pursuit of universal knowledge was less educational than doctrinal, and was intended to re-introduce the teaching of Catholic theology in the recently established secular Enlightenment universities of Europe in general and Ireland in particular.

NEWMAN AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

Whereas Newman is generally invoked by nurse academics as a cipher for the values of the traditional liberal University, Watson and Thompson refer to his work more specifically to argue that Professors of Nursing should be fully engaged with the mission and values of the ideal of the Enlightenment research University whose origins they locate in Newman's *Idea of a University*. A number of writers have cautioned against this particular interpretation of Newman's ideas. Graham (2008, 3) warns against 'a dangerous romanticism in thinking that, once upon a time, British universities were suitably Newnesque until the arrival of utilitarian Philistines', whilst Betts (2009) specifically points out to Watson and Thompson that, after all, 'this is the twenty-first century'. Watson and Thompson's response is to make no apologies for 'using Newman as a reference point... to show readers and the profession of nursing just how far we have come from what we would consider to be the ideal state and purpose of a university' (Watson and Thompson 2010, 320). They acknowledge, however, that 'this is a reference point that did not even exist across the piece in Newman's time; medicine, for example, cannot be described as the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and neither can nursing' (320). I find it difficult to understand the point they are making, unless it is that nursing and medicine did not exist as university disciplines in Newman's time and were therefore not part of his ideal of the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. Nevertheless, they conclude, the disinterested pursuit of knowledge is the ideal state of the University, and since nursing now finds itself integrated in the University, 'education for its own sake' is therefore a worthy goal for the discipline of nursing.

Newman would not necessarily disagree with Watson and Thompson on this point. However, he appears to use the 'education for its own sake' argument as justification for

excluding professional training from the University rather than embracing it, claiming that a well-rounded liberal education is sufficient preparation for any role or profession in society, since 'it prepares [a man] to fill any post with credit, and to master any subject with facility' (Newman 1852/1982, 135). Thus, whilst professional knowledge from disciplines such as law or medicine might form part of the body of universal knowledge taught in the University, 'Law or Medicine is not the end of a University course' (126) and should not be taught in isolation from a more general education. Newman concludes:

If then a practical end must be assigned to a University course, I say it is that of training good members of society. Its art is the art of social life, and its end is fitness for the world. It neither confines its views to particular professions on the one hand, nor creates heroes or inspires genius on the other (134).

Newman's view that a general, well-rounded education for its own sake was sufficient training for the professions would not only rule out pre-registration nurse education but also many post-registration courses, particularly those with an applied or clinical focus.

However, two years after the above lecture in which Newman dismissed professions such as medicine and law, Dublin Catholic University went on to establish a school of medicine at which Newman gave two lectures in 1855 and 1858, respectively. Thus, whereas nursing did not exist as an academic discipline in Newman's time, medicine most certainly did, although it is unclear what he thought of this move away from his ideal of the University as a place in which knowledge was pursued solely for its own sake.

In the first of his lectures to students at the newly created School of Medicine, Newman made the distinction between 'physical science' and the 'science of theology'. Whereas knowledge in physical science derives from experimentation (what we would now refer to as scientific research), theological knowledge arises from what Newman refers to as Revelation; that is, directly from God. Thus, 'Physical Science is richer, Theology more exact; Physics the bolder, Theology the surer' (Newman 1852/1982, 332). This point is a restatement of Newman's earlier distinction between a posteriori and a priori knowledge. Thus, whilst he is at pains to maintain that the two sciences employ different methods to arrive at different 'truths', his second lecture to the medical students makes it quite clear that these truths are not equal. Thus, he imagines a priest in dispute with a 'medical man':

each says what is true in his own science, each will think he has a right to insist on seeing that the truth which he himself is maintaining is carried out in action; whereas, one of the two sciences is above the other, and *the end of Religion is*

indefinitely higher than the end of Medicine (Newman 1852/1982, 385; my emphasis).

Newman continues by proposing 'to bring the faculty of medicine under the shadow of the Catholic Church', since 'Science should not run wild like a planet broken loose from its celestial system' (390).

We can now perhaps begin to see a second way in which Watson and Thompson run into difficulties in their use of Newman as a 'reference point' for nursing. If nursing had existed as an academic subject in Newman's time, he would almost certainly have regarded it in a similar way to medicine, that is, as 'under the shadow' of religion to the extent that nurse researchers should be constrained by the doctrine of the Church rather than 'running wild' in the disinterested pursuit of knowledge. Newman concludes by condemning as 'detestable' the views of the 'medical philosopher' who is guided only by science, who does not take religious doctrine into account, and whose 'practice, then, is according to his facts and his theory' (Newman 1852/1982, p. 386). It therefore appears that Newman would have been strongly opposed to evidence-based practice, had the concept existed in his time.

Furthermore, it seems highly unlikely that nursing would even have qualified as an academic subject in Newman's University. Newman made the distinction between 'education' and 'instruction', where the former is concerned with 'general ideas' and the latter with information or facts. Unlike ideas, facts can be established once and for all, and once established, there is no need to pursue them further. The teaching of nursing, I suggest, would have fallen squarely under the rubric of 'instruction', allowing little or no scope for speculation and blue skies thinking. If we transpose Newman's *Idea of a University* to the present day, nursing students would be instructed rather than educated, the concept of the professor of nursing would not exist, and nurse teachers would be little more than conveyors of unchanging and incontestable facts. Some nurse traditionalists might say that this is how it should be, but such a view of nurse training hardly conforms to the vision for the nursing professoriate so passionately and eloquently advocated by Watson and Thompson.

Watson, however, appears to suggest that Newman would have supported the cause of nursing, claiming that 'Newman viewed universities as *places where training was given* but character was also formed...' (Watson 2006, 314; my emphasis). Watson is undoubtedly correct in his observation that Newman considers training to have a place in the University, but it would seem that Newman does not use the word 'training' in the modern sense of referring to vocational courses such

as nursing, but appears to be invoking the *exact opposite* of Watson's meaning, in the sense of training the mind to perceive truth. Thus:

This process of training, by which the intellect, *instead of being formed or sacrificed to some particular or accidental purpose, some specific trade or profession*, or study or science, is disciplined for its own sake, for the perception of its own proper object, and for its own highest culture, is called Liberal Education.... And to set forth the right standard, and to train according to it, and to help forwards all students towards it according to their various capacities, this I conceive to be the business of a University (Newman 1852/1982, 115; my emphasis).

Due to a difference in interpretation of the meaning of the term 'training', I would argue that Newman's point is the very opposite of what Watson claims that he is saying. Newman is not advocating professional training, but is rather *excluding* study for a 'specific trade or profession' from 'Liberal Education' and 'the business of a University'. I wish to suggest that it was the very shift in the mission of the University sometime during the late twentieth century from a Newmannesque 'education for its own sake' ethos to an applied 'education for specific and specialist jobs' model that facilitated the entry of nursing into the academy in the first place. To argue now for a return to an educational philosophy that would never have recognised nursing as an academic discipline seems somewhat perverse.

PRACTICE DEVELOPMENT AND THE IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY

I have focused mostly in this article on a deeper and more nuanced reading of Newman's book *The Idea of a University* than is usually undertaken by nurse academics, and concluded that Newman's views are incompatible with, and antagonistic towards, modern ideas about nurse education. However, even if we accept at face value Newman's core message of education for its own sake, the implications for nursing practice, education and research are profound and, I believe, a cause for concern. The main difficulty with a Newmannesque approach to nurse education and research lies in reconciling Newman's ideal of the University as a site for the disinterested pursuit of knowledge, with the more mundane and prosaic requirement to equip nursing students for professional practice demanded by a variety of stakeholders, including education funders, service providers and service users. If we pursue these contradictory demands further, as Watson and Thompson do in a series of papers and editorials (Thompson and Watson 2006; Watson 2006; Thompson et al. 2008; Watson and Thompson 2008a,b,

2010; Thompson 2009), we arrive at two conflicting conclusions. Either nurse education is merely a training that has no place in Newman's University, or else it should be undertaken for its own sake without reference to the practice of nursing and without 'pandering to the insatiable appetite of the National Health Service (NHS) for undermining academic nursing' (Watson and Thompson 2008b, 73). In keeping with their own interpretation of Newman's writing, Watson and Thompson advocate strongly for the latter view. They are therefore concerned that the funders of nurse education in the UK, particularly the NHS, have lost sight of Newman's 'ideal state and purpose of the university' (Watson and Thompson 2010, 321), and bemoan the fact that 'nursing education and research are only valued if they are relevant, applicable, transferable and can be implemented in practice' (321). This begs not only the question of why anyone would value, let alone fund, nurse education and research that was irrelevant, non-applicable, non-transferable and unable to be implemented by practising nurses, but also the more fundamental question of whether this 'ideal state' of nurse education that has no relevance, application and practical implementation to nursing even makes sense.

Central to Watson and Thompson's dissatisfaction with the current state of academic nursing is the issue of practice development and whether or not it has a place in the University. Thus, somewhat rhetorically, they ask:

Is practice development any business of universities? We pose this question because some of our academic colleagues seem to be of the view that not only should it be part of academic life, it should be the central part (Thompson et al. 2008, 222).

Watson and Thompson's answer to their own question is a resounding 'no'. Practice development should have no place in departments of nursing and should be of no concern to nurse lecturers and professors since it 'is a diversion from academic activity and... an alternative to academic enquiry' (Watson and Thompson 2008b, 74). They continued:

We are not against practice development but we would ask – at the risk of seeming to gaze out from our ivory tower – 'what's it got to do with us?' Practice development should be done by people in practice and not by people in universities, the vast majority of whom have, to all intents and purposes, left practice (74).

This sharp distinction between what happens in the 'ivory towers' and what happens in practice, and with it the separation of nurse academics from practising nurses, would appear to be a natural if somewhat controversial consequence of their premise that there are only two responses to the current predicament in which academic nursing finds itself. Whilst I share Watson and Thompson's concern that

the higher education sector in the UK appears to be responding ever more to corporate market demands at the expense of what they call 'the ideal state and purpose of a university', I believe that their analysis that nurse education must either retreat to an idealised nineteenth century Newmannesque view of education for its own sake or else pull out of the university sector altogether is flawed on two counts. I would suggest firstly that the way forwards for the University, and for the place of nursing in it, does not entail what Readings (1996, 169) referred to as 'romantic nostalgia', and secondly that practice development is part of the solution for academic nursing rather than part of the problem.

In contrast to the Newmannesque distinction between theory and practice and between theorists and practitioners, we should embrace new ways of thinking about knowledge, where it comes from and what it is for (Eraut 1994; Bleiklie 2005). If academic nursing is to thrive, there is an urgent need to extend the scope of knowledge generation and utilisation beyond the ivory tower in the form of academic partnerships between knowledge producers and knowledge consumers. Thus, in contrast to 'blue skies' research which is carried out in isolation from the world of practice, Gibbons et al. (1994) propose what they refer to as 'Mode 2 knowledge production', characterised by:

a constant flow back and forth between the fundamental and the applied, between the theoretical and the practical. Typically, discovery occurs in contexts where knowledge is developed for *[sic]* and put to use, while results – which would have been traditionally characterised as applied – fuel further advances (Gibbons et al. 1994, 19).

I would suggest that practice development perfectly meets this requirement. Whilst Watson and Thompson (2008b, 73) acknowledge that 'practice development seems to be a vague concept', there is nevertheless a consensus that, however it is defined, it almost always involves a partnership between practitioners, theorists and researchers 'in contexts where knowledge is developed and put to use'. Indeed, Thompson et al. had themselves previously recognised the need for such a partnership when they defined practice development as: 'To work democratically and collaboratively with staff on changing practice, to involve them in the process and enable them to feel in control of each step of the way' (Kitson et al. 1996, 435).

Practice development typically involves academics and practitioners working together on activities such as project planning, reviewing literature, conducting baseline assessments, facilitating change management, evaluating practice innovations and the written and oral dissemination of findings. It would seem to me to be a peculiar sort of department

of nursing which has no place for these activities and a peculiar sort of professor of nursing who would not see the relevance of working in partnership with colleagues in practice to improve the care and treatment of patients in such a direct and positive way. Practice development is not an alternative to academic enquiry but an important and vibrant form of scholarly activity in its own right (McCormack, Manley, and Garbett 2004).

Thus, rather than attempt to distort the academic discipline of nursing to fit the real or imagined Newmanesque model of blue skies research and the disinterested pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, I propose that we need to create a space for nursing in the academy on our own terms (Rolfe and Gardner 2006; Rolfe 2009). Rather than reject practice development as somehow removed from academia or as anti-intellectual, we should promote an extended role of the nurse academic that values our contribution to the development of practice (Rolfe 2006). Rather than pursue disinterested blue skies research that has little to say to practitioners, nurse academics should be engaging with practice-based colleagues to work together on projects that are of direct concern to nursing practice and to the benefit of patients (Rolfe 2007, 2011). The way forwards for nurse education and research is not to retreat back to an imagined academic utopia, nor to reject entirely the academic project of nursing, but to have the confidence to carve out a new space and a new way of working in the University.

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