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Practicing What You Preach

UK Philanthropy Practitioners' Experiences of Theoretical Academic Study

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Abstract

Analysis of UK educational provision in philanthropic studies (Carrington, 2009; Keidan et al., 2014; Palmer & Bogdanova, 2008) has demonstrated a need for further provision of philanthropy education for the UK sector. Taking its lead from debates around the role of academic theory in this growing field of study, this project aims to determine how theoretical (rather than practical) master's-level study of philanthropy is understood and perceived by those working in the philanthropy, charity and fundraising sectors. Using a qualitative case study, this paper will present and discuss three key themes emergent from the data. These are: the ethical soup philanthropy practitioners experience as a result of reflection on their practice, the trickle effect of how literature and theory is shared around their networks, and the interdisciplinarity problem whereby the teaching of philanthropic theory from multiple disciplines can make application of the theory to practice difficult. The paper will conclude with some suggestions of what theory in the academy can contribute to practitioner skills in the philanthropy sector, including both strengths and some limitations

Keywords: *Philanthropic studies, philanthropy, higher education, nonprofit studies, pracademia*

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Introduction

The teaching and study of philanthropy within higher education is still a relatively new phenomenon worldwide. The term "philanthropic studies" was only coined in the 1980s (Katz, 1999, p. 74), and initially only existed under that name in the United States, where philanthropic action is more embedded within the social psyche and where the nonprofit sector has been increasingly depended upon for the delivery of public services (O'Neill, 2007). Comparatively, in the United Kingdom, philanthropic studies is a nascent discipline in terms of graduate study, and therefore one that has received little pedagogical attention. One of the first full UK master's courses in Philanthropic Studies commenced at the University of Kent in 2016, and forms the context of this research study. This paper examines how the teaching of critical theory on a specific module of that course (The Fundamentals of Philanthropy) is experienced by nonprofit practitioners in leadership roles, and how they relate this back to their professional practice. In particular it explores how ethics and leadership are enhanced by critical academic study of their daily work practices. The findings also offer an additional perspective on the value of multidisciplinary approach to philanthropic studies.

The paper will progress as follows. The literature review presents the context of the perceived need for philanthropic education in the United Kingdom, particularly at the graduate level, and explores previous research into the efficacy of academic nonprofit courses. The section also reiterates the need to co-ordinate practice and theory within the UK philanthropy context. The methods section discusses the module that is the focus of this study, and its learning outcomes, along with the leadership roles of the student participants and the rationale behind the case study methods used (online questionnaires, supplementary interviews and online forum posts). The paper then presents three thematic findings based on how students experience critical theory, and integrate it into their work: through the trickledown of academic knowledge as leadership tool; the ethical soup of approaching their work critically, and the pros and cons of multidisciplinary philanthropic education. This is followed by a discussion and concluding limitations and recommendations.

Context and Literature Review

Several decades ago, the majority of HE courses that broadly covered philanthropy (such as "nonprofit studies," "civil society studies," or "third sector studies") based in the field were only available at American institutions (Crowder & Hodgkinson, 1992). In 1996, there were only 179 courses at U.S. universities that taught 'nonprofit management' education (Mirabella, 2007); however, provision has grown exponentially, with 338 U.S. institutions now offering courses in that subject area, according to the Seton Hall database (2019). However, of these, 249 offer graduate study, which is our focus here (Seton Hall Database, 2019).

Keidan et al., writing about this development in 2014, commented that the growth in nonprofit education "reflects a demand for employment based skills in the nonprofit sector and, more broadly, for professional education itself" (2014, p. 11). This comment reflected a similarly common theme in the United Kingdom at this time, following a Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) report (2014) on the growing need for a trained and qualified university fundraising workforce in the UK.

The UK nonprofit sector more broadly has been under increasing pressure to "upskill" in recent years (the FSI, 2019), as charities have been forced to become more "data driven," operate more competitively to secure government and public contributions, and have been subject to rigorous scrutiny by the media following the economic recession, subsequent austerity measures and the cuts in funding to the sector as a whole (PWC, Charity Finance Group & The Institute of Fundraising, 2013).

In 2008, Paul Palmer and Mariana Bogdanova at Cass Business School bemoaned the lack of UK nonprofit education comparative to the relative boom the discipline experienced in the United States, blaming traditional university power structures and systems amongst other things for stymying this growth. Despite philanthropy being less ingrained into the national culture (Wright, 2002, p. 7), the demand for philanthropy education is present in the United Kingdom (Keiden et al., 2014). However, even across Europe as a whole Keidan et al. (2014) found that 24 institutions offer HE study in philanthropy, with only four offering postgraduate study at master's level (Table 1). This was prior to the commencement of teaching on the MA in Philanthropic Studies at the University of Kent, which began accepting students as of September 2016, when only one philanthropy and fundraising module was running at the institution. More recently, Grant et al. (2018) have ascertained that there are 23 UK courses that study the "voluntary sector" in some way; however, they do not specify which of these are undergraduate as opposed to postgraduate, and they note that some of these are merely modules within courses that do not predominantly focus on civil society.

Table 1

UK Provision of Graduate Philanthropic Studies Courses (from Keidan et al., 2014, p. 20)

Country	University	Centre/Chair on philanthropy	Degree in philanthropy	Course(s) in philanthropy	Professional training
UK	City University Cass Business School	P	P	P	P
	Northumbria University	×	P	P	×
	University of Cambridge Judge Business School	×	×	×	P
	University of Kent	P	×	P	×
	University of St Andrews	×	×	P	×

Philanthropic Studies as a Disciplinary Area

It is notable that of the provision shown in Table 1, philanthropic studies is housed within schools of management or business studies, with the exception of the relatively independent Centre for Research on Entrepreneurship, Wealth & Philanthropy (REWP) at Northumbria University, and the Centre for Philanthropy at the University of Kent which is housed within the School of Social Policy, Sociology & Social Research (SSPSSR). Elsewhere in the world, philanthropic studies is also taught in the disciplines of public administration, social policy, political science and social work (Mirabella & Wish, 2001). Academic research into philanthropy also goes on in many other disciplines: clinical and social psychology, economics, arts management, marketing, anthropology, history and sociology to name but a few (Sargeant & Woodliffe, 2007, p. 298). The interdisciplinary nature of the research and teaching of philanthropy has been explored by Mirabella and Wish (2000), who describe the "best place" debate persevering in U.S. universities; and the "tricky business" (Young, cited in Mirabella & Wish 2000, p. 220) of housing nonprofit studies within the existing curriculum. Ultimately, they find a juncture between the teaching of nonprofit education in schools of business, and schools of social work/public administration (similar to social policy in the UK) which mirrors the divide between the business and public sectors, and end on a recommendation to look beyond "industry specific" disciplinary boundaries when studying the nonprofit sector. This recommendation is echoed by discussions of sectoral hybridity here in the UK also, where a "blurring" of the boundaries between the private, public and charity sectors has been identified (Billis, 2010).

A tendency in academic research and teaching is to fold philanthropic studies in with public administration/nonprofit studies courses (e.g., Grant et al., 2018; Mirabella et al., 2019), when many aspects of this discipline are more practical than critical or theoretical. Research into student experience of U.S. courses such as nonprofit management, which has found overall positive perceptions from students (Fletcher, 2005), a perceived positive effect due to enhanced management skills (Mirabella & Wish, 2000) and positive perceptions of the qualification by potential employers in nonprofit organisations (Haas & Robinson, 1998). However, similar studies found negative impacts, for example, nonprofit managers regarding the qualification as bottom of the list in terms of importance when hiring staff (Tschirhart, 1998) and the fact the qualification offered limited employment opportunities after graduation (Mirabella & Wish, 2000, p. 335). Whilst these studies indicate some of the practical outcomes and perceptions of nonprofit studies, studies of "philanthropic studies" as a unique, theoretical discipline are more rare, and more U.S.-centric (see Katz, 1999). There is, at present, no research into how philanthropic studies can encourage a critical, theoretical analysis of practice amongst staff already employed in senior leadership roles in nonprofit organisations. This study aims to fill the gap in knowledge in relation to the experience of philanthropic study at graduate level, specifically for practitioners here in the United Kingdom. In particular, it seeks to establish whether theoretical and conceptual study of issues such as ethics or fundraising training (beyond that which is practice orientated or solely empirical) offer an enhancement to the professional practice of these students. In order to do so, the context of philanthropic practice and its relationship to academic theory will be briefly explored below.

Theory vs. Practice

In 1999, Stanley Katz noted that there has been a historical split within philanthropy between the "doers" and the "thinkers": There are those who work in the philanthropy sector and those who academically research it, with the argument that rarely does expertise span both areas. The divide between practice and theory has been much lamented in the field of U.S. public administration (Bushouse et al., 2011; Orr & Bennett, 2012; Ospina & Dodge, 2005; Posner, 2009). One proposed solution is a form of "pracademia" (Posner, 2009; Powell et al., 2018; Volpe & Chandler, 2001; Vrentas et al., 2018; Wilson, 2015), a dialectic process that draws upon the positive elements of practice learned "on the job," whilst simultaneously using the intellectual rigour and theoretical foundations of good quality academic work. Van Til (2000) saw "pracademics" as integral for transgressing the boundary between those working in the nonprofit sector and those studying it, facilitating both research and education in this area. However, many pracademic approaches emphasise empiricism as their basis for rigour (e.g., Vrentas et al., 2018) and theory tends not to be considered a key part of academic/sector collaborations.

The popularity of nonprofit education, beyond the policy impetus mentioned above, is fueled by a keenness amongst senior nonprofit practitioners in the field to bridge this gap 'from the other side' in order to enhance their leadership skills. Of the many studies on ethical leadership (see Brown & Treviño, 2006), a number have referred to the importance of this in the nonprofit sector (Constandt & Willem, 2019; Eisenbeiß & Brodbeck, 2014; Haas & Robinson, 1998; Hodges & Howieson, 2017), in particular around issues of efficiency in an era where UK nonprofit sector funding is becoming increasing stretched. Therefore, senior nonprofit sector practitioners with a wealth of practical experience (rather than those looking to move into the sector) are potentially more likely to re-skill through academic channels in an effort to cement their practitioner knowledge. Nevertheless, the utility of academic theory (as opposed to empirical academic work) as a tool for development for those with established leadership roles in the philanthropy/nonprofit sphere is an area woefully underresearched.

Method

In order to address this omission, a case study analysis was undertaken of student experiences of a predominantly theoretical and conceptual module within the distance-learning Masters in Philanthropic Studies course, at the University of Kent. It is what Yin (2009, p. 48) would describe as a unique or a "revelatory" case study—one that investigates a "previously inaccessible" phenomenon. The master's in Philanthropic Studies at the University of Kent is the first of its kind in the United Kingdom, as there are no other master's level courses specifically in Philanthropic Studies in the UK. The MA uses a "totally online mode" of delivery (Harasim, 2000, p. 47) as opposed to a mixed (blended learning) approach or an adjunct (offline) mode of delivery. In the U.S. there are currently 80 universities offering online learning in philanthropic studies (Seton Hall Database, 2019) but in the UK there were previously none. For this reason, this particular online Masters course is of significant pedagogical interest due to its unique nature within the field in the United Kingdom, and its accessibility to those also working as practitioners in the national and international philanthropy sector.

The number of students on the MA course totalled 28 at the time of writing, including both first- and second-year students. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the students, and informed consent was gathered prior to the research commencing. The sample comprises eight females and two males, which is in line with the typical characterization of the nonprofit labour force as predominantly female (Dale, 2017). The job roles of each participant are described in Table 2, to demonstrate the leadership elements of their job titles. Many were in leadership roles in large nonprofit organisations.

Table 2

Student Participants, All of Whom Studied the Fundamentals of Philanthropy Module during during 2016/17

Susan	56, Director of Development in HE Institution
Katalina	38, Head of Trusts & Foundations in Nonprofit Organisation
Alan	43, Director of Development in HE Institution
Mike	41, Executive Director (Finance) in For-Profit Organisation
Elspeth	47, Director of Marketing, Public Relations & Corporate Social Responsibility for a For-Profit Organisation
Aadhya	54, Assistant Director of Partnership Development in Nonprofit Organisation
Ella	41, Director of Philanthropy in Nonprofit Organisation
Georgina	41, Research Director for Philanthropy Consultancy
Linda	55, Founder of a Nonprofit Group
Rebecca	37, Fundraising & Philanthropy Consultant

The students are studying part time and most are combining their studies with full-time work, therefore impingement on their time beyond what they have already committed to their ongoing MA studies was out of the question. The aim of the methodology was, in line with the SRA's ethical guidelines, to "minimize disturbance both to the subjects themselves and to the subjects' relationships with their environment" (Bryman, 2012, p. 136). Online, open-ended questionnaires are well suited to the mode of delivery distance-learning students were accustomed to, and allowed students to elaborate on their answers in their own time.

The questionnaire was conducted once the module was complete. The questions asked them to detail any prior knowledge or qualifications they had undertaking (specifically Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and training) and then reflect upon their experiences of learning theoretical and conceptual approaches on the module, and whether it had influenced or affected their work practice. This was followed by a textual analysis of discussions within the online forum of the module, and supplemented with phone interviews conducted at a later date where students were asked to elaborate and reflect upon their comments in the questionnaire and forum. This enabled a mosaic of different interactions within the case study to develop, and for the researcher to examine student responses with the least disruption to their studies as is possible. Using unprompted discussion (as in the forums) also controlled for the likelihood of the researcher influencing student responses due to their role as lecturer on the module.

The unit of analysis for this qualitative investigation is the student cohort taking the core module SO840: *Fundamentals of Philanthropy*. This module was selected as it is predominantly theoretical, with weekly topics ranging from corporate philanthropy and ethical practice to effective altruism; from theories about geographical variations in philanthropy to historical developments over time. This is in contrast to modules on the programme that have more practical aims, for example, *Advising Donors*, which teaches different approaches to donor-management, outcome-orientations, methods of measurement and impact assessments. The assignments are essay-based, and require weekly contributions to an online forum, where students answer and debate questions on a series of set readings. They are encouraged to engage critically with academic work alongside their existing knowledge gleaned from their practice, as advanced critical understanding is a key part of the following learning outcomes (LO) of this module:

> LO1. Demonstrate an advanced critical understanding of the range of theories and key conceptual approaches to philanthropy
>
> LO2. Demonstrate a systematic understanding of the historical evolution of philanthropy and charity in the United Kingdom and beyond and be able to critically evaluate the impact of this on current debates
>
> LO3. Demonstrate a critical awareness of the role of the policy environment in which philanthropy exists and the role government actors play in shaping the legal, fiscal and cultural context of philanthropy
>
> LO4. Evaluate philanthropy and grant making techniques in order to produce reasoned, justified and creative opinions on a range of contemporary issues relating to the practice of philanthropy
>
> LO5. Act autonomously in creating and presenting critical ideas for applying theoretical, empirical and practical knowledge in the tackling and solving of specific philanthropic tasks

As is clear from the outcomes, the module sought to consolidate prior knowledge of practitioners with a high level of critical awareness of various aspects of philanthropy, including its historical origins, and policy context. The following findings section details how the students' experiences of theoretical study of philanthropy map against these desired outcomes.

Findings

Initially, it was clear from the data that the students experienced 'theory in action' (Gergen & Zielke, 2006); they related what they were reading about in abstract form back to concrete experiences in their professional lives, corresponding with LO5. Generally, students responded with reflective accounts (looking back at previous experiences in a new light), or proactive measures they would undertake in the future as a result of studying academic theory:

> "[The module] allowed me to be more reflective on donor motivations and my cultivation strategy. […] I believe my cultivation is now more strategic."

> "Reading about donor motivations led me to do much more thinking about the major donors I work with." (Ella, questionnaire)

> "It has been interesting to apply this knowledge when reviewing how likely a prospect is to become a donor or when discussing potential research projects with clients." (Georgina, questionnaire)

> "It has helped me a lot, both in making me structure my empirical knowledge and in making me think "out of the box" and reassess areas I took as given." (Elspeth, questionnaire)

The influence upon practice from the studying the module was described variously as, "profound" "a big change" and "significant." There were also some hints that certain elements of theory were not useful in applied practice. The findings have been organised into three main themes which were emergent from the data and corresponded in a variety of ways to the learning outcomes listed in the section above. The themes indicate that when the students had a positive experience with studying academic theories of philanthropy, responses were proactive and resulted in *The Trickle Effect*. However, more negative (or at least, difficult) experiences with theory resulted in the two other themes within the findings: *The Ethical Soup* and *The Interdisciplinary Problem*, both of which prompted reflective responses. All three themes are explored in detail below.

The Trickle Effect

> "I'm shocked at how little fundraising literature trickles down into practice." (Georgina, interview)

This theme discusses how student practitioners developed their knowledge and passed this on throughout their organisations and networks via a "trickle down" process, elevating their role as "ethical leaders" within the nonprofit sector (Mayer et al., 2009). LO1, LO4 and LO5 were all evidenced in their responses, as detailed below.

In the initial questionnaire, participants were asked to consider any previous training, study or continuing professional development (CPD) they previously had undertaken, and whether this had had an impact on their practice. All with the exception of one had undertaken some previous professional training, such as management, short courses, webinars, conferences and workshops. Responses to the level of impact emphasised a "light touch" approach that lessened the practical changes the participant made as a result:

> "Fundraising/philanthropy/impact investment courses turned out to be superficial and had no greater impact on the job." (Alan, questionnaire)

Studying theory in the course allowed students explore a more critical and robust approach to philanthropy (LO1), which lead one student to question the way CPD and training prioritises a certain worldview:

> "Have I been brainwashed by years of being told at conferences and on training courses that a donor-focused approach is the best?" (Georgina, forum post)

The responses on the questionnaire lead to students questioning whether what they have previously accepted as "the right way to do things" is misleading practitioners in the field (something that is further explored in the Ethical Soup theme, below), particularly in terms of prioritizing donors, as opposed to, for instance, beneficiaries. However, a surprising finding was that a number of the students had themselves delivered CPD, in particular fundraising training, within their role. Therefore, theory within the module was being used not just by the individual students in their practice, but reached far further into their organisation via other team members and employees. A trickle-down effect was identified where theory learnt within the module was used by in delivering training in a formal sense, and also informally through the passing on of informative course readings (LO5):

> "I have taught fundraising, and it's fascinating to see what's being taught [...] it never occurred to me to use academic literature."

> "I'm educating my organisation about donor motivations and how this is affecting our relationship [with donors]." (Ella, interview)

> "I have shared reports and articles of interest with colleagues." (Katalina, questionnaire)

> "I give my team stuff to read from the course." (Susan, interview)

The trickle-down effect, popularised by Thorsten Veblen (1899) is a consumer phenomenon where those at the top of a hierarchy strive to be "early adopters." This then is filtered, or "trickles" down to those hierarchically below them. In this particular context, theory is grasped by the students, who view themselves as conduits of new knowledge that can be distributed through their professional practice. This phenomenon has been identified in studies on ethical team leadership, where the knowledge and influence of those in senior positions has a "cascading effect" (Mayer et al., 2009; Bass et al., 1987) from manager; to supervisor; to general employees. It has also been identified in work on perceptions of justice and fairness in organisational management (Masterson, 2001; Tepper & Taylor, 2003). In general, the role of leadership within fundraising teams regarded as crucial because the leader sets "the direction in which organisational objectives will be met" (Sargeant & Jay, 2014, p. 394). Academic theory therefore can be a robust reinforcement to strong leadership skills.

However, in addition to contributing to the CPD and informal training they were giving, several participants also indicated that theoretical discussions had impacted upon their practice in terms of networking, allowing them to be more confident in conversations with peers and colleagues (LO4, LO5):

> "[It] has definitely helped me have different and more informed conversations with the fundraisers and researchers I work with on a daily basis. [...] I will now more happily join in with conversations on topics outside my particular (narrow) field of expertise." (Natalie, questionnaire)

> "I am more confident in arguing and pushing my case, in part due to the actual 'knowledge' imparted but also due to a sort of confirmation that my work is 'on the right track.'" (Linda, questionnaire)

> "My Director has commented about the quality of the questions that I ask since embarking on the course and on the value that brings. And I think there is something in this intangible space about the breadth and depth of thinking, understanding and questioning of what is happening." (Katalina, questionnaire)

The "breadth and depth" of thinking around the issues explored on the course philanthropy practitioners is a key finding. Students are seeking to draw meaning from academic theory and relate this to their prior knowledge and experience. This form of learning is known to provide better academic results and recall than "surface learning" of practical skills that just require reproduction as opposed to critical thought (Marton & Säljö, 1976).

Taking on board the critical dimensions of the module (LO1) also helped the students in establishing new networks. The following student, a major gifts advisor who worked internationally, felt that academic theory helped to initiate and provoke discussions with new connections, thus widening the number of contacts within her field:

> Academic knowledge of philanthropy helped me establish new connections […] Many Italian fundraising/nonprofit professionals are curious about the field and systematised academic knowledge about philanthropy serves as a good starting point for further discussion or exchange of ideas. This leads also to new collaborations. […] Inspired by the selection of topics covered by the module, […] I've conducted research of the Italian philanthropy advisory market and created an informal network of philanthropy professionals. (Rebecca, questionnaire)

The student directly linked her experience on the module with an increase in her confidence to speak with authority to her networks. This is in spite of her having a long career in fundraising and philanthropy management, with experience of teaching fundraising as part of that role (thus also participating in the trickle-down effect).

Weiss (1981, cited in Donmoyer, 2009) describes how theory provides a "new language" for those working in the field to use to develop responses to specific issues. The academic study of philanthropy through a theoretical lens therefore also facilitates a "trickle-around" effect, where the horizontal transference of knowledge has an impact upon the work practices of the student by enhancing opportunities to network, opening up avenues of discussion that were previously inaccessible and allowing the students to distribute their knowledge in a way that enriches the field. Mirabella and Wish (2000) identified a similar characteristic of increased opportunities for networking and collaboration, as well as an opportunity for innovation, in nonprofit management courses in the United States.

The "Ethical Soup"

A second finding of the study was that the incorporation of theoretical rather than practical learning induced an unanticipated self-scrutiny, and reflection upon the purpose of the students' job roles. Whilst this was a result of several of the learning outcomes (LO1, LO4, Lo5) it could be understood as an unintended consequence that has important implications for nonprofit leadership. The process of critical engagement and assessment of academic theory had an impact upon perceptions of the students' own ethical stance and, in particular, their proximity to negative perceptions of extreme wealth:

"[the module has] given me a greater insight into those people who find philanthropy very distasteful." (Susan, questionnaire)

"Working in trusts and foundations fundraising for the past 9 years I had an unquestioning assumption that they were a good thing as they gave us money, and had not thought about questions about legitimacy, power and authority, and paternalism." (Katalina, questionnaire)

Questioning the nature of practice was extremely personal to the students, since this is how the majority of them make their livelihoods. The module consists of several topics that require the students to face theoretical critiques of major giving, fundraising and the general ethics of the nonprofit sector—in particular a week on historical case studies including that of Scottish philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, and a study of Effective Altruism (MacAskill, 2017; Singer, 2015). However, during an early point of the module in which philanthropy was merely being defined, one student reflected upon her own ethical obligations:

> On a practical day-to-day level (as fundraisers, researchers and nonprofit leaders) should we just be grateful that wealthy philanthropists are willing to give away their fortunes, attempting (at least) to help those less fortunate? Should our role just be to encourage more philanthropy and to advise on how funds can best be used […]? Or should we be more outraged that wealth inequality is exacerbated by wealth creation, causing many of the problems in society that we are working to solve (putting us in the "ethical soup" of fundraising)? (Georgina, forum post)

Georgina's soliloquy refers to a well-established ethical quandary: ought philanthropy practitioners be doing what they believe to be best in the circumstances, or ought they to be working instead to change circumstances for the better? In the United Kingdom, fundraising as a profession has been under greater public scrutiny for its ethics following the investigation into the death of Olive Cooke, a pensioner who was bombarded with unsolicited fundraising appeals prior to committing suicide in May 2015. This resulted in the publication of the *Etherington Review* (2015), which recommended a dramatic increase in regulation of all fundraising activities. For practitioners working in senior leadership roles in the nonprofit sector, the need to interrogate the ethics of their work has become of increasing importance, but is often at odds with the institutional need to increase donations.

To invoke the work of philosopher Immanuel Kant (1785/1993), the participants were exercising a form of "imperfect duty" within their practice. According to Kant, philanthropic action is a duty all ought to fulfil, but it is one that can be fulfilled in a multitude of different ways, and the individual is free to select how and when they undertake these. The participants are fulfilling their duty within the scope and capacity of their role, but they are making moral exceptions, for example, not engaging too closely with how a philanthropic donor earned the money he is donating, and suspending concern about the wider implications this may hold.

To illustrate: at the end of her post, Georgina refers to Chris Carnie's (2016) description of the "ethical soup" fundraisers and prospect researchers find themselves in when they are made aware of their own culpability in the perpetuation of inequality, due to their role in securing funds from the rich. This proximity to the subject matter students are studying contributes to a significant amount of reflexivity in the forum posts and interview responses. This can result in concrete change in their professional practice, whereby they consider the moral decision-making process more rationally. Elspeth described this when talking about her company CSR strategy:

> I have been encouraged by the various concepts of why people give to [consider] how are we evaluated overall by different audiences [?] I have been able to better justify refusals [i.e. not partnering with a nonprofit organization for PR/CSR purposes], by understanding the mechanisms of warm-glow feeling, thus being able to better give where we choose to support, without guilt and with the clear objective of being just and truly supportive. (Elspeth, questionnaire)

In this quote, Elspeth demonstrates how James Andreoni's (1990) economic theory of altruism, which is taught on the course, has been helpful in understanding and moderating her own moral response to her work. She speaks of her feelings being better understood and mitigated for, rather than those of donors as described previously. This indicates that use of academic theory enables the removal of personal bias when selecting partner organisations; it also alludes more broadly to the weight of responsibility felt by those working in this sector throughout the decision making process.

University Development Director Susan also mentions the sense of 'responsibility' experienced by the students:

> "I am also now questioning how much responsibility as a fundraiser I have to limit the power of my donors." (Susan, forum post)

Susan highlights how those working in the philanthropy sector treat it as a profession—a role that is subject to a code of ethics and has a duty to wider society beyond just the fulfillment of a work contract. Emile Durkheim (1950) identified this phenomenon within the traditional professions (law, education, medicine, etc.), and theorized that their moral responsibility plays a crucial role in maintaining a functioning society. It is through the work of professionals that wider society creates and cements the values by which it operates. Whilst not part of the set learning outcomes for the programme, the development of critical morality has important implications for the role of ethical leadership in nonprofit and philanthropy practice, particularly in light of the recent scandals described above. Nonprofit practitioners tend to place more importance upon external and public-facing ethics: transparency and accountability, than they do internal processes (Constandt & Willem, 2019; Heres & Lasthuizen, 2012). Students in philanthropic studies therefore are encouraged through theory to interrogate their own ethical and moral stance and consider how this contributes to principles of better nonprofit leadership practice.

The Interdisciplinarity Problem

Philanthropic Studies, as previously mentioned, is one of the most interdisciplinary subjects of specialised study in contemporary academia. This particular module features literature, theoretical models and studies from a broad range of disciplines including history, economics, the arts, philosophy, sociology, social policy, business, psychology and even evolutionary biology (LO3, LO4). This resulted in several students responding that certain aspects of theory weren't easily applicable to their practice:

> "I admit it's hard to see how some of the topics, e.g., knowing the history of philanthropy, can really be useful in my current professional practice." (Natalie, questionnaire)

> "The course appears to be skewed towards the history, principles, [and] reactions to philanthropy. " (Aadhya, questionnaire)

> "I enjoyed reading about biological altruism […] but found the emphasis on reproduction (or the selfish gene) did not add much to my understanding of donors." (Susan, forum post)

Interdisciplinarity in the study of philanthropy corresponds with the fact that "different scholars approach the definition of philanthropy in different ways" (Daly, 2011, p. 536). The problem of bridging the gap between practitioners and academic scholars can be partly understood by this interdisciplinarity, as academics struggle to teach practitioners using compartmentalised "knowledge" that is dependent upon the restrictions and implicit values of the given discipline. Michel Foucault (2003) in his work on knowledge and power describes how knowledge is "disciplined" and divided up into categories in education to enable us analyse them with more ease. This knowledge is then subject to "selection, normalisation, hierarchalisation, and centralisation" (Foucault, 2003, p. 181). This includes the absorption and subjugation of certain "knowledge" over others—in particular, the superiority of academic knowledge over that which is "below the required level of erudition or scientificity" (Foucault, 2003, pp. 6-7). Therein exists a two-fold problem, where teaching and research in philanthropy is not only is a dividing practice vertically, forming a hierarchy of knowledge which favours the academic over the practitioner, but also horizontally, into multifarious different disciplines that serve to obscure and detract from the usefulness of the research when put into practice. The discipline within which this module in Philanthropic Studies resides (Social Science) is therefore important as it serves to "shape the type and content of knowledge about philanthropy that is produced and disseminated" (Keidan et al., 2014, p. 43). However, Keidan et al. also note that a more flexible multidisciplinary study of philanthropy should be encouraged (p. 35), which is the aim established through learning outcomes 3 and 4, however the theoretical concepts taught extend beyond the historical or social policy/public administration discplines, highlighting the true interdisciplinarity of philanthropic studies.

Donmoyer (2009, p. 706) highlights the issue of "idiosyncrasy" that is characteristic of philanthropy work practice due to the need to deal with unique cases, and the tendency to treat the atypical as commonplace. This is not a happy bedfellow with academic theory, Donmoyer suggests, because theory is by its very nature general, seeking to "simplify complexity" (2009, p. 706). The findings of this study suggest that atypical cases make certain disciplinary approaches very useful to some students, whilst being utterly useless to others. Natalie and Susan (above) found it difficult to apply theories from history or biology to their work, yet other participants said the following:

> "I could have done a whole module on the history and development of philanthropy in the UK." (Katalina, questionnaire)

> "I enjoyed the different philosophical approaches to philanthropy, particularly the evolutionary biology theory of altruism. I have long thought there must be a deeper rationale to philanthropy." (Alan, questionnaire)

The comment by Alan highlights a crucial finding—that academic theory drawn from various disciplines may seem incongruous, and not always have overtly obvious and tangible impacts on practice, yet it aids understanding, reflection and the synthesis of information that informs practice. Weiss describes this as "creeping" knowledge (cited in Donmoyer, 2009, p. 705, emphasis added) that finds its way into nonprofit planning and policy making through its dissemination by academic channels.

Discussion

A core tension within debates around teaching leadership in philanthropy surrounds the concern that the academy is "responsive and reflective of the needs of practitioners" (Daly, 2011, p.538; see also Van Til, 1990). The findings of this study demonstrate various ways that students experienced the theoretical teaching on the Fundamentals of Philanthropy module, in relation to the Learning Outcomes of the course, and also some aspects that reach beyond them.

Student practitioners were found to have both proactive and reflexive responses to theory when relating it to their work. The reflexivity mires them within an 'ethical soup' causing them to question their motivations, the context of their role and their own contribution to social issues; whilst the proactivity encourages a trickle down/trickle around effect of knowledge which is seen as more useful than traditional CPD and training. There is a link between these two experiences, as the ethics of fundraising and other roles within the philanthropy sector are often reproduced within CPD and training, which was found by participants in this study to be lacking in an evidence basis. One antidote to this could be the increased employment of academic theory, alongside empirical evidence or "grey literature," to correct this issue and enhance the knowledge and skills of philanthropy practitioners. Equally, further communication hierarchically up and down through organisations or through horizontal networking, can enhance this on an informal level, through the dissemination of knowledge beyond the philanthropic sector bubble.

Trevino et al. (2000) describe two pillars that support ethical leadership in any organization—being a moral person, and being a moral manager. They argue that is not enough to possess ethical traits such as honesty, integrity and openness yourself, these also need to be embodied within the professional role the person is performing as part of an organization. This is enacted through acting as a role model through visible actions, and communicating ethics and values (Trevino et al., 2000, pp. 134-5). Both of these elements correspond with the trickle effect identified in the findings of this study—academic theory filters through to colleagues (and networks beyond this) to encourage and enhance good practice in the sector. Thus, theory facilitated students in being both moral people (wading through the 'ethical soup') and moral managers (through facilitating the trickle effect). As a result, the module enables nonprofit student practitioners to "practice what they preach" in terms of their ethical leadership.

The third finding demonstrated that the interdisciplinary nature of philanthropic studies coinciding with the confines of traditional disciplinary boundaries renders certain elements of theory more applicable to practice for certain individuals than to others. Bridging these gaps and finding coherence across disciplines is necessary for constructing an academic program that serves a need—a need that is identified both in the U.S. and more recently here in the UK (Keidan et al., 2014), particularly as the philanthropy sector has grown in response to state funding withdrawal. The discipline through teaching is delivered is extremely important, particularly in relation to the question of ethics. Dwight Burlingame, reflecting upon nonprofit leadership education, notes, "Business school education programs have, by most measures, failed in instilling good character" (2009, p. 60). Balancing academic theory originating from social studies programmes, such as the one examined in this paper, with economics, business and marketing literature can ensure that a narrative of reflexivity, historical context, and social justice is not lost. Otherwise, the siloing of philanthropic studies alongside other business programs risks resulting in a failure to address the 'ethical soup' that nonprofit practitioners uniquely have to deal with, comparative to those working in the for-profit sector. It has been revealed, particularly in the "Ethical Soup" findings above, that philanthropic practice cannot be separated from a human desire to uphold moral and ethical standards. The module content enables students to explore this through a multifaceted disciplinary lens.

Conclusion

Awareness of the issue of atypicality within practitioner roles and their poor fit with the generalisability and monodisciplinarity of academia is a valuable starting lesson from this preliminary investigation. Based on the findings and discussion, a multidisciplinary approach is recommended, despite the fact that some students may find the variety between disciplines overwhelming. The role of educators in Philanthropic Studies is to emphasise the benefits that a variety of disciplines lends to the multifaceted nature of nonprofit practice, and enable the recentreing of practitioner knowledge within the hierarchy of various diciplinary "knowledges."

The author acknowledges that a limitation of this study is that it is a case study analysis of only two cohorts of students taking one module. Further research could encompass other modules on the course, and contrast these with practitioner experience of more traditional forms of professional training and CPD. An area that necessitates further research is a comparison of the experiences of students who are studying degrees housed in disciplines such as business studies or marketing, to explore whether the "trickle effect," the "ethical soup" and the "interdiciplinarity problem" persist in these programmes also.

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