Partnerships

Articles
from the
Learning and
Teaching
Conference
2010

Eds:

Gina Wisker
Lynda Marshall
Nadia Edmond
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Centre for Learning
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University of Brighton

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Editorial introduction

Partnerships, the theme of the 2010 Learning and Teaching Conference, is increasingly topical as we move into a changing version of higher education post white paper 2011, building on rich learning partnerships between students and staff, employers and learners, partner colleges and the community, learning, teaching and assessment. Contributors interpreted the theme from their own perceptions and experience, underpinning and informing papers with theories of communities of practices, identity, transformation, social engagement and social justice. This selection of papers emerges broadly in two main strands, each led by a keynote.

In 'Real live learning' **John Hilsdon**, founder of the Association for learning Development in HE, takes us straight into partnership in the lecture theatre or seminar room with an exploration of interactive learning practices, particularly group work and triads. John sees roles with both staff and students as demystifying and providing support, particularly where rather alien aspects of academic life and practice concern students. He argues that when students are 'in the know' or, 'in the swim' they can really participate, thus quickly enhancing progress. Subject teachers also sometimes need an opportunity to renew perspectives on how sessions and learning materials are working, and how they are communicating with students. John uses Bakhtin's notion of meaning arising in dialogue, considering real learning happening in real situations in the present moment of both the UK political, economic and educational policy context and the learning space.

In 'Workbook Frame Lock: a transitional survey and critical analysis of student approaches to creative process documentation in photography, visual art and media education', **Claire Scanlon and Paul Grivell** explore their Learning and Teaching Fellowship project utilising the concept of 'Frame Lock' (Bernstein 1992) and its impact on the development of 'meta-learning', to consider student creative process documentation (workbooks, sketchbooks, notebooks etc) found on AS/A2, diploma, foundation and BA Photography, Art and Media courses. This involved the collation of an archive of photographic examples of practice, sound recordings and questionnaire responses, made available online to a wider community of interest, to engage students in moving beyond earlier prescribed, habitual and unreflective approaches to their creative process documentation.

Sarah Field and Lucy Jones consider the roles of oral assessment in 'Enhancing student employability: the role of simulation and oral assessment strategies'. Moving from a recognition that oral assessment plays a significant role in education to test specific rhetorical skills required of lawyers and other disciplines where oral presentation is a position to be argued, they suggest it can be a particularly rich source of learning to assess and develop generic and transferable skills, such as presentation and critical thinking and thus enhancing graduate employability.

In 'The Aspect project: working together to enhance the learning experiences of students with Asperger syndrome at the University of Brighton', **Charlotte Morris** discusses ongoing work with widening participation, wellbeing, mental health and diversity in student learning. The Aspect project builds on partnership between the Centre for Learning and Teaching and the Disability and Dyslexia team, responding to increasing numbers of students with Asperger syndrome presenting to Student Services. It sought to identify ways to enhance learning experiences. The team worked to heighten awareness across the university through consultation, staff development and research. Using interviews, identifying barriers faced and making recommendations, they found that a combination of inclusive teaching, specialist support and ongoing awareness raising in staff and student populations helps ensure the best possible learning experience for these students.

Sarah Atkinson and Andrea Benn document and evaluate the annual multi-disciplinary induction activity undertaken by final year media and business students based at University Centre Hastings. 'The case of the viral film production multi-agency partnerships: the potential of real world collaborative induction projects for final year students', emphasises the benefits of undergraduate students engaging in Peer Assisted and Problem Based Learning activities to work collaboratively to an industry brief to achieve a common goal, identifying and exploiting opportunities for implementation in a real world context.

In 'Preparing for partnership: the first year experience of assessment' **Alison Bone** considers an audit of first year coursework assessment, asking why staff chose particular methods of assessment, and the views of students on the effectiveness of these decisions in engaging their interest and progressing their learning. She decides that there is no one 'best' way to use assessment to drive learning.

The second section of the collection begins with **Professor Ronald Barnett** in 'The collaborative university: challenges and possibilities'. He begins by analysing the concept and problematising the sometimes comfortable notion of collaboration, pointing out that leadership is equally important in a university. Collaboration is an established and newly topical issue in higher education, and developments bring fundamental shifts in the character of academic work. The lone scholar is a diminishing species of academic life and we witness the arrival of 'the social academy' (Walsh and Kahn 2010). Ron Barnett argues that while collaboration might indicate a loss of self, it also inspires community interaction, contribution to civic society, societal improvement and needs careful management and leadership.

'It's a reciprocal thing': a reflection on a four year community-university partnership' by **Dr Dave Simpson** considers a well-established community partnership bringing school and university students together in a variety of activities including small group teaching, mentoring and curriculum focus days. The partnership raises question about values and 'volunteering'.

Sina Krause in 'Technology in teaching and learning: a state of mind?' presents ways to, and reasons for, integrating asynchronous learning networks in teaching and learning, addressing common obstacles preventing their implementation. While Sina's examples are from community@brighton, the conclusions also apply more broadly.

Mark Price and **Dr Teresa Cairns** present in 'Developing inter-professional learning: evaluating boundary crossing in higher education' an evaluation of the second cross-faculty, inter-professional learning day for students on professional qualification award programmes, highlighting the importance of developing understanding of others' values and perspectives, occupational and organisational professionalism, boundary spanning and 'knotworking' activity in the context of policy movements .

In 'The ripple effect: partnerships working to quality enhance mentor updates' **Caroline Hudson**, **Linnette King** and **Tricia Rigby** demonstrate how increased partnership working between service providers and an HEI enhances the quality of mentor update sessions for nurses and midwives, making recommendations for future work disseminating good practice to support mentors within this emerging 'community of practice'.

Finally, **David Alexander** in 'Being outside the box in order to think outside the box' considers increased emphasis on learning outside the classroom and growth in vocational provision at secondary and tertiary levels, creating a modern student who is very outward facing, beyond the walls of the lecture theatre or even the campus. Partnerships provide opportunities to meet these challenges.

– Gina Wisker
Head, Centre for Learning and Teaching and Chair, Conference Organising Committee

Real live learning

Real live learning

■ **JOHN HILSDON**

The notion of 'partnership' is especially important in the field of learning development. Working with staff and students, our role is both to demystify and provide support. Some aspects of academic life and practice are quite alien to many students, yet when they are 'in the know' (or, more accurately perhaps, 'in the swim') they can really participate, and their progress is quickly enhanced. Equally, subject teachers sometimes need an opportunity to renew their perspective on how sessions and learning materials are working, and how they are communicating with students. Real learning happens in real situations; this sounds trite but, I argue, it is a statement well worth exploring. What makes a situation 'real' – real enough to learn from, that is? This paper opens up the question and makes use of a simple exercise which can be used to enliven teaching and learning.

The purpose of this article is to draw attention to what we do in the 'present moment' in teaching and learning, and how that relates to notions of partnership. I am referring to the present here not just as background; at the time of writing, for example, the 'present moment' includes the political, economic and educational policy context of the UK in November 2010: the aftermath of the Browne report; the Coalition Government's public spending review; the news that higher education is to be ever more dependent upon fees paid by an increasingly indebted student body. Such contextual factors are always relevant, of course, to the 'now' we inhabit, but I want to concentrate on the significance of the present moment in a rather more direct, existential sense, for example, as expressed by Leo Tolstoy in a short story published in 1885:

> 'Remember then, there is only one time that is important – now! It is the most important time because it is the only time when we have any power'.

This thought 'grabs me' as an educator because it signals so forcefully that time is precious, that it is passing and that our use of time – in our classrooms, laboratories and lecture theatres, matters more than anything else. Such an idea may seem so obvious as to be facile, yet I am increasingly convinced of its value and, in particular, the notion of power it implies.

In the educational and learning development communities, we are familiar with the terms 'active' and 'experiential' learning, and with the assumption that we need to engage our students in 'deep' learning activities as opposed to more passive behaviours. These ideas are at the heart of 'constructive alignment' as promoted by Biggs and Tang (2007), and build upon the well-known statement by Thomas Shuell that:

> 'If students are to learn desired outcomes in a reasonably effective manner, then the
> teacher's fundamental task is to get students to engage in learning activities that are
> likely to result in their achieving those outcomes … it is helpful to remember that what

the student does is actually more important in determining what is learned than what the teacher does' (1986: 429).

Following these ideas, where active learning is an underpinning concept, relatively similar outcomes-focused programmes of study for those new to teaching in higher education, and staff development sessions on these themes have become common in UK universities (Gosling 2008). Despite this welcome general trend to encourage moves away from the more traditional didactic 'transmission' models of teaching, it remains the case that the lecture, or a form of 'delivery' closely resembling it, in what are called seminar groups (but which often include upwards of 30 students) is still very common in higher education.

It is not my intention to argue against lectures per se; this form of teaching can be inspiring and can stimulate truly profound learning, as any of us who have attended good presentations, talks and lectures will quickly testify. My point is that the engagement of students, as learners, in the situation of the class or lecture is often lacking, and that this represents missed opportunities which are potentially of great significance in our students' lives. For most of us there have been times during which we have sat passively in lecture theatres or classrooms in which someone who, however well-intentioned, however erudite, or even eminent in their field, nonetheless bored us! This was probably not because their subject was boring, on the contrary, they may have been presenting ideas and materials which we would have found useful or fascinating had we been able to engage with them. The problem resides partly in what John Dewey referred to as the 'ennui' of the traditional classroom (Dewey 1938), with its still-prevalent physical setup of rows of desks and chairs facing a teacher, as well as the transmissive and didactic traditions and style of communication associated with such situations. This point, and its continuing relevance in the twenty-first century century, despite all our computerised 'bells and whistles', has been made even more powerfully by Ken Robinson in a number of talks about education in recent years (see especially Robinson 2006; 2009).

Dewey valued participation and was passionate about democracy and democratic values. In arguing that we need to find ways to bring these values into the classroom, he is a historically key advocate of truly active learning – where cognitive engagement is matched (holistically, one might say) by affective and behavioural features. But in addition to these 'domains' identified by conventional psychology, university educators are also interested in the social world where values, such as participation, co-operation and partnership are of primary importance.

Participation certainly implies engagement as a form of partnership, and there is plenty of evidence to support this value in pedagogy. Well-known texts about teaching and learning in higher education refer frequently to the ideas of Kolb (1984), for example, on learning from experience, learning from reflection (Moon 2000) and to the use of experiential approaches such as problem-based learning (PBL) (Boud and Feletti 1998; Fry, Ketteridge and Marshall 2003). An aspect of this that Dewey would have stressed, had he lived to comment on PBL, is the importance of participants having a meaningful task on which to focus, what he called a 'real question'; ie one which is of genuine concern to them and to their lives.

This reference to authenticity takes me back to my own purpose in this article, to what I am calling 'real live learning' and what that might be. In addition to the problem of classroom ennui, the dimension which can often be overlooked (in otherwise excellent educational development work to promote effective pedagogy), is that of language use itself and its relationship to power. The work of theorists who are concerned with how we make meaning through language use, or discourse, is of great relevance here, and offers a potentially helpful additional perspective on both student engagement and the notion of partnership.

Bakhtin (1986) argues that meaning arises in dialogue between addressor (eg teacher), addressee (eg students) and utterance (eg a text being utilised or studied) in the context of situation and of culture. In one sense this could be seen simply as another way of expressing the notion of 'constructive alignment', taking account of how students' backgrounds, as well as the classroom environment, the mode of study and assessment influence learning. Taken on its own, however, this would remain a limited interpretation of the significance of dialogue, and implies a similarly limited view of the role of students as partners in learning.

Among others, Lillis (2003) draws upon Bakhtin's work to call for higher education practices which promote the development of meaning-making capacity, with an emphasis upon dialogue, and dialogic processes, as opposed to monologue, where there is only seen to be one 'authorised' version of knowledge. In my own interpretation of this, 'real live learning' focuses on ways that students can use, and begin to take ownership of the language and ideas of their subjects of study. Hence my insistence that power is an issue, and my enthusiasm for Tolstoy's notion that the present moment is the only place where we, or our students, can have power.

My plan, therefore; for this article and for my own teaching practice, is to repeat the reminder about the power which resides in 'now'! So, what can be done? We can resolve not to 'let the moment slip' by defaulting to well-rehearsed and comfortable roles, where teachers talk and students (apparently) listen! Instead, as a commitment to an active partnership with students, we can seek questions that will be real to them and create the 'space' for them to enter dialogue, even in the lecture theatre.

Triads

The example I want to concentrate on here is an activity I call 'triads'. This has been adapted from work by John Heron in skills development for coaching and counselling (1999). In this exercise, which can be used for discussing any task, problem or issue relevant to the subject of study, participants work in threes and each one takes an explicit role as speaker, listener or

observer. The parameters of these roles are made very clear (they can be negotiated where time allows) and strict timings are allocated for the activity so that each role is taken by participants in rotation. In role, the speaker speaks, the listener listens and seeks clarification if necessary, and the observer makes notes and gives feedback on the overall process.

In my experience, this activity always results in something 'real' and vital for the participants. There is power, and a kind of liberation in occupying a strict and limited role for a specified period of time. The notion of role has a range of interpretations in social theory (see, for example, Raffel 1999) but common to most versions of the idea, is the importance of the expectations which are set up by the social context or situation in determining the ways in which individuals will behave. Most observers report that people tend to comply with the expectations of the role they are given.

In the triads exercise, the facilitator makes use of this phenomenon of compliance by specifying roles very clearly for the purposes of setting up a learning situation, where some concentrated time is given to an issue, question, topic or problem. In the time allocated, the speakers are asked to do their best to articulate their understandings or questions in relation to the topic; the listeners give full attention to the speaker and seek clarification of anything said that they do not understand; and the observer is charged with making notes of whatever s/he deems to be significant, and is asked to record points legibly and to give them back to the speaker at the end of their 'round'. All this activity is time-limited, preferably within a period of just three to five minutes per turn for each speaker, followed by similar periods for listeners to seek clarification and for observers to comment and give feedback. The fulfilment of all three role-holders' turns constitutes a 'round'. Ideally, time should be made available for three consecutive rounds to allow everyone to occupy each role.

How does this result in 'real live learning'? In my experience, the triads activity offers a very good chance that 'real' and active learning will occur. In the first instance, to return to Dewey and his injunction to choose a 'real' question, it means the students are involved in the setting up of the task, for example, by deciding for themselves what question or topic will be most relevant for them to address when they are in the role of speaker. By offering some degree of choice, commitment to the task, or at least voluntary participation, is more likely. This invitation, with its implications of mutuality and dialogue, also serves to underpin the learning endeavour as a genuine partnership.

Secondly, I have found that the specification of roles acts in favour of learning by concentrating participants' attention onto a limited range of activities, and within a limited time frame. Though it acts to narrow things down, perhaps paradoxically it also 'liberates' participants to give their full attention to their allocated tasks. It has also been reported by several participants that the time limitation and role rotation had a positive impact on their motivation to undertake their task well. This may be explained in part by the brevity of time in each role, which may have the effect of improving motivation because it offers variation in activity, militating against boredom. However, in terms of partnership, the development of expectations of reciprocity may also underpin the positive results which triad work can achieve: for example, if I as listener attend well to you; or if I as speaker take you seriously enough to do my best to explain something to you; or if I as observer make careful notes for you, then I can expect that you in turn will do the same kinds of things for me.

However, my third reason for claiming that this kind of activity offers 'real live learning', goes beyond the two rather procedurally-focused points above and returns us to Bakhtin's notion of meaning arising in dialogue. Along with Tolstoy, and his focus on the power of now, I take an existential view of learning as primarily meaning-making. It can therefore be seen that the

deliberate setting up of situations where dialogue is required will encourage learning, or at least make it more likely than under conditions where dialogue is limited. This also follows a social practices or 'literacies' view of learning (see for example, Street 2003), where the teacher's role is very much about setting up opportunities for students to practice, use, gain ownership of and critique subject language and discourse. In this educational model, learners as partners are invited to make sense of the new concepts, material or new practices by allowing (and thereby validating) their own ways of making meaning from the outset, rather than defining them (by implication) as deficient, as in a traditional, didactic transmission model.

This brings me, finally to why triads (as opposed to dyads), is the preferred organisational form for this exercise. At the simplest level, a third person acting as observer and scribe offers the possibility of relieving the speaker and listener of the need to make notes. This is significant in itself, as it allows for greater uninterrupted concentration on what is being said, and reduces the potential for distracting the speaker's train of thought. There is, however, a more important reason for having an observer. As Bakhtin's work reminds us, meaning arises in dialogue *in context*. The observer role helps to represent context (eg society at large) by acting as a kind of witness to the situation. Participants report that the observer's presence and participation (for example, in offering comment on the process of communication between the speaker and listener) adds another dimension, making the exercise feel more valid or real, ie less abstract or artificial than pairwork.

In conclusion, I want to summarise the key points in this paper. I should first admit that my use of the popular phrase 'real live' in the title is (at least partly) a gimmick. In some ways the triads activity itself might be seen as 'artificial' and having some of the features of gimmickry. Yet, tempered with Dewey's advice (which might popularly be interpreted as 'keep it real'!) the use of activities designed to promote dialogue, both between students and teachers, students and students and students and texts, is the purpose of my work. The power associated with our role as teachers gives us the 'turn', the right to speak, and to determine who else can speak, and this essential connection between language use and power (Fairclough 2000) is inherent in education, as in all social situations.

Another well-known phrase associated with Dewey is 'we learn what we do'. In this context, giving over the 'turn' to our students underpins a belief in partnership, in their involvement and participation; it demonstrates respect for the process of dialogue and a power-sharing model of learning. I know from my own experience that, once in the role of teacher, it is all too easy to just keep talking and, albeit unintentionally, to close dialogue down. Roles can be like that: they have their habitual and comfortable aspects and we tend to follow the well-trodden routes of teacher-talk and control. However, we can take the decision to stop talking, and to hand over to our students! It is a decision that needs to be taken as deliberate intervention. It often feels hard to do because it goes against the habitual and the comfortable; the familiar patterns of classroom behaviours we have all imbibed. But the decision is one we have the choice and the power to make, and it brings attention to now, which is where learning is real and live!

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John Hilsdon is Head of Learning Development at the University of Plymouth and is a National Teaching Fellow. His work has contributed to the evolution of 'Learning Development' as a distinct field of practice in higher education. He helped set up the UK network of learning developers in 2002, and is the founding chairman of the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE). He is also editor of the *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education* (JLDHE).

John's main interest is in how students can make sense of their learning experiences at university through participation in the language and practices of academic life, and their subject disciplines. As one of the learning area co-ordinators for the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, 'LearnHigher', he has developed a range of learning materials concerned with academic writing (via the 'WrAssE' project), and on the themes of critical thinking and reflection. He is co-editor of a forthcoming book on learning development for Palgrave Macmillan and has delivered presentations and research seminars at the University of Lancaster; University of Oxford; Chiba University, Japan; the University of the West of England; and Bournemouth University. He is now embarking upon a professional doctorate in education.

Workbook Frame Lock

A transitional survey and critical analysis of student approaches to creative process documentation in photography, visual art and media education

■ CLAIRE SCANLON AND PAUL GRIVELL

Abstract

This paper outlines our 2009-10 University of Brighton Learning and Teaching Fellowship project to create a survey of student creative process documentation (workbooks, sketchbooks, notebooks etc) found on AS/A2, diploma, foundation and BA Photography/Art/Media courses. The project involved the collation of an archive of photographic examples of practice, sound recordings and questionnaire responses, to be made available online to a wider community of interest.

An underpinning rationale for the work was our observation from previous fellowship research that higher education students tend to maintain earlier prescribed, habitual and unreflective approaches to their creative process documentation, that may inhibit rather than enable the development of their creative practices.

Utilising the concept of 'Frame Lock' (Bernstein 1992) and its impact on the development of 'meta-learning', pedagogic questions are raised that are applicable across a wider field of student progression from further education to higher education.

We have gathered the data in order to test the hypothesis that student perceptions are often formulated on implicit assumptions about the instrumental value of such documentation processes, frequently derived informally from staff, peers and previously learned behaviours in relation to perceived course requirements. The online interactive 'archive' of gathered data/ material evidences a range of student approaches and understandings of the use of the workbook. This (currently incomplete) archive aims to present all of the gathered data in a relatively open format, enabling users to browse, view, listen to and work with the material.

Key terminology

Workbook – we use this term as a catch-all to describe a host of 'creative process documentation' forms employed by students to record, develop and provide assessable evidence of their working processes in the making of course related creative work. The term is not limited to the 'norm' of a physical book of blank white pages to be filled by the student, although that 'norm' is substantially the subject of our research, since it is the form utilised by the vast majority of students in our survey. Other forms include; a range of digital formats such as blog, social

networking and image hosting sites, alongside spatial approaches such as the use of bedroom walls, studio spaces and posters. Increasingly digital technologies are enabling the effective integration of these forms in the manifestation of 'multi-media workbooks'.

Frame Lock – a term coined by Charles Bernstein (1999) in his critique of the 'prevailing stylistic constraints' haunting academic writing. Specifically referring to the American literary academy, he writes:

> 'A traditional, or frame-locked, curriculum is designed so that each of its elements fits within a single overall scheme. Like the fourth wall in an old-fashioned play, the curricular frame is neither questioned nor broken. Even as curricular content (the canon) is challenged and reconstituted, the new material tends to be reframed within revised disciplinary boundaries'.

We have adopted this use of Frame Lock to describe the comparably fixed, relatively instrumental and unreflective approaches to creative process documentation that over time, and in the context of developing 'level-ness,' may become restrictive and limiting to student practitioners.

> 'Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit' *(Samuel Beckett, 'Proust' Essay 1930).*

Work in progress poster

Description of project

Previous research into the 'creative process documentation' practices of higher education students, undertaken as part of a University of Brighton Centre for Learning and Teaching Research Fellowship (Scanlon and Grivell 2008), indicated to us that the format and aesthetics of some student approaches appeared to 'fall into' unreflective, institutionalised modes of production (mind-maps, spider diagrams, silver pen on black paper, reams of internet 'research'), often pre-established and readily conforming to models of practice uncritically learned in prior education. We noticed that these accepted approaches had a tendency to 'get stuck', rather than

develop in tandem with the critical and creative development of the practice itself, as required by the step up from further education (FE) to higher education (HE).

Student workbook 'mind-map'

With this observation in mind, our latest fellowship work (2009-10), aimed to develop a better understanding of the student experience of transition through levels in FE/HE by comparison of their creative processes documentation in the usually course prescribed format of the workbook, across pre-degree and undergraduate photography, art and media courses (levels three and four). To that end, we determined to conduct a local (and inevitably limited), survey of the range of approaches to the making of workbooks as routinely deployed by students.

In gathering our data we conducted nine group sessions working with AS/A2, diploma, foundation and year one BA students across a range of institutions in the Sussex area. At these sessions, course specific student groups were invited to engage in a researcher led discussion about their understandings of the role of the documentation approaches that they routinely employed, and were asked to bring examples of their workbooks to photograph and discuss. This dialogue was supported by a structuring questionnaire framing the debate, and enabling students to offer written responses to key questions. Audio recordings of the discussions supplemented the written and visual documentation of the sessions.
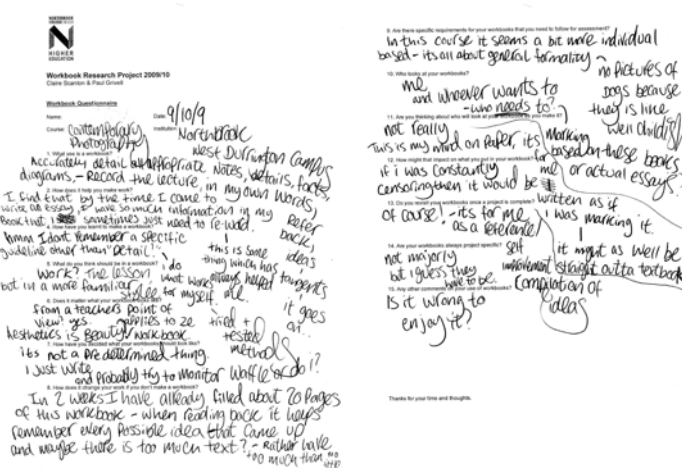
Student questionnaire response

The gathering together of this range of examples of creative process documentation enabled analysis of, and reflection on student learning experiences. This helped identify areas of difference, similarity, continuity and change, both within and across FE and HE levels. We have initially collated this material into an interactive archive consisting of photographic examples of student workbook practice, sound recordings of the discussions and scans of students' written

questionnaire responses. To date, this fledgling archive evidences a range of student approaches and understandings of the use of the workbook, and offers an overview of the research catalogued under the key over-lapping headings of 'form', 'function' and 'value'. The archive is a work-in-progress, with a partial sample of the data organised under these headings.
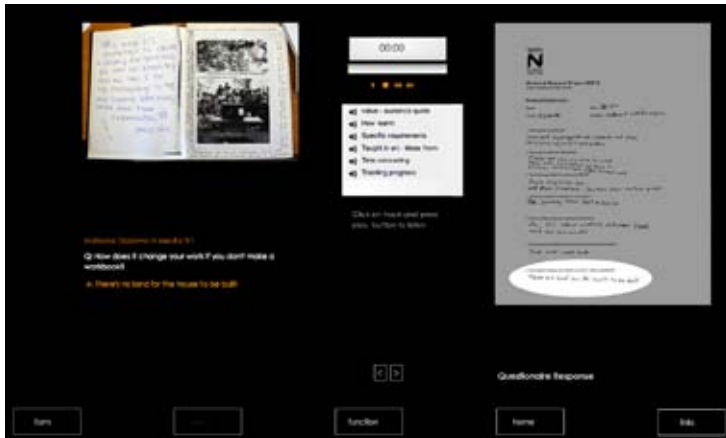
Online archive at: www.taylormadeproductions.co.uk/workbook/

The key structuring headings of 'form', 'function' and 'value' are readily admitted to be problematic. To an extent, they were settled on as a pragmatic way of organising material in an attempt to reflect the perceived understandings of students in their responses to our questions. However, although the three headings were not explicit in our structuring of the questionnaire, it is clear that methodologically,the structure of those questions has significantly determined possible student responses, and the subsequent imposition of these heading similarly pre-determines understandings to be made by users of the archive. And so be it.

One yet to be realised intention for the archive is that all the material can also be accessed without recourse to the key headings. In particular, we would like to make the full (and lengthy) sound archive of discussions available, where currently the sound material is presented as 'sound-bite' clips in support of the workbook images, and written responses offered under the three key headings. It is also true to say that many of the responses do not fit distinctly into just one of the three key headings, and consequently they are used in more than one section.

Coffee stain Venn diagram

That said, and for ease of consumption, we offer the following potted version of student responses under the key headings identified:

Form

Workbooks tended to be compiled in the following formats:

- Usually in book form with variable bindings including sketch book, zig-zag, moleskine style, spiral bound, lever arch etc.

- A range of sizes were used from A6 through to A3. Sometimes size was prescribed by the course. In the instance of BA Photography Arts, students were given an A6 'notebook' at the start of the year. They were not required to use it, though many did.

- Though some courses prescribe size, often students have a choice. In practice students tended to conform to a 'standard' format, often determined by what was in stock in the college art shop or by what most others in the group used.

- Decoration, customisation and embellishment were common as an expression of individuality.

Though students frequently used digital online formats such as Flickr, Facebook and blogs, they rarely perceived these formats to be relevant to course requirements and excluded them from their workbooks. They occasionally included digital material in CD and DVD format within their workbooks.

Q: Are you thinking about who will look at your workbook as you make it?

A: *'Sometimes I am concerned it will look boring and not make sense to anyone but me. So I edit it in that sense, it annoys me that I am writing about things in a certain way for others not for myself'.*

Function

Student responses suggested that workbooks:

- helped to generate ideas as evidenced with 'mind-maps'

- helped to structure, organise and develop thinking as evidenced in research annotation

- acted as an archive of work in progress, and hence as a memory supplement

- charted progress in linear format

- served as a memory/revision aid, for example, in the keeping of lecture notes

- contained required material for assessment purposes, often in the form of technical notes and visual research as prescribed in assessment criteria

- documented experimentation, for example, in the making of contact sheets and test prints

- demonstrated reflection and evaluation, particularly in 'formal' written evaluations

Visual Arts Interim Assessment	Students name Lucy Bacon	Block	Teacher Darren	Date
Subject AS Digital Photography unit 1 Coursework		D	Jason Lee Laidler	WB 18.11.08
Assessment criteria	Evidence in sketchbook	strengths	levels	date	comments
AO1 Develop change/rework/rethink/ analyse/understand/ contextualise/purpose/ independence/perseverance /breadth/depth/excitement	Statement of intention/personal brief ✓		no evidence		
	Analyse the work of other Photographers using words, drawings and initiative samples.		limited		
	Analysis of own work & comparison with the work of others.	extend	basic		
	Demonstrate competent handling of manual camera settings		competent	24.11	
	Further exploration/development of selected techniques.		confident		
AO2 Experiment resources/materials/ technique/media/processes /review/refine	Pin hole camera		no evidence		
	Photograms and scannergrams ✓		limited		
	Experimentation with monotone and colour photography and printing (darkroom and digital, paper and acetate) ✓		basic		
	Experimentation with digital manipulation, including curves/levels, layers, channels, etc. ✓		competent	24.11	
	Experimentation with combined chemical and digital techniques (ie, scanning negatives, digitally produced acetate negatives...)		confident		
AO3 Record Gather /collect/organise/ observe/experience/think/ represent/visualise/draw/ photograph/reflect	Contact sheets of photography sessions with print outs of works in progress and experiments.		no evidence		
	Recording learning of photographic technology and techniques. Recording development of own understanding. ✓		limited		
	Found images of visual elements ✓		basic		
	Examples of the work of relevant photographers and artists ✓		competent	24.11	
	Images from slideshows showing visual elements and theme.		confident		
AO4 Realise Response/outcome/ideas/ techniques/materials/ connections/understanding	Produce outcome/s showing personal identity and appropriate response to brief		no evidence		guideline grade	D
	Show continued development		limited		target grade	B
	Link own work to sources		basic		feedback grade	C+
	Evaluate success of unit and future directions, refer back to aims of unit		competent		feedback grade	B+
	Display resolved photographic outcome/s in sketchbook and exhibition		confident		feedback grade	

Example of a workbook checklist

Q: Are there specific requirements for your workbooks that you need to follow for assessment?

A: '*Checklists*'

Value

Student responses identified a range of ways in which they valued workbooks:

- for assessment purposes
- as a record of personal achievement and progression
- as an aid to learning
- something to be proud of, especially when decoratively individualised
- as a creative artefact in its own right
- as a useful space for reflection on process and outcomes

Q: Any other comments on your use of workbooks?

A: '*I personally wish I could do my sketchbook just for me. My ideas jotted down as and when I need to, and in a way that is personal and makes sense for me, and not other people*'.

Conclusion

In this work we have sought to base our assumptions on a roughly empirical method, by observing, questioning and collecting data. We are nevertheless aware that in all such 'research' there exists the 'paradox of inquiry', where what we might expect to find is ratified by the subsequent data analysis. In this we make no apology. By appropriating Bernstein's inherently critical term 'Frame Lock' we have thus set the tone (and frame) for this research project. In addition, our readings of Paul Feyerabend and John Law have resulted in us applying 'conventional' research

methods in a highly sceptical way. From this we are far from assertive about what might conventionally be called our 'findings'. In practice whenever we imagine we are moving towards a clear and unambiguous position, the more caveats and complexities we become aware of. Again we make no apology for this messiness. In summary the issues we were seeking to address were:

- the role of the workbook in developing creativity

- how this role changes (or not) in transition from pre-degree to degree

- whether the workbook practice moves in concert with the progressive levelness of the educational programme

- what is the student understanding of this process?

One recurring comment from students was that they couldn't remember being 'taught' how to 'do' a workbook, and subsequently had received very little guidance on how to progress their use of it in line with a developing creative practice. Indeed, it could be argued that this developing creative practice is itself stunted by a lack of creative development in their reflection upon, and documentation of that process.

Some contemporary learning theory proposes that the problem here could be one of a lack of 'constructive alignment' in the teacher's structuring of the learning experience (Biggs 1999). What is needed is a much greater level of explicitness on behalf of the teacher:

> 'Constructive alignment' starts with the notion that the learner constructs his or her own learning through relevant learning activities. The teacher's job is to create a learning environment that supports the learning activities appropriate to achieving the desired learning outcomes. The key is that all components in the teaching system – the curriculum and its intended outcomes, the teaching methods used, the assessment tasks – are aligned to each other – are tuned to learning activities addressed in the desired learning outcomes. The learner finds it difficult to escape without learning appropriately' (Biggs 2003).

Interestingly this entrapment through consistency model seems to have been advocated and applied most widely in the curriculum design of HE science and engineering programmes, though it certainly has a strong currency across university departments of professional development. It seems less prevalent in HE Art and Design, where a knowledge based and prescriptive understanding of learning is more readily questioned, and where the question of 'desire' may be more complexly negotiated in a two way process. In principle the systemic theory of learning embodied in constructive alignment may well be cross-disciplinary, but we conjecture that it may be mal-adapted to the realm of art and design education (our cursory research into the area reveals a lack of critical perspective on the model, and the ways in which it has been applied in the context of developing creativity).
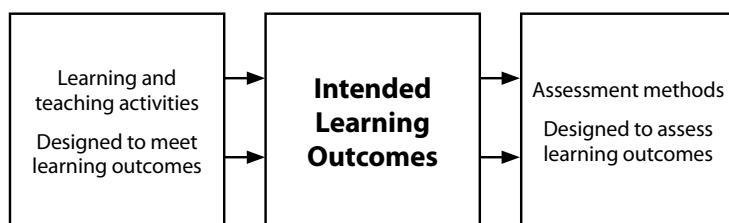
'Aligning learning outcomes, learning and teaching activities and the assessment', adapted from Biggs (1999) in Houghton, Warren (2004) Engineering Subject Centre Guide: Learning and Teaching Theory for Engineering Academics. Loughborough, HEA Engineering Subject Centre

However, it could also be argued that in many of our FE case studies, intended learning outcomes (ILO's), curriculum and assessment had all been adequately aligned by teachers. Students had been told what it was they were to learn, what they needed to put in their workbooks, and what they would be assessed on in order to tick all the right boxes. But this closed system may just have missed the point to develop student creativity. Pre-determined, 'intended' and hence over-prescribed specific requirements for workbook submission, whilst potentially complying with notions of constructive alignment, all too often prevent students from exploring and developing their creative process (and the form of its documentation).

To visually 'quote' Ken Robinson's account of 'divergent thinking' as an essential component of creativity:

**RSA Animate by Andrew Park for Ken Robinson's talk
'Changing Education Paradigms', Royal Society of Arts, 2010**

This model runs counter to the closed, cyclical system of constructive alignment, proposing instead an open ended, indeterminate, emergent and generative mode where learning outcomes are potentially unknown, and hence difficult to specify beyond the generalised aim of developing creativity.

'Creativity' is certainly a hot topic, the word is bandied about and we are not alone in expressing our concern that its usage often bears little or no relation to its meaning. It bites at the heart of this project, our worry that what we are increasingly expected to teach are formulae and techniques that mimic creative practice, predicated on an assumption that in order to work in the 'creative industries' students need to be 'trained' to do so. For us, and paradoxically for the 'creative industries' (whatever they may be), this idea of training sits uncomfortably with the more complex processes of education and learning in the creative arts.

At FE level the 'bitification' of creative projects and units meant that for many students there was a discernible lack of connection between projects. At HE level the greater duration of projects saw workbooks becoming more holistic and integrated across student practices. This was particularly noticeable with semester or year-long units, where workbooks clearly crossed over and informed more than one unit at a time. In general there appeared to be a significantly higher level of 'creative' prescription at FE. We would argue that a high level of prescription also persists at HE level, but some student responses manage to become more flexible and innovative in relation to that prescription. It could also be argued that the meaningfulness of what students are being asked to do increases at HE level, with students more able to see the sense of it in relation to their creative practice. Arguably, at A/AS-level creativity isn't a significant factor anyway, with effective mimesis being more readily rewarded in assessment.

There was also perhaps a naive assumption on our behalf, that the shift from FE to HE involves a movement towards a critical and reflective understanding of students' own practice in both

workbook methodology and creative practice. In this regard we did observe a subtle shift from an emphasis on decorative form towards an emphasis on meaningful content in the transition through levels, though we wouldn't want to suggest any simplistic judgement in this distinction. Indeed, our assumption may readily be questioned in the light of the requirements of FdAs in particular, which in the context of their truncated time-frame often advocate unquestioning/ uncritical mimesis of 'accepted' conventions, be they creative or procedural.

So clearly, there is a tension between the desire to encourage students to use workbooks as spaces for creative development, and the students' own instrumental understandings of the workbook as a place to evidence prescribed assessment requirements. Biggs' constructive alignment model sees intentionality as key. Whilst reflective modification is essential, he assumes that outcomes are ultimately knowable, and readily describable in the language of assessment criteria, albeit through a constant process of realignment of ILOs, learning and assessment criteria. By over-prescribing specific ILOs, such as the insistence on a 'statement of intent' as a workbook requirement, we may prematurely force ideas into the realm of language before they have materialised in student practice, and in so doing prejudge them. It is clear to us that such certainty is counter to the actual processes of creative education wherein knowledge, praxis and understanding are fundamentally contingent and emergent, and are hence not readily codified in either ILOs or assessment criteria. In prescribing these requirements we subordinate at best, and foreclose at worst, the opportunities for speculative 'notation' and the properly drifting dynamic of creative visual thinking. To quote Bridget Riley:

> 'to do that seems to be dangerous. There is an area, and a very sensitive primary area for an artist, which cannot be referred to directly without damage – it's as though the impulse which is about to be expressed should remain unavailable to the intellect in order to find its true form in whatever field or metier the artist has chosen' (Riley 2009: 11).

By prescribing the evidential form of 'contextual research' we risk encouraging a type of mindless regurgitation of 'findings', which often leads to similarly mindless outcomes, where style presides over substance and 'inspiration' is conflated with stuff to copy. Here again Riley's insight is pertinent:

> 'I think there is a tremendous difference between imitation or even directly copying and something done for commercial purpose....One is about learning and understanding and the other a rip-off and trivialisation' (ibid: 174).

And for a student, in this instance, the means to an end of ticking the learning outcome box can equate in our 'knowledge industry' to a commercial purpose.

Without denying the use of good models and exemplars as an aid to learning, by prescribing the form in which thought is now conventionally represented through mind-maps, spider diagrams and the like, we can over-authorise formulaic and convergent schema, yet still expect unconventional and innovative outcomes. The contradictions are self-evident. As educators (and creative practitioners) we have a duty to resist instrumental procedures that uncritically promote intentionality and mimicry as evidence of authentic creative practice, which effectively teach the framework without engaging with the complexities of desire. We need to enable students to question procedures which foreground knowledge acquisition over their passions, whilst giving them permission to pursue a desultory curiosity in their creative educational journeys.

The problem 'creativity' presents for education is that it is messy, nonlinear and unpredictable. Its un-containability is key to its functioning. In this context the workbook all too often functions to frame and evidence a process that by definition cannot be quantified. This is not to say

that the workbook is an unnecessary part of genuine creative practice, just that within it, the student needs to retain ownership of its form, function and value in representing their creative purpose. Crucially, what we wanted to do in this project was to put our questions directly to the students to see if their experience correlated with ours. We wanted to give them an opportunity to reflect on their workbooks and share their experience with us and with each other, in the hope that it would improve their understanding of the role of workbooks in their creative practices.

We conclude this phase of our research with a strong sense that it was primarily the participatory act of dialogue, rather than the gathering of data for the archive, that was key to our own and students' developing understanding of the value of workbooks. Time and again in the many sessions of discussion that we led, it was clear that the participating students had never previously been asked to reflect on their use of workbooks. In so doing, it was evident that these students were for the first time consciously thinking about, sharing and developing their understandings of this vital creative process. We hope that in its present provisional form, this project continues to provoke dialogue and raise questions amongst teachers and students engaged in creative practice. The Workbook website is viewable at: www.taylormadeproductions. co.uk/workbook/.

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Claire Scanlon and **Paul Grivell** work together on photography, media and art programmes across FE and HE at Northbrook College, Sussex. They also collaborate as artists and writers.

Claire has worked as a lecturer and practitioner in a number of higher education institutions in London and the South of England. She is interested in how the subjective and experiential nature of aesthetic practice interrogates knowledge.

Paul's background is in photographic education, though his interests range widely in the field of art and cultural practices. He has worked in formal and informal education, including primary and secondary schools, further and higher education, and in the community. He has particular interests in the role of creativity in education, and the role of education in creativity.

Enhancing student employability

The role of simulation and oral assessment strategies

■ SARAH FIELD AND LUCY JONES

Abstract

Oral assessment has for years played a significant role in education, not only to test specific rhetorical skills required of lawyers but also in other disciplines, and where the oral presentation takes the form of a position from which to be argued, it can be a particularly rich source of learning. In addition, it can be used to assess and develop generic and transferable skills, such as presentation and critical thinking. Expectations of higher education have grown over the past 50 years and institutions are now required to enhance graduate employability by equipping graduates with more than just academic skills. This paper explains how innovative oral assessment strategies have been adopted at the Brighton Business School (BBS) to respond to the demands of today's changing higher education landscape.

Introduction: employability issues – the need for critical thinking and oral skills

Higher education (HE) finds itself in a state of flux, and in the throes of a recession, with greater expectations on it than ever before. It has long been argued (Haug and Tauch 2001) that graduates should be attuned to the needs of the workplace, and that the skills that are beyond the subject-specific (often termed 'transferable', 'core' or 'key' skills) can assist students to demonstrate their value to the workplace (Mason, Williams and Cramer 2009). The Dearing report (NCIHE 1997) recommended that HE institutions should focus on such skills, on the grounds that a more rounded education, underpinned by qualities and skills relevant to employment, would improve the graduate profile, and thereby increase employment prospects. The policy document, 'Higher Ambitions – The Future of Universities in a Knowledge Economy' (BIS 2009), declares that it is vital that universities prepare students for the modern world. Universities are expected to describe how they enhance employability and demonstrate how they prepare their students for employment, including skills (amongst others) of teamworking and communication (ibid). In the current economic climate, where the need to enhance student employability has become more acute, the teaching of such skills is arguably more than ever a vital component of HE curricula.

To this end, teaching, learning and assessment strategies need to evolve but without compromising traditional academic values, in a manner that fits with what Biggs (2003) has termed 'constructive alignment'. According to his theory, constructive alignment has two key elements:

- students construct meaning from what they do to learn.

- the teacher aligns the planned learning activities with the learning outcomes.

Biggs argues that constructive alignment provides many benefits, including the facilitation of deep learning where approaches, such as a case study, are selected that require more active participation and encourage more high-level learning. Indeed there is considerable support for the view that generic/standard teaching strategies generally do not teach critical thinking skills: Bowers (2006) and Paul et al (1997) concluded that undergraduate law students do not develop their analytical problem solving skills naturally through ordinary law teaching, but may require an alternative approach. Carlson and Skaggs (2000) found that active learning techniques in the classroom, such as the use of moot courts, offer a way to make economics more interesting to a broader range of students, and that requiring students to 'do' economics means that students are more likely to learn and understand the concept in question.

Work-based learning can be seen as a possible way of developing employability (Brennan 2005). There is no single or simple definition of what work-based learning entails, beyond the notion that it is about learning (not teaching); occurs in the workplace (rather than on campus) (Nicholls and Walsh 2007) and results in students developing a range of skills that include increased confidence, management of their own learning, application of theory to practice, problem solving and communication skills (Scesa and Williams 2007). Furthermore, Prensky (2001) has argued persuasively that as contemporary students are the first 'Information Technology' generation, they have a different learning style to previous generations. He posits that modern students may have considerable difficulty with text based learning and this can impact on their ability to develop problem solving and analytical thinking skills. However, effective work-based learning does require considerable preparation, and for a programme to be worthwhile students need to be equipped with conceptual and practical resources (Boud 2001).

The aims of the undergraduate Law degree programme (LLB Hons)(Law with Business) at the University of Brighton are to provide an inspiring, stimulating and relevant programme, and to develop students' academic, practical and transferable skills. Within the programme there is an emphasis on innovation in student development, assessment and learning. To this end, a number of innovative assessment strategies, both formative and summative, have been introduced with the aim of developing critical thinking, legal knowledge, oral proficiency and other transferable skills. When new methods of assessment are introduced, it is important to understand student reaction to them because it has such an impact on their learning (McDowell 2001). This paper focuses on two different strategies to enhance employability and transferable skills: one, the simulated Magistrates' Court project, is a voluntary exercise which is formatively assessed, the other, the Legal case study moot, is a compulsory core module which is summatively assessed.

The simulated Magistrates' Court is, in effect, part of a mock trial – the part where the police office gives evidence for the prosecution and is cross-examined by the defence. The Legal case study takes the form of a moot trial. There is a dramatic difference between a mock trial and a moot trial. A mock trial, like a real trial, is more concerned with facts and evidence rather than a dispute on legal issues (Gillespie 2007). A moot trial is set in a fictitious appellate court. The facts are undisputed and the argument is on the legal issues which are usually given as grounds of appeal.

The simulated Magistrates' Court project

All University of Brighton law students currently have the opportunity to take part in the school's 'Simulated Magistrates' Court' initiative which takes place three or four times a year and is run as a joint project by the law team at BBS and the Sussex Police training team. The project provides a prime example of how partnerships can be mutually beneficial: on the one hand, law students

are offered a unique opportunity to role play prosecution and defence lawyers, examining and cross-examining the university's student police officers about criminal cases before real magistrates in an authentic court room environment; on the other, the simulation provides a vehicle for the summative assessment of the student police officers' performance in court, as part of their formal police training.

University of Brighton Law students attend a simulated Magistrates' Court

The hearing is in open court and other students (and staff) are encouraged to watch the proceedings. The cases used by the police students relate to incidents that have actually occurred whilst the student police officer was on work placement, and cover a range of criminal offences, including, theft, assault, possession of class A drugs, driving with excess alcohol, driving without insurance and disorderly behaviour. Students from all years are eligible to participate, and are encouraged to take on a minimum of three cases per session, with at least one for the prosecution and one for the defence. Usually students will not have covered the topic areas in their formal studies, and although students take a module on the English Legal System in year one, there is very little coverage of criminal evidence. In year two, students take a module in Criminal Law, which does include the academic study of theft and assault, but does not include practical elements or driving or drug offences.

There is little formal 'teaching' for the project; the main emphasis being on independent student learning. As part of the training, students are encouraged to observe a real court trial and undertake a package of online training via the university's student intranet, which includes viewing a training session delivered by the local branch of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) on court etiquette, the basic rules of evidence in a criminal court, and how to examine different types of witnesses. Students are also given the opportunity to discuss cases with the lecturers from the policing course.

Students have taken the initiative to develop their own learning by setting up workshops on advocacy and running them through the Student Law Society, and two final year students have produced a student training manual in order to expound on experience gained and encourage new participants. The 26 page manual covers practical issues, such as where to stand and how to address magistrates; academic issues relating to the law on various offences; and advocacy

issues such as how to decide whether re-examination of the police officer is necessary, as well as a list of common mistakes and how to avoid them.

There is no summative assessment, but all law students receive formative assessment for each session in which they participate. The feedback is written by the magistrates, and in addition to general comments, there is an award of points from five (excellent) to one (poor) on the following: Command of facts; quality and relevance of questioning; clarity of speaking; appropriateness of attitude/demeanour and observance of court etiquette. A feedback form is completed for each case, from which students can identify areas for development, their strengths and weaknesses. The majority of students participating in the project do so on several occasions, some clocking up as many as they can by doing every session on offer. On completion of each session students receive a certificate from Sussex Police and the University of Brighton in recognition of their work. The feedback from law students has been very positive and includes:

> *'The experience gave us a good insight into preparing a case and then presenting this to a real magistrate. It's the first time I have been in direct contact with a magistrate and it was rather daunting at first, but after the first case I began to feel more confident and the whole process flowed well. I will add this to my cv which will boost potential career opportunities'.*

> *'I would recommend the exercise to any student who wants to improve their public speaking, confidence under pressure, and above all advocacy skills. Participating in the exercise was a great opportunity to prepare for practice and gain an insight into litigation'.*

> *'It was a particularly valuable experience from an academic point of view as this was for many of us the first time we were able to apply our legal knowledge in a very practical and realistic context...It offers the chance to test yourself in real-time, apply our knowledge of law and procedure in a very public setting'.*

Participation in the simulated Magistrates' Court project allows students to replicate some of the work undertaken by an advocate in the court, but without some of the problems associated with real work-based learning, such as lack of opportunities for learners to develop and reflect, and employer led agendas (Lester and Costley 2010). For the law student this project is about learning rather than teaching, and it is clear that learning occurs through doing and 'critical experience' (Woodier-Harris 2010). Although the cases used for the simulated Magistrates' Court project did not result in an actual prosecution for various reasons, these were real cases in which real incidents had taken place. The police officers being examined in chief and cross examined had been involved in the incidents, and the evidence was being presented before actual magistrates. It would be difficult to get closer to the reality of Magistrates' Court advocacy without actual participation, which is rarely possible before qualification as a solicitor or barrister. However, as a form of summative assessment in the LLB degree programme the scheme does have its limitations, as a number of students on the programme never volunteer to participate (although all students have usually at least watched others perform).

Second year Legal case study

The second strategy developed at the BBS to enhance employability, transferable skills and deep learning is the Legal case study. While assessment on the core law modules of the LLB programme at the University of Brighton generally takes the form of a 70 per cent unseen examination and 30 per cent coursework ratio, there are exceptions. The second year Legal case study is one such exception. This module, a core module (which therefore counts towards the degree classification), is an independent (research based) study module summatively assessed by written coursework and moot.

Mooting is the oral presentation of a fictitious legal appeal case in front of a 'judge'. A moot consists of four speakers divided into teams, one team representing the appellant and the other representing the respondent. The mooters present their argument to the judge who can question and challenge them throughout their presentation. They are expected to answer questions but must not argue with the judge. A profound understanding of the case in question, their arguments, and their opponents' argument, is necessary for success as well as an ability to 'think on their feet'.

Although Kozinski opines that moots are unrealistic and do not focus on specific lawyer-skills – and he has a valid point, since the majority of lawyers are unlikely to find themselves in front of the Court of Appeal or Supreme Court (particularly early in their career) - it is well established that mooting has been a feature of legal education for many years (Broadbent 2001), embraced by those who believe it can assist in the development of 'professional skills' (the specific practical skills required by those seeking to become solicitors or barristers) (Gillespie and Watt 2007). Broadbent (2001), however, suggests that in addition to such law-specific skills, mooting serves to develop other, key skills, such as research, analysis, argument and presentational skills. This is the view taken at BBS, where our approach to mooting is not simply as a means of honing professional skills, but also as a vehicle for the development of more generic, and transferable skills, like presentation, critical thinking and teamworking.

At the heart of a moot is a problem. The use of problems, particularly in learning in the law, has a long history: according to Gillespie and Watt (2008) both 'Problem-Solving Learning' (PSL) and 'Problem-Based Learning' (PBL) are increasingly playing a role within higher education curricula. With PSL the students find solutions by 'rationalising their learning gained from their lecturer and reading', whereas PBL encourages the students to learn through solving the problem without the lead of their teacher. While a moot can easily be used in either form of learning, our use of mooting in the Legal case study module would appear to fit more in the PBL methodology, since students are required to work independently to research the question and then argue their position.

Students divide into groups of four and each group then subdivide into two teams comprising leading and junior counsel for the appellant, and leading and junior counsel for the respondent. Each group has the opportunity to attend four meetings/workshops with the teaching team to deal with any queries or problems, and students are required to keep a diary to record all meetings, either as a team or as a group. At the first two workshops, the students are also provided with module materials, (which are subsequently posted on the university intranet), containing, *inter alia*, information on the moot topic, the assessment criteria, and the rules and general guidelines to mooting and court etiquette. Additional resources are also made available, such as links to mooting sites, where students can access short video recordings of mock trials, as well as detailed information about moots and guidance on mooting etiquette.

Both the written work and moot are assessed as a team exercise; a single mark is awarded to the team. However, in order to best ensure fairness and for quality assurance purposes (where one student has failed to make a contribution equal to that of other team members), a grievance mechanism has been introduced.

The oral component of the module requires students to engage in academic debate in a professional manner, and use the format of a moot to present specialist material according to strict rules and court etiquette. Some (such as Joughin 2010) have highlighted potential problem areas with oral assessment, such as anonymity (as examiners clearly know who they are examining). In order to address such concerns, ensure best practice and for quality assurance, the moots are video-recorded and internally and externally moderated.

Another issue raised by Joughlin (2010) is that of student anxiety, particularly where oral assessment is unfamiliar to the student. However, the feedback we received from student focus groups has been extremely positive, many of them commenting on the generic skills they have acquired through the module. In particular, students appreciated the opportunity provided by the module to work independently (*'encourages private research and makes us think', 'allows self study practice'*). Many felt that the module provided *'insights into courtroom procedures'*, and useful experience of public speaking. In addition, most stated that they found the module *'interesting', a 'challenging'* and *'fun way'* of developing quite complicated skills. Other comments from module feedback forms included the following:

> *'The Legal case study was great for practical mooting skills and to experience court experience'.*

> *'A very well organised module, very useful for the future, gives one important skills'.*

> *'The Legal case study moot is a good opportunity other universities or courses don't have, gives confidence in presenting information orally'.*

> *The case study encourages students to be actively engaged in the learning process, and facilitates deep learning of subject specific academic study in addition to the development of essential transferable skills, particularly teamworking, communication and self confidence.*

Conclusion

While diversity of assessment is widely acknowledged as a central factor in improving student learning, oral assessment, particularly in its traditional format of the viva, has an almost regressive feel to it. In addition, some have voiced concerns about validity, fairness and transparency (Kehm 2001). A disincentive for using oral assessment is that it can be resource intensive (Clegg 2004). The oral summative assessment of the moot is time-consuming and demanding for examiners, and although this can be balanced, in part, by the learning and teaching methods employed in the module, the allocation of staff time for assessment can pose problems, particularly where there are large numbers of students.

However, we have found that the advantages of oral assessment outweigh any of the potential logistical problems, and that it can play a significant and beneficial role in our teaching and learning strategies. On the one hand, the simulated Magistrates' Court project, draws on a successful partnership with another course and offers students the opportunity for formative assessment, which is widely acknowledged to have a powerful and beneficial effect on student learning (Biggs 2003; Yorke 2005; Jenkins 2010). On the other, the Legal case study module appears to offer a stimulating and innovative teaching and learning platform enjoyed by students, and which concurs with Biggs' (2003) and Joughin's findings (2007), namely that oral assessment can be 'more demanding… requiring deeper understanding, and leading to more or better learning', a much richer source of learning than written assignments.

It is also pertinent to note that these oral assessment strategies are relevant, not only to develop the particular professional skills required of lawyers (Maharg 1999), but also in other disciplines (Carlson and Skaggs 2000; Kerby and Romine 2009; Pearce and Lee 2009). As Joughin (1998: 367) has noted, oral assessment is 'embedded in education' for a number of disciplines, including medicine (through clinical assessment) and architecture with its 'design juries'. It is submitted, therefore, that these rich simulation contexts adopted by the LLB programme could be adapted and transferred to other (non legal) curricula.

Moreover, it has been well documented that HE institutions are now required to enhance graduate employability (Knight and Yorke 2003) by developing 'key' skills alongside academic skills

(Mason, Williams and Cramer 2009). To this end, the simulated Magistrates' Court project and the Legal case study module provide sophisticated and complex simulations which assess and develop generic and transferable skills, such as independent learning, critical thinking, oral communication skills and teamworking. Without compromising traditional academic values (and in line with Biggs' 'constructive alignment' (2003)), these teaching and learning strategies go some way to addressing the requirements set out by BIS (2009) for a more 'rounded' education, in order to better prepare students for employment, whatever their field of study.

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Sarah Field has been a senior lecturer at the Brighton Business School since 2002. She teaches and supervises undergraduate and postgraduate students, is course leader for the Postgraduate Diploma in Law/CPE and a member of the Faculty Academic Board. She was awarded a Learning and Teaching Fellowship by the Centre for Learning and Teaching in 2008, and has been pioneering the use of blended learning in the LLB programme. Sarah has presented numerous conference papers and published articles on teaching and learning strategies and the criminal liability of corporations.

Lucy Jones is a principal lecturer in Law and the Law Subject Group Leader at Brighton Business School. She qualified as a solicitor in 1980 and practiced in local government and private practice before joining the academic field in 1991. She has lectured and tutored at the University of Sussex and the Open University. Lucy has extensive experience in teaching and supervising students at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. Her research and teaching interests include learning and teaching, corporate criminal liability, public law and human rights law.

The Aspect project

Working together to enhance the learning experiences of students with Asperger syndrome at the University of Brighton

■ CHARLOTTE MORRIS

Abstract

The Aspect project built on ongoing partnership between the Centre for Learning and Teaching and Disability and Dyslexia team. Responding to increasing numbers of students with Asperger syndrome (AS) presenting to Student Services, and in line with the requirement to anticipate disabled students' needs, it sought to identify ways to enhance their learning experiences. Previous research indicates that people who have AS face significant barriers and a lack of awareness. The team therefore worked to heighten awareness across the university through consultation, staff development and research. People with AS, and experience of higher education, participated in interviews, identifying barriers they have faced and making recommendations. The research found that a combination of inclusive teaching, specialist support and ongoing awareness raising in staff and student populations is an ideal way forward to ensure the best possible learning experience for this group of students.

Introduction

The Aspect project constituted partnership between the Centre for Learning and Teaching and Disability and Dyslexia team, to identify ways in which to enhance the learning experiences of students with Asperger syndrome (AS). It sought to build on ways in which the University of Brighton anticipates working with students with AS to meet their learning needs and address any barriers to a positive learning experience. Encouraging and supporting the full participation of a diversity of learners forms part of the university's learning and teaching strategy. The project took place against a background of the Widening Participation agenda, aiming to improve access for disabled students and was funded internally. It aimed to consult with disability and academic staff, identify positive learning and teaching strategies and include the perspectives of those with AS. Activities, alongside the research reported on here, included a review of relevant literature, guest speakers, staff development sessions, consultation with community groups and the launch of a new interest group.

AS, sometimes referred to as 'high functioning autism', is described by the National Autistic Society as 'a lifelong developmental disability that affects the way a person communicates and relates to people around them' (see: www.nas.org.uk). Autism includes a spectrum of conditions

which can affect sensory perception, language and communication. AS does not usually involve the associated learning disabilities and those with AS tend to be of average or above average intelligence. Challenges with social interaction, communication and social imagination are traits typically associated with AS. However, it is important to note that the needs of those with AS vary significantly between individuals. As stated by the National Autistic Society: 'No two people are ever affected by Autism spectrum disorders in quite the same way, the manifestations of the main triad and the specific characteristics can vary enormously. The personality of the student will also play a huge role in the way they are – the Asperger syndrome is only a part of what makes up the whole' (ibid). Students diagnosed with AS are entering universities in increasing numbers. According to HESA online data, the number of students with AS entering into their first year of higher education (HE) in the UK has been increasing each year. Initial consultation with colleagues in the Disability Team at this university indicated that more students than ever are disclosing AS at application. This may be partly due to increased participation in mainstream education and increasing awareness and diagnosis of the condition.

A central aim was to support this group of learners through identifying inclusive learning and teaching practices within the institution. This was underpinned by the Special Educational Needs Disability Act (SENDA 2005), which advocates an anticipatory approach to educational provision, ensuring full participation of disabled learners. The government's SEN strategy ('Removing Barriers to Achievement') includes removing barriers to learning, embedding inclusive practice within the curriculum and raising expectations and achievement of disabled learners. The influential Tomlinson Report on inclusive learning (1996), recommended a focus on how people learn and the adaptation of the curriculum in response, as opposed to focusing on the support needs of individuals. This inclusive approach recognises diversity and is seen as best practice for all learners.

The project is informed by the 'social model of disability' which originated in anti-discrimination campaigns. Rather than a focusing on perceived deficits, disability was redefined as 'the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes little or no account of people who have physical impairments, and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities' (Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (1976) in Fernie and Henning (2006)). This model shifts away from an 'individual' model of disability which focuses on individual 'deficits' or 'impairments', towards an emphasis on the societal barriers which disable people. The approach highlights the requirement for society to change and become enabling (Oliver 1990; 1996). The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) places legal responsibilities on organisations, including universities, to reduce external barriers to participation. Students with disabilities may experience a range of barriers in HE. The social model of disability has underpinned much thought around inclusivity in HE, as it is seen as empowering students, placing the responsibility for inclusion, the removal of barriers and flexible teaching and learning provision on the institution. This approach ensures that the institution is anticipating the needs of a diverse student body.

Literature

Previous studies indicate that people who have AS are marginalised in society and experience significant barriers in accessing services. A national report on the needs of adults with AS (Beardon, Luke and Edmonds 2007) found that diagnosis was a particular problem, the average age of diagnosis being 29 and one fifth of the 237 respondents remaining undiagnosed. Of those who had received a diagnosis, 64 per cent reported that this was problematic to obtain. Only 27 per cent of individuals at college/university were receiving any support from the institution. The report recommends that pre-entry support for university students should be provided and that support

should be tailored to individual needs. Students need encouragement and incentive to declare AS in order to access support. To encourage declaration, all university staff should have training in understanding the needs of individuals with AS. Lack of awareness, understanding and media stereotypes have contributed to stigma accompanying AS, experienced as a major social barrier.

The Best Resources for Achievement and Intervention Regarding Neurodiversity in HE (BRAIN HE 2008) project, interrogated the learning experiences of students with a range of specific learning differences, termed here as 'nerodiversity', including AS. Utilising the social model of disability, it investigated how specific learning differences are constructed as disabilities by practices of higher education institutions (HEIs). Qualitative research identified barriers which disable neurodiverse students within the HE environment, especially political, social and environmental barriers. While experiences of disability support were generally positive, there tended to be a lack of awareness amongst academic staff, and better liaison between support services and academic staff was recommended. Commonalities, in terms of learning needs, included preferences for visual learning techniques, the need for reading strategies, such as taking regular breaks, and personal organisation strategies. Inclusive strategies, such as varied teaching methods, are recommended as potentially beneficial to all students. The study concluded that university policy is important in promoting awareness and acceptance, encouraging disclosure and mainstreaming inclusive practice.

The 'Real services to assist university students who have Asperger syndrome' study (Martin 2008), evaluated feedback from members of staff working with students with AS across 17 HEIs. It sought to identify strategies which increase the likelihood of success of students with AS and provides many helpful learning, teaching and support strategies. A university ethos which celebrates difference and diversity rather than perceiving people with AS as 'other' or 'impaired' is a positive position advocated here, in line with the Disability Equality Duty (2006). Many people with AS do not classify themselves as disabled, and there may be some individuals in university who do not need a diagnosis or specific support: 'where staff think a person might have AS – or may know the student has AS, this does not automatically mean that a student needs help. That said, there are many aspects of university life which a student with AS is likely to find difficult...' (Martin 2008). Support requirements vary from individual to individual and students themselves need to be consulted.

The 'Enabling transition into higher education for students with Asperger syndrome' study (Madriaga, Goodley, Hodge and Martin 2007) recognised that much previous research has been from practitioner perspectives, tending to pathologise individuals by focusing on 'deficits'. Studies regarding the experiences of disabled students in HE, have tended to have too wide a focus, obscuring the variety of differences under the umbrella of disability. This study aimed to redress this balance by placing students at the centre of the research process, helping to identify enabling and disabling practices within their universities and social barriers encountered during transition to HE. It found that difficulties faced by respondents were primarily social rather than principally the effects of their impairment. It was recommended that universities make positive steps in ensuring disability equality for all staff and students, ensuring that disability issues are seen as university-wide rather than the preserve of student services departments. All the studies highlight the importance of ongoing awareness-raising to challenge stigma which is often experienced as a major barrier to participation.

Research

Small-scale qualitative research was undertaken to capture the experiences of those with AS in HE. Six participants were recruited through local community support groups and were asked

to share their experiences and identify positive practices. One participant preferred to share their experiences through writing as opposed to an interview. Originally, the project hoped to interview current students, however, recruitment was too problematic. This was partly due to the fact that students tended to present to Student Services at times when they were experiencing difficulties or distress and it was therefore, ethically inappropriate to invite participation. However, the interviews undertaken within the community yielded in-depth insights and good practice suggestions which complement previous research findings.

Problems obtaining a diagnosis can impede access to support, as medical evidence is required for disability assessment. The process of diagnosis can be highly complex as there is often overlap with mental health difficulties. It can also be experienced as highly confusing and frustrating, which can delay starting university and accessing support:

> *'I had really struggled at x college to get a Disability Assessment. It was a year long Access course, I'd left and I got a phone call after 13 months asking if I'd like to come in, and I said I've left and they said 'then we can't see you'. I said can you do the assessment as I'm about to go to university. They said no you've got to get them to do one… I rang ahead at the uni and they said 'hang on they are the same people' and I thought maybe this time taking a full-time degree I'm going to set myself up again just to drop out after two weeks'.*

People with AS can be ambivalent about receiving a diagnosis, not wanting to be labeled and experience differential treatment. Some may not be aware of their entitlements and are therefore unaware of the potential benefits of disclosing. Previous life and educational experiences often affect decisions regarding disclosure and/or asking for help. Those who have had experiences of 'special education' may have negative perceptions of what support entails, believing it means '*someone with me all the time'*. In addition, as communication and understanding behavioural norms can be challenging, there may be uncertainty as to whether it is acceptable to ask for help and how to go about it. Students may come into HE having had experiences of bullying or stigma and can anticipate receiving negative reactions which can exacerbate a sense of isolation. Several participants did experience stigma in HE and for one, it contributed to non-completion of their course. It is important therefore that there is ongoing awareness-raising among students and staff; suggestions include using celebrity role models and highlighting success stories:

> *'… I was trying to get on with the technical work of being there but people were making it so exceptionally difficult, you know, for me to actually turn up, it was just outrageous so, you know, it was very challenging. I don't know if it would have helped, because there was this attitude that you have to be, you know, extraordinarily physically disabled before they would consider you as being disabled'.*

The transition into university can be particularly challenging. Students may not understand the norms in the new social environment and experience difficulties around social integration. Some may have been based primarily in the parental home prior to university, and lack the practical skills and knowledge of how to look after themselves and cope with the 'party culture' of university life which can be anxiety provoking:

> *'My first year was especially painful, a kind of rites of passage which should have been, but which never was. At times I found myself seriously lonely and despairing, at others I had a hint of my strangeness and remoteness from people. I quickly learned that my naive beliefs about how to build and understand human relationships were sorely lacking, and that what had worked and been taught in the parental home was no preparation for the big step of moving into halls'.*

Interviews revealed that pre-entry support and early support could potentially be highly beneficial. Practical, alongside academic support, where required, provides students with the best chance of making the transition and participating more fully in university life. Two participants reported that they preferred to remain alone wherever possible and recommended that this choice should be respected. Others fit in with their peers by finding a role, for example as 'the joker', while others are able to find strategies to fit into university life through improving social skills, as one participant was able to. Universities can support the process of social-academic integration by creating safe social opportunities, including opportunities to meet with other students with AS and by providing communication skills sessions.

> *'My behaviour and conversation must have marked me out as strange – I rarely knew how to join in whatever debate was raging, and felt insecure in the mixed sex groups which congregated in each others' rooms for coffee. I thought nothing of shaving very badly, dressing oddly (a shirt and tie, College tie and woollen jumper being my preferred attire), and playing the fool. This was university after all, and students were meant to be a little bit odd'.*

In terms of accessing academic or general support, strategies recommended by participants included making it explicit that people can ask for help, allowing space for students to ask for clarification, for example at the end of a lecture or by specifying availability for one-to-one appointments. It is seen as essential that all staff are aware of AS and have a good knowledge of the support infrastructure so that they can confidently refer students on, as appropriate. Participants also reported that it is important not to take students at face value. For example when asked 'How are you?' they might reply 'fine', needing more specific questions to help them identify what they need help with. It is also helpful to remember that while students may excel in one area of their work, they may struggle in others, having a tendency to focus disproportionately on one aspect of their work.

Given the potential challenge of social situations, it is unsurprising that learning environments which involve a lot of people and interaction, such as lectures, exams and small group work can be particularly anxiety provoking as the following examples show:

> *'…what was difficult was that they were presentation based, taking it in turns… I was finding it difficult to present myself, but if another person in the room is nervous it makes me more nervous than I was before, and a lot of people had sort of stage fright, sort of anxiety things and they were shaking like leaves and I was finding it impossible to cope. It got to the point where I wasn't attending lectures, wasn't attending small group sessions'.*

> *'I mean, the first thing you'll always do is ice breakers, getting to know each other straight away which pushed every trigger – please let me do it at my own speed. I don't mind if you tell everybody because I've often had 'Oh he's aloof, he's snotty and all the rest of it', I'd much rather tell everyone and then there'd be no hard feelings… it's very difficult to get people to stop doing it'.*

It was suggested that learning environments where students don't feel put 'on the spot' might help, along with built in study skills so students can develop the skills needed to give presentations, especially where they are to be assessed. Students could be provided with a choice of assessments and also have lecture and seminar notes available online to access if they feel unable to attend.

In addition to social challenges inherent in some learning situations, students with AS may be particularly sensitive to suffering the effects of sensory overload such as noise, colour, fluorescent lighting, crowds, busyness and touch. Experiences of pain and anxiety in relation to this can exacerbate difficulties in concentration. Attending to the environment and creating comfortable,

quiet areas such as lounges or quiet zones, could be one way forward which would be potentially beneficial to the wellbeing and learning of many students. An example of the effects of a poor environment on a student with sensitivity to touch and noise is provided here:

'In the lecture hall, there were no individual seats, it was a case of 'just shove up' and I found this incredibly difficult to deal with. 'Cos there weren't always enough seats I would come in and sit on the floor at the back... then the late people would come in and sit right next to me and so in the end I would sit in the corner and move the bin to the free side of me, so in the end I was finding it quite difficult with hearing because these were huge lecture halls and I was finding it difficult to catch everything and take notes on my lap'.

One of the most consistently reported problems was the need for time to interpret what was being said and identify the main points, especially where non-literal language is used. In exams, and other forms of assessment, students may struggle to interpret the questions. Lecture notes which summarise the main points can help, with clear unambiguous language used wherever possible. Providing opportunities to discuss exam questions can assist, as can providing a choice of questions:

'...the other major problem I've had, I had no way of knowing how literally I take things. A lot of the questions are trick questions, and I know that now. Reading the feedback – this is a really good essay, I can tell you've done the work... you're just not anywhere close to answering the question so I've got to fail you even though you've done very good work...'

In addition to support for individuals, a range of inclusive learning and teaching strategies were identified which would be beneficial to the learning experience of all students. These included:

- reliability and consistency of academic staff

- clear expectations and learning outcomes

- clear communication

- unambiguous language wherever possible

- ground rules

- built in study skills

- varied teaching methods (including visual methods)

- choice of assessment

- opportunities to ask for help with academic work, ask questions (eg allow time at end of lectures)

- check for understanding

- making it explicit that students can ask for help (and being clear about availability)

- opportunities to discuss assignments

- precise questioning

- choice of questions in assignments/exams

- lecture notes available in a variety of formats

- opportunities to take breaks

Conclusion

One of the recurrent themes throughout the project, which arose through research, consultation and discussion, was a need to balance well informed, high quality specialist support for individual students with embedding inclusive practice in learning and teaching delivery. Students with AS cover the full range of academic ability and each person with AS is unique with their own strengths and abilities. It is vital to recognise therefore, that different students will have different support needs and not all students with AS will require additional support, although it is important that they are aware of their entitlements under the DDA. Those who do require and access disability support find it invaluable. However, all staff have a role to play in ensuring quality of provision for all learners through good knowledge, awareness and the mainstreaming of inclusive practices. A university ethos and culture which promotes and celebrates difference and diversity provides a good foundation for ongoing development. In terms of enhancing the learning experiences of students with AS, continued partnership and collaboration is essential to enable ongoing development opportunities and to ensure that inclusivity is embedded in policy and practice.

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Charlotte Morris is a research officer at the Centre for Learning and Teaching and has been researching in the area of inclusivity and the student experience for six years. At the University of Brighton she has led a two year widening participation project, Open Minds, exploring inclusive practices to support student mental health and wellbeing. Alongside this, she was part of the HEA Doctoral Learning Journeys project team, overseeing and conducting qualitative research into doctoral learning. She is currently conducting research for an ESCalate funded project which seeks to identify strategies to manage the wellbeing of research students in education. Charlotte is completing a DPhil in Gender Studies at the University of Sussex, investigating the experiences of lone mothers in terms of intimacy and relationships.

The case of the viral film production multi-agency partnerships

The potential of real world collaborative induction projects for final year students

■ DR SARAH ATKINSON AND ANDREA BENN

Abstract

This article documents and evaluates the annual multi-disciplinary induction activity undertaken by final year Media and Business students based at University Centre Hastings. It explores the importance and benefits of undergraduate students engaging in Peer Assisted and Problem Based Learning activities in order to work collaboratively to an industry brief to achieve a common goal. The key drivers behind these departmentally disparate, yet vocationally intertwined disciplines, are aspects of employer engagement, professional practice, and applied knowledge. These are intrinsic to the induction activity, which is the production of a viral film to advertise the services and products of a commercial client in the context of a genuine commission. The academic aim of the exercise is to introduce students to a higher level of study, by encouraging them to consolidate and utilise their previously learned disciplinary skills and knowledge, identifying and exploiting opportunities to implement them in a real world context.

Introduction: partnerships

'Many colleges, schools, and workplaces are converging on a common approach to management and education based on participative small work groups and inter-organisational linkages. Education partnerships designed to take advantage of this convergence have the potential to become powerful agents of institutional reform in pursuit of higher academic achievement, better jobs, and more productive workplaces' (Jacobson 2001: 45).

This project represents a small scale example of such a convergence, where two academic disciplines are brought together, along with the Business Services department of the university, who facilitate the liaison with, and involvement of, the external client.

The project

Arriving for the first day of induction week, the students are assembled and briefed on the week's activities by the university staff; the Media and Business course leaders, the Business Development Manager, and the external client. In 2009, this involved a local company *Shopper Anonymous*, whose core business is mystery shopper services and in 2010, *Booker & Best,* a large building and maintenance company. In both cases the marketing director and a key member of staff talk about their businesses, and brief the students on the project in hand and prize money involved. The students are given a definitive deadline to submit their finished films four days later in readiness for a public screening of the work and award ceremony on the final day of induction week. On both occasions, the students have met the activity with enthusiasm and have immediately engaged with it, for the very reasons that Jacobson describes:

> 'Real world themes provide a way to engage students in academic exploration while exposing them to a very real set of career options and demonstrating the relevance of academic skills within those occupations' (2001: 48).

Students commented in their responses to anonymous questionnaires after the exercise, that they appreciated:

> *'Being put in a high pressure low time frame exercise encouraged us to make quick decisions and experiment with equipment'.*

> *'It gave us a taste of what it is like to handle a client brief in professional life'.*

As level six is a top up year, which involves both returning students and direct entrants; project groups are mixed in order to ensure a balance of team members. This facilitates a key aim of the project to capture opportunities for Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) and Problem Based Learning (PBL). These are pedagogic strategies that have tended to be allied with the health care professions, upon which there has been much study and research. This is a scarcely documented area in the fields of Business and Media, but is deemed an essential part of the learning experience, given the interdisciplinary nature of the subject areas. PAL has been described thus; 'People from similar social groupings who are not professional teachers, helping each other to learn and learning themselves by teaching' (Topping 1996). PBL 'is a learner-centred curricular approach that is organised around ill-structured, authentic problems that can be studied from multiple perspectives' (Jonassen, Hernandez-Serrano and Choi 2000, cited in Otting 2010). This method requires students to work in groups to resolve a problem by managing their own learning process, and deciding what information they will need and which skills they will need to develop.

This project enabled inter-subject students to learn the logistical aspects of the courses (such as where to access resources, facilities, and equipment) as well as the operational techniques of the specialist equipment. The project also facilitated interdisciplinary learning; the task required the business students to lead the team in the interpretation and analysis of the client's brief, and to advise which marketing theories to deploy. The media students were required to lead on the creativity of the film and to take control of its production. Teamwork and communication skills were paramount for all members of the group, as one student commented this was a key aspect of the experience:

> *'Because our group worked so well it made me appreciate the value of teamwork'.*

Boud et al (2001) advise that formalised peer learning can help students learn effectively; that it should be mutually beneficial and involve the sharing of knowledge, ideas and experience; is becoming increasingly important and can be used in a variety of contexts and disciplines. This collaborative project provided the opportunity for the students to do just that. Once briefed,

the students worked independently for the duration of the project with no intervention from the staff team.

The viral film

> 'The future of media is the future of advertising; the future of advertising is the future of media. The fundamental difference, however, is that the design philosophies of digital media will exert a greater influence on traditional advertising than traditional advertising will hold over the design philosophies of the digerati' (*Creative Review* 2006: 45).

The medium of viral film is an online contemporary form of production and marketing. Films tend to be between 60 to 90 seconds in length and carry a high impact, memorable message, which tends to come in the form of a narrative 'twist' or a subversion of the viewer's expectations. The intent of the producers is to encourage the recipients to send the video on to multiple recipients, who in turn send it to further recipients, who forward it again, hence the term 'viral', as the video becomes self-propagating and spreads like a virus.

As Roberts has commented 'The challenge in the digital revolution is to bring technology, marketing and creativity together' (ibid), an observation which in turn, reflects the challenges and aims of the course leaders in their attempted fusion of these disparate areas in order to achieve the aims of the project. The medium of the viral film is an ideal vehicle in which to do this, since it presents these opportunities in a manageable, small-scale project with a finite timeline.

That does not however, mean that the students need not apply conventional marketing principles to their brief. Careful consideration of their campaign will be required, as they will still need to understand their target audience, the message they are trying to convey, and the response they hope to achieve. As Perry et al (2002) advise, 'correct targeting at the beginning is fundamental to success'. The initial recipients must have a sufficient level of interest in the content delivered to prompt a positive reaction, and desire for recipients to forward it on to their network of contacts. It is therefore, the shared role of creativity between the students that can have the significant influence on the overall success of the initiative.

The outcome

The students succeeded in the task on both occasions, in that all students produced and submitted a completed film in time for the deadline. They all demonstrated initiative in conceiving original ideas for the films, and resourcefulness in sourcing locations, props and actors. They also demonstrated proficient production skills, successfully undertaking the filming and editing, adding voice overs, sound effects, graphics and delivering the project in time for the screenings. Technical and creative qualities were consistently good in all cases. It was the originality, innovation and ultimately the humour of the finished films that set the chosen winners apart from the rest of the groups.

Lee Cobb, a Director from Booker & Best Ltd, judging the 2010 film entries said:

> 'As a company we are committed to identifying and nurturing talent and I am delighted we can now extend this commitment to local undergraduates. Over the years we have provided many

training places for work experience and apprentices for all trades within our industry, and this competition has broadened our horizons. We know that young people need to have experience, otherwise employers just aren't interested these days. We are pleased to have been part of this competition which put pressure on the students to take our brief, and produce the video in a very short space of time – providing them with the experience that the commercial world demands'.

These outcomes illustrate that there is definitely scope for continued collaborative projects of this kind. The standard of the work that students could provide when permitted the freedom to be creative, and the capability of achievement on deadline given this level of independence, is indicative of this.

Student feedback

Some of the business students perceived this as an assignment for which the Broadcast Media team were better equipped to complete, and did not want to dilute the prize if they had not participated as much. They had not realised the extent their involvement could take. One business student felt that as a team, they had been given too much independence and would have preferred more preparation at the start of the week. The student added however, that the independence made them feel like final year students, that trust had been installed in them, which was something that would not have happened as first years.

Final feedback was received from another business student indicating that they had found the project *'extremely interesting and enjoyable'* but also advised that some of the team did not fully engage with it. A mixed reaction was received from the students, who either really engaged with and enjoyed it, or did not take it seriously and left it to those that did. The successful teams included members from both disciplines who had worked well together and produced results of an extremely high standard.

The learning points

The project has evolved and developed since its initial inception in 2009, based on both student and client feedback, and upon our own observations. It was noted that not all students would rise to a challenge immediately. Some are motivated enough to fully engage but others require greater incentives than having fun, particularly if they perceive it to be of no tangible benefit to them. Level six programmes often culminate in opportunities for students to demonstrate the skills learned during the programme through independent enquiry, and the production of a dissertation or research project. This induction activity was the beginning of the development of these skills, which would include more than the grasp or depth of knowledge of the topic of study, but also the fundamentals of research such as planning, organisation and delivery. Reardon (2006) advises that industry and government require graduates to be able to demonstrate that they understand, as well as prove their ability to work to a discrete time and/or within work and resource frames, in general the mastery of project management skills.

The reflective opportunity now given to the students at the end of the project (an additional strategy, implemented in 2010 based on the previous year's experience), helps to highlight the intangible benefits. The students are offered the chance to debrief, reflect and evaluate which skills they felt they had used, what contribution they had made, what they had liked or disliked about the project, and what they had learned from the experience, particularly the specific employability skills that they will have demonstrated. The intangible benefits include the chance to develop or enhance personal qualities such as determination, commitment, motivation, interpersonal skills and teamworking. Tutors, across courses recognise these as good qualities

for future employment in compliance with the QAA Code of Practice with reference to higher education.

However, Boud et al (2001) invites the question of peer learning: 'why does it need to be managed?' Peer learning has traditionally been an informal learning process, usually organised by students for themselves, but peer learning appears to be becoming less common amongst students for a variety of reasons. They assert that if academics can prepare and manage activities which demonstrate and support peer learning, then it may be a way of formalising the process and outcomes, and so make the benefits and difficulties more visible. Academics may also be able to demonstrate the difference between peer learning and collusion through managing the activity.

Boud et al (1993) suggest that experience is the foundation of, and the stimulus for, learning. Given the context of this project, students would be required to call upon previous experience or learning to assist them in working in a team to find solutions. Boud et al (ibid) continue by making an assumption that every experience is a learning opportunity, but that 'teaching' does not necessarily lead to learning taking place. But, if a teacher can create an event which the learner can actively engage in, then later, when participating in another but not necessarily similar event, the learner may well be prompted to reflect and bring to mind something learned from the earlier experience. Advocates of PBL also advise that the designers of the event need to carefully consider the level of structure and complexity of the tasks, as well as the learning needs of the students.

Overall, the strategic decision to leave the students unconstrained to enjoy the trust and freedom to find a solution to the brief, had a positive and rewarding effect. Each student's understanding can be drawn out and identified through careful planning of the project brief and reflection opportunities linked to the learning objectives.

Future development

This project is now an established and permanent fixture in both the BA Broadcast Media and BA Business Studies calendars. As employer engagement and professional practice are increasingly pushed further up the agenda of vocationally oriented degrees, the opportunities that this exercise offers become invaluable.

The impact and effects of this exercise have the potential to reach far beyond the induction phase of the courses, and further consideration has been given to find ways to integrate this experience into subsequent studies. One of the key challenges has been to sustain an equitable level of integration of employer engagement, PAL and PBL throughout the level six academic year in both the media and business subject areas. This year, in response to this challenge, further reflection and development of the viral form was embedded into a Broadcast Media level six module, in which the medium is investigated and analysed more fully. The student examples from the previous years' induction exercises are used as an integral facet of this investigation, facilitating deeper levels of reflection, synthesis and analysis. It also provides a foundation for the exploration of new and emerging forms of audiovisual media advertising, which in turn, may influence future iterations of the induction exercise. As technology advances and audience behaviours become ever more sophisticated; the question of whether the viral film will remain the most relevant and appropriate vehicle for the induction week exercise can be explored and informed by the students themselves.

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Dr Sarah Atkinson is programme leader of Broadcast Media, part of the Media subject area in the Faculty of Arts, based at the University Centre Hastings. The programme now includes a suite of well regarded foundation degree courses in the media production field, a level six top up and a full degree in Broadcast Journalism. Sarah has grounded these developments at the interface between the academic world and the professional media industries, emulating industry conditions in all teaching and assessment approaches.

Andrea Benn is a senior lecturer with the Brighton Business School and joined the university in 2008 as course leader for the business programme in University Centre Hastings. Her current research is in the field of problem based learning within a business context complemented by elearning, which will form the basis of the development of the new business provision at University Centre Hastings. Andrea is also reading for an MBA (Technology Management) to support her teaching.

Preparing for partnership

The first year experience of assessment

■ ALISON BONE

Abstract

Brighton Business School has a range of undergraduate degrees that assess first year students in a variety of ways. This project conducted an audit of all first year coursework assessment within the school and asked why staff chose particular methods of assessment, and the views of the students on the effectiveness of these decisions in engaging their interest and progressing their learning. There was sometimes no particular rationale for the choices made about assessment tasks by staff, and opinion amongst students was so mixed, that it seems true to say that there is no one 'best' way to use assessment to drive learning.

Introduction

This project was awarded a university Learning and Teaching Fellowship in 2009-10 to carry out an audit of first year assessment across the undergraduate programmes run within Brighton Business School (BBS). Although all undergraduate programmes had been validated or revalidated within the last three years, the hypothesis was that many courses, especially in the first year, tended to set rather traditional assessment tasks. The project sought to investigate why lecturers chose to assess students in the way that they did, and how students viewed their assessment. The project concentrated on coursework ie all assessment other than tests or examinations.

The BBS runs a number of undergraduate programmes which are divided into two streams: 1) Finance, Accounting and Law and 2) Business Studies. Both streams have named degree pathways which share some common modules, for example, all students study an academic skills module and economics, and at least the basic aspects of accounting. There are a total of around 500 students in their first year. Students are grouped for teaching purposes according to their course, but in the shared modules eg Economics for Business, there are around 375 students. The majority of modules however, are course specific, for example, only Finance and Investment students study Economics of Financial Markets, which has fewer than fifty students.

The context of the project

The first year experience (FYE) of higher education has been the subject of widespread research in the UK (Mantz and Longden 2008) and the United States has its own resource centre (First Year Experience, South Carolina). I have also contributed to an Australian Learning and Teaching Council project (2009) that examined the FYE and resulted in a set of resources useful for those

wishing to deconstruct (and reconstruct) how curriculum design is affected by assessment and other factors.

The FYE of assessment should be challenging and yet supportive, and students should be exposed to different types of assessment so that they can acquire and practise a variety of skills. Ironically as Gibbs and Simpson (2004) have identified, some assessment exercises actually undermine the very learning they intend to measure. Giving students repetitive tasks such as producing essays or reports, albeit in a variety of subject contexts, may result in students coasting, ie not feeling intellectually challenged. Academic tutors with responsibility for first year courses often feel that they are walking through a minefield as they negotiate the requirements of students who are needing incremental formative assessment (with all the associated resources this may entail,) and those of experienced students who, having achieved good examination results at a former educational environment, wish to be intellectually stretched by their assessment tasks. As assessment impacts on the entire FYE including retention, motivation and performance, this research was intended to explore, amongst other things, the student experience of assessment.

Methodology

1 Pilot study

A preliminary study was carried out towards the end of 2009, focusing on one degree programme, the LLB Law with Business. This was selected because it is one of the smaller programmes in the school with c. 70 students in the first year at that time, and as a law lecturer, it was easier to contact the staff and encourage students to discuss their assessment. All staff responsible for the first year modules (n=6) were interviewed, and three focus groups involving a total of ten students discussed their assessment. Staff were asked why they had chosen the particular form of coursework for their subject, and the focus groups of students were asked about their experience of assessment to date. This was limited, as the interviews were held at the end of the first term when students had only received feedback on two of the six modules, but some interesting qualitative data was generated.

2 The main study

The full study covered all BBS degree programmes (Business Studies, Business Management, International Business, Law with Business, Finance and Investment, Economics and Finance, Accounting and Finance and other 'with' degrees such as Business Studies with Marketing). At the beginning of the summer term 2010, all BBS students have a timetabled 'Revision week' which is used by lecturers to inform students of the structure of the examination, to practise past papers and deal with queries relating to the assessment. This week was chosen for the study as students would have received feedback on all their coursework, and it was reasonable to assume that these lectures would be well attended. Questionnaires were distributed to first year students, completed and returned during the lectures. The lecturers also completed questionnaires relating to the coursework assessments they had set.

The response was a little disappointing. At least one of the tutors decided to hold their revision session in the last week of the spring term 'as students often go home to revise and do not return for the scheduled revision sessions', which proved to be true in a number of cases. Attendance was sometimes hovering at around 30 per cent or less of registered numbers. Two lecturers 'forgot' to distribute the questionnaires and an attempted follow-up email elicited only three responses, so the overall response rate from students was around 21 per cent (n=103). The staff response rate to a short questionnaire covering similar issues to those explored in the pilot

study interviews, was better at 53 per cent (n=11) although some, who had participated in the pilot study, chose not to fill in the questionnaire.

Findings

1 The pilot study

This was based solely on the LLB Law with Business course. Staff teaching on the first year, were asked to explain their coursework assessment tasks which broke down as follows:

- Economics – group report worth 30 per cent of final module mark (balance of 70 per cent weighting given to examination)

- Law of Tort – legal problem (individual) worth 30 per cent

- Legal and Academic Skills (LAS) – variety of skills-based tasks = 100 per cent weighting

- Legal Institutions and Method (LIM) – variety of tasks weighted at 50 per cent

- Public Law – essay worth 30 per cent

- Understanding Financial Information – accounting problem worth 30 per cent – a group problem with an individual element

The first subject, Economics, was taught to a large number of other students on different courses (mainly business) in the school, and five lecturers led the seminars, although the lead tutor who was interviewed, took most of the lectures. The main lecturer was based in another school and was unfamiliar with the course when asked to lead it (three weeks before the start of the course). His reason for the choice of coursework task, which was group-based and involved students researching a leading company of their choice and producing a report, was that he had 'inherited' it: this was the way his predecessor had assessed the module and he saw no reason to change it. The coursework was handed in at the end of the autumn term, and so students were able to comment on it in their focus groups (see below).

The other subjects were all unique to the LLB course. Understanding Financial Information (UFI) coursework was not due to be handed in until after the students were interviewed. This was also the case with the Law of Tort and Public Law. The UFI lecturer had used a similar assessment task in the past that appeared to work well, and so repeated it. The Tort and Public Law lecturers both said that the main purpose of their assessment was to test 'subject knowledge', although the Tort lecturer (who set a problem,) admitted that as the examination consisted of several problems which required a certain technique to be mastered, the students would gain valuable experience and feedback through the coursework. He said:

> 'I always set a problem to develop their problem-solving skills – it's quite a complex one – and they do better in the problem questions in the exams. But of course, I don't know if this has anything to do with the fact they have a problem for their assignment. I think many students just prefer to tackle problems'.

The Public Law essay was the last piece of coursework the law students submitted. The lecturer said:

> 'The purpose of the assignment is to assess their subject knowledge – they should already have the [writing] skills'.

The LIM module had three separate tasks: an essay weighted at 30 per cent of the final module mark, a case-note[1] (15 per cent) and participation in an online debate (5 per cent). The lecturer made it clear that these tasks had all been developed in the light of the module's learning outcomes (this was the first and only time during the pilot study that any lecturer had mentioned this as a rationale for the choice of assessment…)

The LAS module consisted of several separate tasks. The lecturer on this module had again 'inherited' the module and thus chose to continue with previous assessment tasks. Interestingly one of these tasks also consisted of writing a case-note, which was due to be submitted three weeks after the previous case-note task for LIM.

The students in their focus group were asked to reflect on their experience of assessment given that it was relatively early in the academic year. As they were self-selected (three were student representatives) it was unsurprising that they were keen to talk. They were generally pleased with the nature of the tasks they had completed; that there was a choice with the economics essay, and that assessment criteria had been specifically addressed in seminars so that they felt reasonably confident that they understood what was required. This was also reflected in responses made in the main study. The only other two tasks they had completed at that time were the two case-notes for the LIM and LAS modules. They were very disappointed not to have received feedback from the first one before submitting the second, and could not understand this. The lecturers concerned admitted that the timing was problematic and that this would be addressed in future.

2 The main study

An assessment audit was carried out to look at all the methods of coursework assessment being used within the BBS. Most of this was done by checking what had been posted on studentcentral, although in a few cases, staff were contacted directly by way of the questionnaire. The audit covered issues not directly addressed in this paper such as the degree of information students were given about completing the task including detailed criteria, date of hand back and so on.

The types of assessment varied widely but were usually individual (although every course had at least one piece of assessed group work). It was comparatively rare for students to have a choice of subject although where there was group work (UFI and Economics) this was available. Modules that were designed to develop skills (Personal Academic Skills, Legal Academic Skills) were 100 per cent coursework assessed, while those testing understanding of quantative techniques or Accounting above the basic level, were usually 100 per cent examination assessed (but often in smaller bites, for example, 2 x 50 per cent), and outside the terms of this project which was primarily concerned with coursework.

The majority of modules in the BBS were assessed by 30 per cent coursework and 70 per cent examination or occasionally 50/50. In total there were around 20 separate modules being taught to first year undergraduate students, some of which, for example languages, are outside the scope of the audit. When asked why they chose the coursework assessment tasks that they had, staff (their numbers recorded in brackets,) replied as follows:

- (the task) assessed the learning outcomes in a way that an examination cannot (3)

- it has always been assessed this way (4)

- large numbers make this particular form of assessment manageable (0)

- it has proved popular with the students in the past (1)

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1   A case note requires an understanding of the key legal points being made by a judge and develops essential analytical skills.

It is interesting that nobody used the constraint of large numbers as a rationale for assessing in a particular way but as with the pilot study, 'inheritance' is the most frequently given reason for choosing an assessment task. Staff occasionally elaborated in their replies:

'It seems an applied way to make students think about Economics'.

'Some tasks are there because all students need to [acquire these skills] eg Excel spreadsheet, team skills day'.

'The exercises encourage regular attendance and engagement with material and cumulative rather than 'topic by topic' learning. They also familarise students with style of exam question'.

Students were asked which of their coursework assessment tasks they found the most and least challenging/difficult. This was meant to exclude examinations but some mentioned these anyway. They were also asked to give reasons for their answers. Given that the response rate mentioned above was not particularly high (just over 20 per cent), these findings must be treated with caution, but they nevertheless provide some insight into student opinions of their assessment tasks. The most challenging was deemed to be Accounting/Management Accounting (30 per cent) followed by Economics (22 per cent) and Academic Skills (18 per cent).

Reasons given by the students were all very similar regardless of subject:

- *'The coursework was difficult to research'*

- *'I didn't understand it'*

- *'It was not explained well'*

(Both the latter were assumed to refer to the assessment task rather than the module as a whole). However, when students were asked to nominate a subject/module whose coursework they found the *least* challenging they chose Academic Skills (28 per cent) which was described variously as *'easy'*, *'no knowledge is needed'* and *'I've done it before'*. This module required a variety of tasks to be completed including a literature review and a job search portfolio, and as will have been noted, proved the *most* challenging for some students.

Other modules also regarded as less challenging were Quantitative Methods (15 per cent), with reasons that included *'well-explained'*, *'done before'*, Marketing (15 per cent) *'done before'* and Economics (11 per cent) *'good teaching'*, *'done before'* and Law for Business (10 per cent) *'explained well'*, *'given everything we needed'*.

Students were also asked which assignment most helped to develop their understanding of the subject and to explain why. Economics was the clear leader (35 per cent), with reasons given including the fact that it was a *'group task'*, *'we were given good support'* and *'a great deal of research needed'*. Others mentioned Academic Skills (13 per cent): *'I learned how to reference properly'* and Financial Accounting (12 per cent*) 'it was such a practical application'*.

Finally, students were asked if one of their subjects was *only* to be assessed by examination which would they choose, ie which assessment task contributed *least* to their learning. 21 per cent said *'None'* ie they thought examinations only tested memory and coursework was needed to demonstrate their understanding. Others mentioned Economics (12 per cent), Marketing (9 per cent) and Law for Business (9 per cent).

Conclusion

Although the response rate from students was relatively poor, the answers were diverse and showed that the coursework one student might find challenging, another might find relatively

easy (eg the literature review component in Academic Skills which was mentioned by several). This may be accounted for by the diversity of student experience prior to coming to university and possibly by cultural background.

Interestingly many students quote tutor support (or the lack of it) as the reason for their finding work easy or challenging. There is clearly a disparity of approach in the way that assessment tasks are explained and delivered to students. Student interviews and some comments on question-naires indicated that some tutors were at pains to explain what the assessment criteria meant in practice, and others gave students seminar tasks which effectively gave them the opportunity to practise what they would later be assessed on. Very few students (under five) admitted that their own lack of effort/reading may have contributed to the difficulties they faced in completing their coursework.

Staff varied in the reasons given for assessing students in the way they did, but 'inheriting' a method of assessment seemed common. Interviews with staff in the pilot study tended to indicate a general lack of enthusiasm for any particular method of assessment and some were unsure of their rationale. Student focus groups in the pilot study generally found staff helpful and supportive, but did not directly associate assessment with learning (more with 'testing') and this was supported to some extent in the main study.

From these findings, it is difficult to make general statements about the nature of the FYE experience of coursework assessment in BBS. They emphasise that each student has their own learning journey, shaped by previous experience and their own preferences for particular forms of assessment. What one finds challenging another will find easy. Some enjoy group work, others do not. The staff seem largely to understand student needs and fears, although there is some-times lack of evidence of joined-up thinking across course modules in terms of timing feedback. The nature of assessment for learning (as opposed to 'of' learning) needs to be made clearer to students. One way of doing this is to give assessed work back through personal tutors who can keep track of feedback across subjects. This would enable a holistic view of student performance to be taken. Getting students to reflect on feedback and explain what action they will take as a result of it, should help close the feedback loop and promote learning. This is the subject of another project to be undertaken in the BBS in 2010–11.

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Alison Bone is a principal lecturer based in Brighton Business School, where she teaches contract and employment law. Her research focuses mainly on the student experience of assessment and on the role of formative assessment to promote student learning. She has worked closely with the UK Centre for Legal Education (the HEA law subject centre) and produced various research papers and materials for law lecturers on assessment, including 'Ensuring Successful Assessment' and a 'Toolkit on Assessment' for new law lecturers.

The collaborative university

The collaborative university

Challenges and possibilities

■ PROFESSOR RONALD BARNETT

Abstract

The collaborative university is here to stay. The idea of the collaborative university works both epistemologically (for knowledge production is becoming more collaborative) and institutionally (for in a globalised world, rarely can a single university attain all its goals by itself). The idea of collaboration also speaks to themes of sociality, conversation and community, and a university that *listens*. So there is much on the side of collaboration. But lurking within collaboration and its working out in practice, can also be discerned some more disquieting and somewhat contradictory moments, of ideology, power, diminution of voice, individualism, amorphousness and a possible suppression of criticality. There is, therefore, a balance sheet to be drawn up in regard to the collaborative university; and it is by no means clear that the outturn will always be in favour of the idea. Accordingly, not just the management of collaboration but also institutional *leadership* deserves attention if the full potential of the collaborative university is to be realised.

Introduction

Around the world, universities are collaborating both with other universities and with institutions and organisations beyond the university sector. Collaboration is to be found in teaching, in research, in knowledge transfer and in civic engagement. It is to be found among students and academics. Senior managers also engage in collaborative activities themselves. It is, therefore, to be found at the levels of departments, faculties and institutions. It is to be found within countries and across countries. This burgeoning of collaborative ventures raises many issues which have only just become subject to investigation (see, for example, Walsh and Kahn 2010, which is possibility the best contemporary offering on the topic, including both exemplars of collaboration and a theoretical framework). In this short paper, I want to do just one thing and that is to explore what might be understood as the ideological hinterland of the very idea of collaboration. Why is the idea taking off just now? Where is the impetus coming from? What strains and what interests, might lie in this ideational energy? What might be the limits of 'collaboration' in the current era? What might be its possibilities? We can only hope to open up these questions in this short offering.

An old or a new set of practices?

Collaboration in higher education is not new. In particular, research in the physical sciences has required teamwork for over a hundred years. The characteristic mode of securing advances in

knowledge in those areas is precisely through individuals working together. But collaboration has recently come to be ubiquitous. Most programmes of study are designed nowadays by groups of staff, and even individual units or modules are the responsibility of more than one individual. And in research, teams may now be spread across continents, while collaborative research has found its way into the humanities as well as the social sciences. Partly, this latter development is a reflection of disciplines in general adopting methods associated with the natural sciences, including the digitisation of materials which produce large data-sets.

Together, these developments are bringing fundamental shifts in the character of academic work. The lone scholar, whether as scholar-teacher or as scholar-researcher is not yet extinct, but is a diminishing species of academic life. We are therefore, witnessing in this general movement, the arrival of 'the social academy' (ibid).

Isn't this a strange depiction? isn't it a category mistake? for the academy was *always* social. The academy was not and is not a monastery. Communication, talk and interaction are part of the essence of the university. Indeed, in its earliest inception, the very idea of a 'university' stood for a gathering, a community, a guild. The university was born out of individuals coming together to sustain mutual interests in scholarship, enquiry and learning. But the designation of the contemporary academy as 'the social academy,' draws attention to the ways in which the academy is being enjoined in this direction. There is abroad an *impulse* towards the social.

How might we account for this new impulse? There is surely a combination of forces at work. Some are doubtless connected with the incorporation of the academy into the institutional web of society. Universities are large and complex institutions, increasingly playing major roles in society, through large-scale research and teaching missions. Many of their activities span complex fields. A course entitled 'Music design technology' simply has to be put together and offered by staff from several fields working together. Other forces are more organisational and spring from a drive to manage institutions effectively and efficiently, and teamwork seems to offer both happy outcomes. No matter how large a university might be, and how many 'world-class' departments it may boast, there will still be projects and ventures that it wishes to be engaged in which it lacks the resources to tackle by itself.

But 'collaboration' has surely even more positive ideas in its backing. If the medieval university was established largely through the efforts of individuals coming together (on some marshy ground somewhere) collectively to meet common challenges and impulses, that collective impulse can only be heightened today. For the challenges of a global village, of proliferation and intersecting knowledge fields, of an expansion in the scope and scale of university activities, of the press of time and of a heterogeneity of 'stakeholders,' must reinforce the urge towards the collective. Society has come into the academy and in turn, it makes sense for the academy to take seriously its own impulses towards sociality if it is to be adequate to the challenges it now faces.

The collaborative university, as we might term it, is a new kind of university. It takes its networking seriously. Frameworks of understanding are already networked, criss-crossing and overlapping in ever more complex forms. The metaphors themselves proliferate in a vain attempt to capture this complexity. Some conjure images of spaghetti or seaweed tangled in a mess; some point to the fuzziness and interpenetration of boundaries; some call up metaphors of the liquid, referring to intermingling pools, streams and currents; and others refer to the randomness that creativity has now become, with perhaps billions of streams of data, images, representations and texts intermingling in crazy ways. In this milieu, the individual as 'a moment of academic activity' has lost his or her sell-by date: the collective offers the only hope of forming responses that are halfway adequate to the networked world in which we all now are.

A new discourse

Accompanying, and even helping to fuel this new impulse towards the collaborative, a new discourse is fast developing. In this discourse, terms are found, alongside 'collaboration,' such as 'partnership', 'network', 'community of practice', and 'co-operation'. Even the compilation and the signing of a 'memorandum of understanding' between a university and another institution is part of this discourse. It is a nice, vivid example of the very idea of collaboration being given tangible effect. This discourse comes alive, and is lived; as it has to do, if it is a genuine discourse. (For a discourse is an ensemble of meaning structures, sociality and enactments). As a discourse then, collaboration is more than even the identification of a cluster of cognate terms now entering the language of higher education. It is, as stated, the emergence of a set of practices which the terminology struggles to keep up and to reflect. As such, there is a penumbra of practices that might be included under the broad umbrella of collaboration. And within that penumbra, we can surely discern if not fault lines, then at least the makings of segments of activity.

The collaborative university is the networked university writ large. The collaborative university is manifestly a networked university but it is more than that. A university is a supremely networked institution. Its research, its developmental and its teaching activities are all bound up in networks of various kinds, in the private and public sectors, with other universities and with government agencies. Local, national and global: its networks are to be found in knowledge, in professional and in organisational networks. Many of those networks are engaged in some way: there is communicative traffic within them. Many, however, are much quieter, almost tacit or even dormant; yet still having a subtle influence. Such networks reflect regional and national systems, globalisation and academic and professional communities at work. As such, networks constitute resources that can be called into play if need be.

The collaborative university is all of this and more. The collaborative university takes its networking really seriously and works at its networks, in all of their ramifications and at all levels, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. The collaborative university understands that collaboration is essential to itself and to realising its ambitions. 'Collaboration' may have even been worked up into a major theme in the corporate strategy of this university. It is one dimension around which it wishes to advance its interests and even its values. Through its many collaborations, it demonstrates to the world the company that it is keeping and that which it wishes to keep. For this university, collaboration is a crucial part of its positioning and even its repositioning. Collaboration is a way not only of realising pre-existing aims, but of realising new aims and so moving into new spaces.

Spaces of collaboration

Inevitably, then, collaborations will vary. Two sets of distinctions are pertinent here. In a marketised age, collaboration can be set off against competition. 'Collaboration' becomes a trope that takes its bearings from being a rival to competition. It is difficult for institutions X and Y to be in competition with each other if and while they are also collaborating with each other. Collaboration and competition therefore, is an axis of university orientations. A university can be understood in terms of the extent it is collaborative or competitive.

A second set of distinctions is that between individualism and collectivism. As implied, collectivism has marked the university ever since its mediaeval inception. And this collectivism has in some ways intensified as 'knowledge production' has itself taken on large-scale dimensions. Much research is not only pursued by large teams, but the ownership of research findings has become collectivised. For a single scientific paper, there may be several scores of named 'authors'. Large teams are even finding that with huge data-sets, they do not possess the resources

themselves to cope with all of the data to hand, and so are having to turn to the public to help them in their researches. But in parallel with this collectivism, the marketisation of the university has brought a heightened individualism, as individual researchers and even scholars, are promoted in the public eye and seek to project or even market themselves as media stars.

These two dimensions, *collaboration/competition* on the one hand and i*ndividualism/collectivism* on the other, cut across each other and offer a kind of matrix of *spaces of collaboration*. Collectives exhibit collaboration in themselves but can also exhibit severe rivalry and competition with other collectives. At the same time, large collaborative ventures may well have spaces for some individualism, as when the director of a large collaborative project across institutions takes on a public profile.

We see here then, that both collaboration and collectivism are nuanced phenomena. In neither case, are there possibilities for pure processes (of collaboration and collectivism) to show themselves. There is a link, in that both sets of movements are limited, especially by the marketisation of higher education. The individualism that shows itself contra collectivism *and* the competition that shows itself contra collaboration are both significantly exacerbated by the neo-liberalism that has engulfed universities. Neo-liberalism both engenders competition among universities and promotes academic individualism. Both processes are the working out of a market logic. Competition is assumed to promote efficiency and higher outputs in the system; academic individualism is marketisation at the individual level, for now spaces open for individuals to take on market personas (as well as market-influenced salaries).

The theme of 'collaboration', therefore, can be understood in part as an attempt to counter some of the market presences and even distortions now found in the higher education system. Since the dominant forces are entirely the other way, in favour of competition and individualism, collaboration is likely to have a hard time of it. Even within a single university, departments will come to compete against each other and individuals will be subtly encouraged to promote their own interests. In the UK, the research assessment exercise promotes *both* institutional competition and academic individualism. The spaces of collaboration therefore, are opening and closing all at once. They swirl around and in and out of each other. Opportunities for collaboration open but always threaten to close again.

Critical questions

There are three critical questions to be posed of the theme of collaboration, and they run into each other. Firstly, to what extent does 'collaboration' herald a loss of self? Does collaboration not mark a giving up, a surrendering, of some part of the self? Western academic life has given high value to the self, not just to individuals, but to the authentic self. It is out of the authentic self that utterances can be struggled for, and then trusted. It is the self that imagines anew. This individualism is marked in honours and prizes (such as the Nobel prize) which honours the strivings and achievements of individuals. It is also marked in the assessment system where degrees are given to students. Collaboration reminds us that many of these achievements are made possible only through group efforts but still, the individual mind and will to struggle will be forgotten only at some cost. The quiet revolution in moving from 'the reflective practitioner' to 'communities of practice' as a totemic phrase in professional development is telling. This shift towards the collective is diminishing a concern with the individual mind.

This honouring and valuing of the self is connected with a spirit of openness and criticality, again long-standing parts of the culture of western academe. So a second question arises: To what extent does the trope of collaboration also herald a diminution of criticality? The honouring of the individual reflects respect being paid to the individual. The views of the individual,

provided that they conform to certain disciplinary and wider academic norms, *matter*. The idea of academic freedom, now fraying somewhat around the edges as it suffers little cuts here and there, betokens a double concern in according space for individuals to speak out, and for the culture of criticality that such spaces can sustain. Collaboration, on the other hand, may unwittingly amount to just such a diminution of spaces for criticality, for in collaboration, it may be more difficult for individuals to speak out. There may be sensitivities at play. Individuals may even come to censure themselves under conditions of firm collaboration. In the process, the culture of criticality may dwindle. So collaboration may unwittingly form a vehicle for the suppression of dissent. Instead, conformity may be its watchword.

A third question follows on: is collaboration a new ideology or might it become such? Is collaboration to become a major project for universities, brooking no argument? Will it be driven forward with unflinching determination? Perhaps each university will have its own 'Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Collaboration', each one heading an 'Office for Collaboration'. There will be actual physical offices for collaboration, with staff and physical resources; and even a 'Help desk' to advise on ways of developing collaborative ventures. This collaboration has the prospect of turning into a vicious ideology, the potential virtuousness in the idea of collaboration being extinguished (cf Barnett 2002). Kant saw the university as contributing to the development of public reason, a development made possible through the activities of the lone scholar having a space in which to think and speak out. But the thinking space and the speaking out is not just an issue about the public realm. Within universities, with collaboration being driven forward with ideological fervour, spaces for the individual will shrink, as the group becomes the dominant means of research. Scholarly activity falls away and criticality within the university fades. Vice-chancellors will have an easier time of it.

Possibilities and their management

Collaboration has several virtuous possibilities. Collaboration can open up new epistemological complexes, it can enable a new inclusivity in academic activities (through the contribution of multiple perspectives and contributions), and it can enable the university to form new relationships with its wider environment. The tasks confronting the university, if it is seriously to engage with the large problems of the world, require both disparate cognitive resources and multiple communities. Collaboration is a necessary condition of the university realising its possibilities and its responsibilities in the world in the twenty-first century.

'The collaborative university' is a new kind of university, a university not merely aware of its environment but actively engaged in it. This is a university neither in-itself nor for-itself but *for-others* (or, strictly speaking, for-the-Other) (cf Barnett 2011). It is seized by an awareness of a large world beyond itself but which yet has claims upon it. It is embarked upon an attempt to realise its responsibilities in and to the world; and it knows that that project calls for collaboration. Whether it has its eye on making a contribution to the civic society of its immediate region, or to some part of the developing world, its resources are too limited to pull off its possibilities: collaboration is an inevitable consequence of a university framing its possibilities in this way. Such collaboration might be financial (in order to 'leverage' more resources), practical or cognitive; or any combination of these. Collaboration can take many forms and can be evident in all the activities of the university.

Such collaboration requires astute management and leadership. Collaboration is no way to the easy life. It brings many challenges, at once organisational, ideological and relational. There are two major challenges especially. The first is that of governance: put simply 'Who is in charge?' The success of any collaborative project is dependent on there being a clear sense of direction, and

an understood structure for decision making and the enactment of decisions. Characteristically too, within a large and complex organisation such as a university, each collaborative venture (whether in teaching, research or outreach) will have its place in a larger structure that provides support and resources. In turn, there is a linked question: 'Who is accountable?' The embedding of any collaborative venture, especially when there are partners in another institution (or even institutions) can be a complex matter.

There is though, a more deep-seated complex of issues that could be said to be both ideological *and* relational. The key issue here is this: 'How is the project or venture being understood among its participants?' Crucially, is there an integrative theme or idea to which all participants are signed up? Unless the participants are more or less agreed and united on a common description and understanding of the project, relationships amongst them are likely to be fragile and communication fraught with difficulty. This ideological aspect has ramifications beyond the participants, for if there is no commonly accepted description among the participants, the project will not be communicated effectively and its potential will be vitiated. It is in turn, the role of leadership, as distinct from management, to help to identify and advance such a description of the project, with a set of purposes that actually commands the allegiance of participants. The forming of such an allegiance calls for the most complex form of leadership, that of the formation of a consensus; and this is particularly challenging if the participants are both within and outside a particular university. This is not to imply complete unity, but it is at least to discern and to encourage the adoption of a set of high-order concepts and principles over which there can be unity. Ultimately, effective collaboration requires voluntariness on the part of participants since without their consent, a collaborative project is no form of collaboration.

Conclusion

Collaboration is a theme whose time has come. The collaborative university is emerging and there is every prospect that it is here to stay. There can be no ratcheting back. It comes with virtuous credentials. Collaboration betokens many worthwhile prospects for the university, of maximising its resources, of forming new partnerships within and beyond the university, and of helping to achieve new purposes of civic good and societal improvement. There are, though, some potential disbenefits that should also be put into the balance sheet, especially the potential for a closing off of spaces for critical thought and speaking out, and for a dent in the potential for the university to contribute to public reason. If collaboration is to achieve its potential and the disbenefits minimised, the most astute and wise leadership and management (which are not the same thing) are called for.

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    York, Routledge.

Ronald Barnett is Emeritus Professor of Higher Education at the Institute of Education, London. His work focuses on the conceptual understanding of the university and higher education. His books include *Realizing the University in an Age of Supercomplexity*, *A Will to Learn: Being a Student in an Age of Uncertainty* and, most recently, *Being a University*. He is a past-Chair of the Society for Research into Higher Education and has been an invited speaker in 30 countries.

'It's a reciprocal thing'

A reflection on a four year community – university partnership

■ DR DAVE SIMPSON

Abstract

Our well-established community partnership brings school students and university students together in a variety of activities that include small group teaching, mentoring and work on curriculum focus days. This paper identifies how the project works from the university perspective, the benefits we see in our work, and how such a partnership is relevant to all schools across the university as a whole. The paper discusses the values and visions which underpin our work and outlines future directions within the context of changes to government policies for universities.

From September 2006 to July 2010 a local secondary school works with the School of Education on a sustainable partnership. Table 1 (p 63) shows an overview of the partnership's development. The partnership enables students to make, in the words of the university teaching and learning strategy, 'connections between their academic study, their reflective self-awareness, and their experiential learning inside and outside the curriculum' (University of Brighton 2007: 8). The partnership's sustainability comes from a plan-implement-evaluate cycle, which provides a basis for the evolution of a range of activities. By the end of the partnership, university students can work in small group literacy lessons, mentor year nine students' learning, work in day long health and sex education projects, and make oral narratives – often acting as buddies on an annual storytelling day to summer school students from the University of Chicago, Illinois.

From the outset, the partnership's focus is the quality of engagement between school and university students. The focus is part of a conscious effort to move Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students away from a standards-led approach to work placements. Because of the long-term nature of the partnership, university students have different opportunities to work with young people that are often beyond the prescriptions of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) standards. Roker's (2007) five key success characteristics for community-university partnership work show this scope: depending on the activity, university students can negotiate a commitment with school staff, complete a small-scale project which makes up the assessment for a level five or six assignment, and plan a self-esteem raising programme, for example (see Table 2, p 64). The activities bring together degree level work, work placement and the sense of becoming a teacher, which Hoban (2007) believes are essential for a thoughtful teacher who is a lifelong learner.

The joint chair of the partnership refers to the partnership as 'a reciprocal thing'. The partnership concentrates consciously on the development of a shared commitment to learning through the partnership process, as well as coming to an understanding of its influence on all student and staff participants. A lot of importance is also attached to the tentative nature of the partnership: it is sustained as it evolves to respond to changes in the policies and practices of both institutions. As changes take effect, the reciprocal nature of the relationship is itself a basis for discussions and decisions. In retrospect the project illustrates Connelly and Clandinin's (1994: 74) belief that collaboration occurs when:

> '...people are treated equally rather than hierarchically; authority is shared; respect and reciprocity of response equally confirms collaborating partners. Lives are brought to relationships and lives are enhanced in educational relationship. There is no imposition of one life on another. Instead, educational communities of value to university faculty and school teachers and to school teachers and students are created'.

Evaluations by pupils and students confirm that this happens throughout the four years of the partnership. One common feature is how much they enjoy each other's company; a further related point is the consistency of working with the same people for a period of time (*'Have you got my student?'* a pupil asks me one morning).

'Reciprocal' conveys further dimensions that make the partnership sustainable. One of the most under-rated of which, is the emotional impact of the partnership on all concerned – school students and staff, university students and staff. People become attached to the work: some university students take part in activities in each of the four years of their course. Friendships develop between school and university colleagues. They lead to other small-scale projects which school and university staff enjoy together (for instance, MA fieldwork, university staff working on a school-initiated PHSE lesson sequence). Mezirow (2004: 12) writes that 'Feelings of trust, solidarity, security, and empathy are essential preconditions for free full participation in discourse'. These feelings ensure that evaluation and review procedures revolve around need and potential, not on competences or standards. In this way there is an agreed, unequivocal focus on 'whole person' learning (Percy Smith 2005). Whilst outcomes are found in all sectors of education, it is people who make as well as control them, and ultimately, allocate them significance. The emotional 'gain' from the partnership positions the standards as a background, not the foreground.

A second dimension to the sustainability comes from the partnership's advocacy of whole person learning. It makes university students feel involved in their learning. In Bonnet's words (2002: 5): 'The pre-occupation with the publicly agreed categories, procedures and standards ... runs the risk of producing a depersonalised understanding'. The demand for students to demonstrate competence in, and collect evidence for, over 30 government QTS standards is a way to exert a form of control which makes learning into a form of compliance. One role of the partnership's activities is to reduce this emphasis: a university community partnership builds personal and intellectual connections that dissolve distinctions between seminars and placement. For example, a citizenship day spent with a group of year eight students meets a number of standards; but it also reveals that there are things which lie beyond them, such as the need to stretch capacities to empathise and feel responsible for a different group of learners, for instance. A citizenship or storytelling day is a critical dialogue with the standards that govern their professional life. Standards are more immediate and individual when there is time to work with young people, to question, challenge and refine ideas about the standards through such work, and to begin to come to terms with the implied emotional commitments that are outside the standards. The tensions are summarised by Bonnet, who writes about teaching in the 1990s. 'We are, in part,

considering the way in which one can, and sometimes should be, affected personally by what one knows' (1994: 90). To be a teacher in the twenty-first century is to work with the emotional pull of one's professional practice as part of being a teacher.

Eraut argues that 'emotional aspects of learning at work' are now significant because 'work place learning is more than induction into existing practices' (Eraut 2007: 4170). The partnership's activities give university students insights into what it is to make relationships with other professionals, and to do so alongside fostering relationships with the young people. In doing so it reveals an affective element of professional uncertainty. In the emergent multi-agency world, professionals doubt their role (White et al 2006) and the status of their voice (Anning et al 2006) within a changing work environment. For example, to be part of a nurture group activity is to join a team that has members from Social Services, the Primary Care Trust (PCT) as well as education. Students become sensitised to new practices, their discourse and the potential for them to impact upon them as teachers in the twenty-first century.

John (2000) reports on how, in nursing, the traditional rational discourse is questioned because in situations of indeterminacy emotional engagement can help to promote effective decision making. What it is to be a teacher, and how one becomes a teacher, is currently being redefined by government as well as research. The partnership shows that mastery of government competences is now accompanied by a commitment to multi-agency working, in which professionals are insecure of their role as well as their status, and that students who are on work placements do more than acquire standards: they feel a commitment to their work in the changing environment. The activities in the partnership help students to understand the role of emotional investment, and the extent to which it is now an accepted and valued part of an uncertain, shifting professional landscape.

A further success of the partnership for university students is to bring lifelong learning to the forefront of ITE students' thinking. For instance, the process of drawing up a training plan for work placements includes reflection on experiences of work at the school. It gives students increased ownership, and helps them to see that such plans are not a record of deficits to be put right on placement. A plan for work placement now uses a four-fold model based upon strengths, areas for development, enthusiasms and new skills that the student would like to acquire. It is an intellectual basis for lifelong learning that comes from 'those capacities and habits that will enable them to continue learning throughout their adult life' (Black et al 2006: 122). Through a placement plan that makes the student the central agent in their learning, the partnership becomes a visible part of lifelong learning.

Following on from the development of training plans that empower students on placement, a further benefit is that it moves students on from thinking of work with school students purely in terms of meeting standards for QTS. Activities in the partnership enable students to find their individual enthusiasms within teaching and realise how they differ from their peers. As student X summarises time spent on several of the partnership's projects:

> 'The more I did, the more I started to think about what I wanted to do. I couldn't be like X (another student) who knows that they want to teach English and that's all. There are other things that I really like doing, clubs and stuff. I've got more out of the curriculum days than the teaching in year two. But that's me'.

The partnership offers diverse experiences for university students. Student X can compare and contrast the experience of work in the school, reflect on which activities give greater insight into a potential future role in school, and recognise the emergence of a professional identity that differs from someone in the same peer group. Student X is stimulated to consider alternatives,

which suggests that participation in the activity is bound up with a sense of ownership of the direction of their future. This student has opportunities to reinterpret in a personal way, ideas that come from university seminars, supported and self directed reading and at least one assignment. Hounsell (1984) believes this is how we all, as learners, interiorise learning. The partnership's activities contextualise ideas and create opportunities for the interpretation of experience. This encourages students to come to terms with how they relate to the world as cognitive and affective learners, and not just as intending teachers.

Through the partnership's programme, Student X has experience of working in the new multi-disciplinary professional world. It is a way to come into contact with the current questions of professional voice. Student Y, on the same course but in a different year group, sees the issues that surround voice from a different perspective. For this activity Y is accompanied by two other students, all of whom make a 10 session, one hour a week commitment:

> *'We did the assessment for learning. I had to sort it all out with the teacher, get the stuff together and tell him what targets we'd sorted out in the time. We got some things right. M (the Head of Department) was great. We learned a lot from him about how to bring all the data together, and he discussed with us how he'll use what we did. We also talked with other people about what we did, like N who runs the drop in. I liked all that'.*

They make their own way to the school at a time they agree with the Head of Department, negotiate an agreed programme with the teacher, together with targets for the school's students, and have their work monitored and evaluated. This comes across as usual for Student Y, who expects to talk in different ways with professionals who have different concerns and responsibilities. The voice is that of a learner who can contribute, and at the same time accept responsibility for what is done. The final comment *'I liked all that'* is a further example of the emotional pull of the work on a university student.

The storytelling and citizenship days bring together students from many courses and routes within the School of Education, and across the university as a whole. Every July, American students on a summer school programme take part, along with at least ten university staff. This creates a different horizon for the university students. They meet and work with their contemporaries from other disciplines who have aspirations and career intentions, which are often far removed from their own. The diversity of views and experiences, which can include students 'buddying' others or leading groups, encourages the view that to be at university should include work with people from other courses and disciplines. A community-university partnership can bring students together to share multiple perspectives on teaching and learning. PGCE Secondary English use these days as recruitment points, where potential or actual applicants meet and work with students already on the course. Academic discipline based education is broadened when a partnership brings together the different disciplines, peer groups and university staff to work together with young people.

At a CUPP seminar in March 2010, Stuart Laing (Laing 2010) asks the question 'Why should learning in the twenty-first century look like learning in the twentieth century?' He argues for two related things. First, universities must move beyond seeing themselves as a base for graduate level jobs and thus improving the GDP. Second, community engagement should be at the centre of what universities are for in the twenty-first century. On this view 'partnership' is pivotal to a university's purpose; teaching, learning and scholarship are to converge through an explicit community focus. His question comes at a moment when the local school moves towards closure, prior to reopening as an academy in September 2010, and an imminent general election brings anxieties about what many think are under performing public services. In addition, the proposed economic measures of the coalition government give an edge to his question.

The partnership discussed in this paper supports Laing's views. It maintains a sustainable momentum because it moves gradually from a base of one literacy activity until it becomes cross-curricula and reaches into the local community. The school's curriculum is the basis for all the activities which run throughout the duration of the partnership; knowledge is not owned by the university and 'given' to the school. Pedagogy is shared, discussed and agreed through planning that brings together school staff and organisations as diverse as the PCT and Safe as Houses. The partnership also works with people across the community, like a local cartoonist for instance, and parents and grandparents of current and past school students. Everyone has expertise which is respected, and there is a desire to collaborate between colleagues, school and university students. The context in which this planning takes place cannot be ignored because during the partnership's lifetime 'Every Child Matters' (DCFS 2004) and the 'Children's Plan' (DCFS 2008) come into being. Both involve multi-agency work based on the needs of a child (Ward and Eden 2008), and are part of a 'reconfiguration of (the) professional relationships to support the social inclusion of children and young people' (Edwards et al 2009: 3). Over the course of the partnership there is an evolution from partnership to partnerships, from work only with teachers, to a series of integrated, networked collaborations between the university and professional communities, as well as the school's immediate locality, all which come from the school's curriculum and its broader social priorities. At the same time, the partnership is effective in responding to a government policy which looks to coherent collaboration between all who work with young people.

A second area of support for Laing's ideas comes from a combination of the flexibility which is built into the partnership's programme and the emotional investment made by students. It is also a further reason for the partnership's sustainability. By the third phase for example, it is possible for a student to take part in a citizenship day for a total of six hours, or to work on a two hour mentoring activity. Furthermore, one subject based assignment at level five and another at level six are based on work in the partnership. As the collaborations begin to extend, students can select from activities according to their interests as well as career aspirations, and realistically, the amount of time that they have available. Some take part in five different activities during their course. As one student summed up their work on the project:

> 'I felt what I did mattered to the kids, they're lovely. But I also knew that it had moved me on, even if like last term I just did a couple of hours. It's all on my cv and I'll definitely talk about it at interview'.

There is a commitment which embraces the role of affective engagement in becoming a teacher, and moves teaching and learning towards a modular structure, which relies less on contact hours and more on the partnership's original focus of the quality of engagement between community and university. Within this is emotional engagement. However the partnership raises a question for the term 'volunteering'. Currently participation in the activities is voluntary. With ITE facing changes in shape as well as direction, it can be argued that a similar programme can become part of every university student's course. It then moves from enrichment to entitlement.

Community-university partnerships are needed if universities are to transform themselves to do more than simply meet the demands of an ends driven, assessment dominated, target driven government education agenda. One of the many dilemmas currently facing us is that we have to challenge our own thinking, whilst at the same time defending ourselves from a government determined to undermine our capabilities to question, challenge and innovate.

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Table 1: Overview of the evolution of the partnership 2006-10

Planning for Phase One		
Small group teaching for five weeks - one hour a week	PHSE lessons - five 25 minute lessons	
Reflection and evaluation: planning for Phase Two		
Small group teaching for five weeks - one hour a week	PGCE English and Science lead a GCSE year 10 Science coursework afternoon	Storytelling – a day of workshops staffed by school, university and community
Reflection and evaluation: planning for Phase Three		
Small group teaching for five weeks – one hour a week	Storytelling – a day of workshops	Citizenship Day – workshop run by the community, including PCT
Assessment for learning – one hour a week for 10 weeks		Complementary placement – one or two students for six weeks
		Nurture group – small single sex group, one two hour session

Table 2: Success characteristics and benefits of the partnership for university students (adapted from Roker 2007)

Activity	How is the shared vision achieved?	Benefit	Personal relationships	Individual and organisational flexibility	Senior staff leadership and commitment
Small group literacy teaching	School provides objectives which are shared and discussed with university students	A level five university assessment* Management of small group learning*	University students plan and evaluate work together weekly contact with small group of school students	University students work with the school's timetable pattern, adapting lesson plans as necessary	University and school senior staff plan the length and scope of overall programme together
Assessment for learning	University students negotiate individualised objectives with school staff	Experience of mentoring and formative assessment*	University students plan and evaluate work together Weekly contact with individual or small group of school students	University students negotiate with class teachers the time for and length of contact (usually one hour for eight weeks)	School middle management staff and individual students negotiate work
University student-led action research project	University students negotiate research objectives with school staff	A level six university assessment* Extensive PHSE teaching experience	University student plans and carries out research, including focus group teaching and interviewing	University student works as a member of a team based in the school and has to manage time and workload	School middle management staff and university student negotiate work and outcome
Citizenship Day – PHSE focus	School and university staff plan programme, including evaluation	Experience of teaching and mentoring PHSE in a one day series of workshops*	University and school students work together for a day and evaluate school student progress against objectives	University students work with the timetabled activities and take part in them	University, school senior and middle management staff, community organisations and individuals plan the programme together
Storytelling Day – making a narrative	School and university staff plan programme, including evaluation	Experience of teaching and mentoring whilst making an oral narrative*	University and school students work together for a day and evaluate school student progress against objectives	University students work with the timetabled activities and take part in them	University, school senior and middle management staff, community organisations and individuals plan the programme together
Nurture group	School and university staff plan programme, including evaluation	Experience of one to one mentoring of a young person*	University students have time to develop a working relationship with a young person	University students work flexibly with the programme adapting it to their young person's needs	University and school middle management staff plan the nature and focus of the programme together

*The benefit and learning column includes, but does not specify, the QTS Standards which university students achieve through the activity.

Dr Dave Simpson works in the School of Education. He teaches English, with special interests in the roles of drama in the twenty-first century curriculum and teaching poetry. For five years he has run, in collaboration with community partners, a range of projects which bring together university and school students. He is currently developing confidence and self esteem materials for use in cross-curricula educational contexts.

Technology in teaching and learning
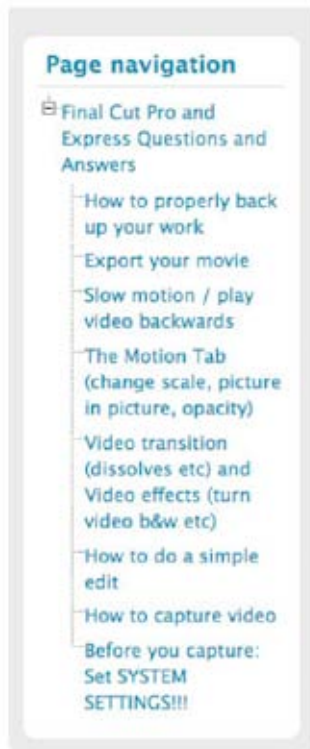
A state of mind?

■ SINA KRAUSE

Abstract

This research presents ways to, and reasons for, integrating asynchronous learning networks (ALNs) in teaching and learning. It also addresses common obstacles that may prevent the implementation of ALNs, namely a fixed mindset and the fear that this technology will diminish face-to-face classroom teaching. The focus will be on examples from community@brighton, the University of Brighton's own ALN/social networking site (SNS) run on ELGG software, although the conclusions drawn also apply to ALN/SNSs run internally by other higher education institutions. Integrating these sites into teaching and learning has the potential to improve students query-based search skills, information literacy, subject knowledge and terminology. The paper argues that partnerships between teaching staff, technical staff and students, together with a particular mindset are essential for the success of this form of elearning.

Introduction

The integration of ALNs/SNSs into higher education is nothing new, yet there seems to be a division between people who embrace the technology and others who shy away from it. For example, there are good reasons to be critical of the use of Facebook in this context. Losing intellectual property rights, information storage on external servers, no control over cyber-bullying, the requirement of students to sign up with Facebook and a possibly awkward crossover of academic and social interaction are just some of those reasons (Cain 2008; Lorenzo 2006). The use of a university's own ALN however, will circumvent these issues and allow for a safe online environment situated within a learning rather than the social context. Hence the term 'social networking site' in relation to a university's own site can be misleading, if neither students nor staff perceive it as a space where teaching and learning can take place. This paper will present three practical examples of the use of community@brighton and its role in enhancing teaching and learning. At the same time it is important to emphasis the core argument, which is that ALNs can enrich lessons, inductions and presentations. Hence the focus is on blended learning that incorporates face-to-face teaching as well as ALNs. This is not the same as distance learning, where ALNs replace all face-to-face teaching (Bates 2005).

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⊟ Final Cut Pro and
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Example one: the online forum: query-based search skills, subject knowledge and terminology

ALNs can be used to create an online forum about any subject. For example the creative and IT industry professionals make use of internet forums such as Creative COW to help them through software problems. This kind of partnership and peer support is well established in those sectors, yet using forums as part of teaching and learning is still alien to many students and possibly some staff. Yet it is exactly this ability to use sophisticated search techniques that makes people information literate (Pool 1997).

An online forum can aid this process. In many ways it works like a hand-out. Ideally it lists all the points demonstrated in an induction for students to refer to at a later date. Yet the main difference is its interactivity. Students can add questions or comments, clarify issues, or even answer questions posted by other students. The challenging task in this, is to formulate an appropriate question in order to get a relevant answer. If a software instructor is at hand, students can ask a question by demonstrating what they want within the software. By formulating a written question they need to choose the correct terminology for the subject area. Hence an online forum requires users to develop their subject knowledge in order to pose a relevant question. Eisenberg (2008) describes information literacy as the set of skills and knowledge that not only allows us to find, evaluate and use the information we need, but perhaps more importantly, to filter out the information we do not need. In many ways this skill is essential when trying to learn new software. Even trained people will not know everything about every software product, but when encountering a problem, they know which questions to ask and where to find the answers. Students need to be able to adopt this approach. It is therefore, important to understand that while students may have grown up with the latest technology at their fingertips, this does not mean that they know how to navigate the web effectively (Kennedy et al 2007). Software updates happen frequently and the version that they were originally inducted in, will not necessarily be the one they need to use in a future workplace. It is important to change the way students engage with knowledge (Mentis 2008).

As Hoelscher (2000) states, it is important to differentiate between the background knowledge related to a topic area and web expertise as such. He defines web expertise as 'a type of media competence, ie, the knowledge and skills necessary to utilise the world wide web and other internet resources successfully to solve information problems' (ibid). The frustration that comes with unsuccessful web searches is a result of applying the wrong search technique. There is a difference between browsing the web and active information seeking (ibid). The most basic kind of search task is the 'look up' search (Marchionini 2006), which includes checking the weather forecast or train times. These elements of factual information can be retrieved quickly and hardly need any further interpretation. This search approach is not sufficient however, to answer questions on how to operate a certain type of software, which is why students often claim not to be able to find the relevant answers on the web. It is a lack of subject knowledge and terminology, together with the wrong search approach that returns no answers to their questions.

An online forum on community@brighton allows them to slowly build up their terminology in a safe environment. It also allows the instructor to monitor their questions and see where the gaps are in subject knowledge and terminology. Once students are confident and able to ask the relevant questions for query-based searching (Hoelscher 2000), they are more success-ful in searching the web for answers. They are moving on from a look up search to a learning search, which requires 'the information seeker to spend time scanning/viewing, comparing, and making qualitative judgments' (Marchionini 2006). Students need to learn that this type of search means spending a lot more time and effort, yet it is part of the learning process. The time spent searching decreases when they move from a novice state into a more experienced state (Marchionini 2006; Hoelscher 2000). Therefore, creating and maintaining online forums on communty@brighton allows students to practice their terminology, and apply their subject knowledge to become more successful in their learning searches.

Example two: module repository

Community@brighton is a great starting point to establish blended learning. It can be used to create a module repository to which staff and students can add and review material. In the example of the digital animation module, staff and students would use the virtual space to share sample animations, their own films, relevant bookmarks and presentations. The asynchronous element of this learning network is particularly effective, as members can add to the community at any time. It is a helpful tool for critiquing each other's work, as some students find it easier to write things down than say them in class. It also allows students to reflect on their contribu-tions and therefore 'offers a distinct advantage in supporting higher levels of learning through critical discourse and reflective thinking' (Garrison 2004). It connects students to their module outside of the set classroom times, and in the process facilitates a community of inquiry (ibid).

Use of Community@Brighton as Module Repository
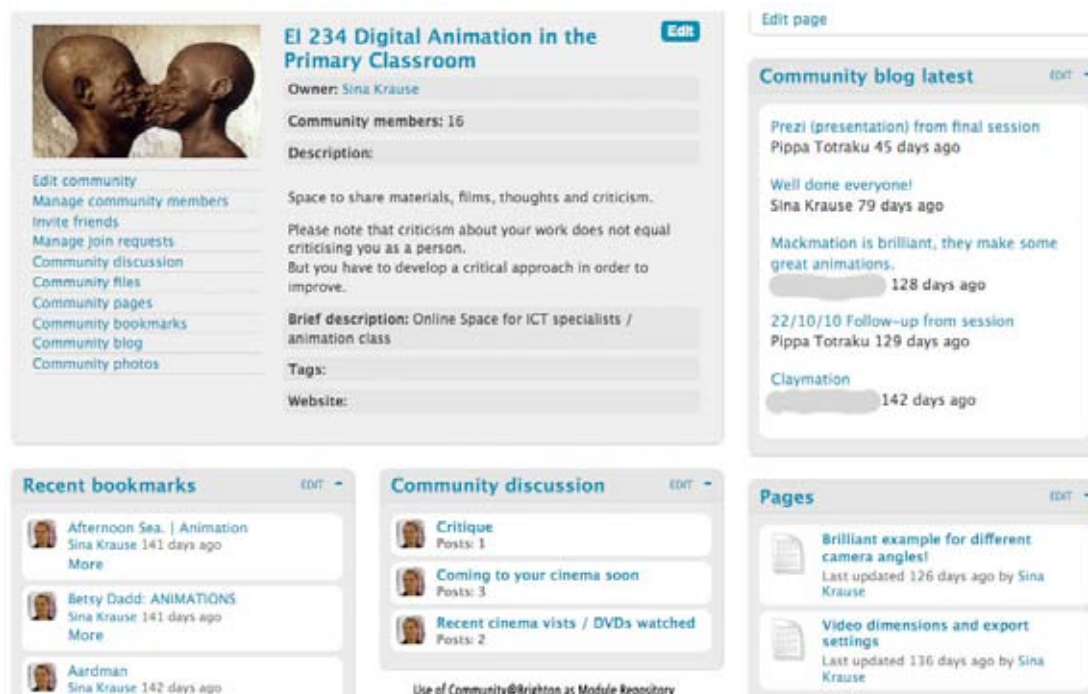
During contact time the repository works as a good tool for recapturing discussions from the previous session. Hence staff and students use it during the actual teaching lesson, as well as during non-contact time. By the end of a module the repository does not just hold relevant subject information, but also shows the process of interaction and sharing.

Example three: conference presentation aide

Example of Community@Brighton as Conference Presentation Aide

Another, possibly unusual, use of community@brighton is as a conference presentation aide. This approach has many advantages. The community would not be created solely for the conference, but at the point where the research starts. Hence it works in a similar way to the module repository example, the difference being that the researcher is potentially the only user to access the community at the beginning. It is a place to store writing, thought processes, bookmarks and everything that is relevant to the project. Findings can then be summed up for the conference presentation using a tool called Prezi. This presenter tool is a great alternative to PowerPoint and is free to use in an educational context. The final presentation can be exported from Prezi and embedded into community. During the talk it works as a visual aide. At the same time, the presenter has all the background research available should it be needed for follow-up questions. Additionally, staff members can request access to the community and continue the discussion long after the conference. Thus, community@brighton is also a good place to establish and nurture a research community. The presentation might also be turned into an academic paper and so the online community allows the same research to be disseminated in a different format. This fusion could be one solution to finding approaches to researching online communication and new technologies (Markham 2005). An academic paper in itself cannot react to sudden changes in technological advances and does not allow for interaction. Hence, in some instances the online environment seems a more fitting space for dissemination, although it may not be able to offer the same level of acceptance of an academic publication. In partnership however, both mediums can open up a potential new path in research activity.

From adoption to acceptance

The first section has shown three examples of using community@brighton and the reasons and benefits derived. From a technical point of view, these communities are easy to set up and just need some training and practice with the software. So the obstacle preventing people from engaging more with ALNs is not a technical one as such. Jaffee (1998) points out that the big discrepancy between the numbers of early adopters and non-adopters is a fear that ALNs mean the end of classroom teaching, which has become a cornerstone of educational practices. While distance learning has done away with the physical classroom, blended learning makes use of both face-to-face interaction and the virtual space. In this context, the online and offline worlds work together in partnership, where one enhances but does not replace the other. It is the random and incorrect use of terms such as elearning, distance learning and blended learning that makes

people jump to the wrong conclusions. Plus, it is important to avoid 'unrealistic claims about the ability of technology to solve all pedagogical challenges' (ibid). Technology is not a means to an end, but when used creatively, it can help solve some pedagogical challenges. In order for this to happen however, 'a distinction must be made between the adoption or use of a technology and the acceptance of the technology as a legitimate means of instruction' (ibid). And it is exactly this move from adoption to acceptance that requires a particular shift in mindset.

Mindset

This section looks at psychology research and attitudes towards computers, since 'mindset' is one of the crucial considerations to take into account when discussing the use of technology in higher education. A common attitude is that there are 'people that do computer and people that don't' (Haas 1994). This kind of thinking includes the assumption of some, that 'computers are not our job', which implies a division of labour (ibid). Caroline Dweck (2002) shows in her research that belief has a profound effect on behaviour, which in this instance, means that when people believe that computers are not their job, they will not engage with them in the way needed in the twenty-first century century. In this case 'engaging' does not mean expert knowledge in programming, installation and software use. 'Engaging' means to give it a try and to allow for failure.

Dweck (2006) differentiates between two mindsets: the fixed mindset and the growth mindset. In relation to computer attitudes, the fixed mindset assumes that people either know computers or they do not, and that computer skills are something of a fixed trait. Thus, any IT work is simply based on individual ability. Fixed mindset people acknowledge the fact that they do not have that ability and so will not try and cannot fail. Yet people with the growth mindset do not look at computer skills as a fixed trait but as an expandable quality (Dweck 2002). It is not something some people can do and others cannot, but something that everyone can learn. Hence the emphasis is not on ability, but on effort. Growth mindset people face challenges and learn as a result. Surely this is a mindset we should encourage and foster within higher education, where skills can be learned as long as one makes an effort. Ability therefore, is not the limiting factor, although time very well might be.

The growth mindset is similar to the technical mindset. Often the term 'technical expertise' is misunderstood, because it seems to imply having an immediate answer to any technical problem. 'Expertise' does not allow for failure, which is ironic when it comes to the technical approach, since it very much relies on trial and error. Failure or errors are even welcome when trying to solve a computer problem, as it excludes one option and ideally, gets one closer to the solution. So when people claim that 'technology fails me all the time', they might not realise that technology fails technically trained people too. The difference is that fixed mindset people will feel disillusioned and stop engaging at that point, while growth mindset people will see it as a challenge and an opportunity to learn.

As discussed, attitudes towards computers will determine the approach to, and engagement with them. And it is more likely that people with fixed mindsets see themselves as users (if at all), rather than shapers of technology. Yet it is crucial that there is an interaction between those with profound subject knowledge and those who know about computers to influence and shape technological inventions and developments (Haas 1994). And the emphasis is on *during* not afterwards. A passive approach to technological development puts people automatically in a subordinate position to technology and turns them into receivers instead of shapers (ibid). This means that the power to shape technology is left to 'those that do computers' by default (ibid).

Partnership

For change to take place, learners need to rethink their mindset and opt for a more open-minded approach. There needs to be more contact across disciplinary boundaries through research communities and teamwork (ibid) because interrelations are so complex, that one person cannot hold all the knowledge. It is essential to collaborate to use collective knowledge to shape technology that makes sense, and is useful in the context of higher education. There is no escaping the influence technology has on everyone, so it is important to ensure that we understand and control that influence (ibid). This would allow for empowerment rather than simply reception (Martin 2003). A way forward would be to create real partnerships, not just across academic subject areas, but also between academic, administrative and technical staff. The combination of academic subject knowledge, databases, organisation skills and technical approaches could lead to some surprising and effective results. The next step is to add students to that equation. Their involvement is crucial, and this allows them to be part of a research community as well as laying the basis for lifelong learning.

Conclusion

This research showed simple examples of embedding community@brighton into higher education activities. It also clarified that this approach, defined as blended learning, requires face-to-face as well as online teaching, and demonstrated how this can improve peer learning, information literacy and in particular students query-based search skills, subject knowledge and terminology. It further established that there are particular search techniques that students need to be familiar with, for example, the difference between merely browsing a simple look up search and a more sophisticated learning search. It showed how ALNs offer a safe environment to practice the subject terminology which is crucial to the development of an experienced (re)searcher.

The research made use of the psychology of mindset in order to identify potential obstacles, and argued that the growth mindset is necessary for the use of technology and blended learning to succeed. It acknowledged that technical systems and innovations are so complex that there is too much knowledge for one person to hold, and so partnerships between teaching, administrative, technical staff and students are essential. Non-ICT specialists need to play a part in the shaping of technology, so it can be relevant to their needs.

Acknowledgements

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Sina Krause is a technical demonstrator at the School of Media and Arts (in particular for the Critical Fine Art Practice course) and School of Education. Previously, she was employed by a computer company specialising in custom-made video editing machines, presented creative software at major tradeshows and worked as a sound engineer for live music venues. She also worked for the Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning through Design (CETLD) offering technical support for the different research projects funded by CETLD. She has a BA (Hons) in Theatre and Visual Art and an MA in Critical and Cultural Theory – Globalisation, Politics and Culture, both from the University of Brighton.

Developing inter-professional learning

Evaluating boundary crossing in higher education

■ MARK PRICE AND DR TERESA CAIRNS

Abstract

An evaluation of the second cross-faculty, inter-professional learning day for students on professional qualification award programmes in the Faculty of Education and Sport and Faculty of Health and Social Science, highlights the importance of developing an understanding of others' values and perspectives. Consideration of occupational and organisational professionalism supports analysis of the way in which students in the early stages of professional formation can interact and engage in boundary spanning and 'knotworking' activity.

Introduction

Movements in the policy framework governing health, social care and children's services since 2000, 'The NHS Plan' (DOH 2000), 'Working Together-Learning Together' (DOH 2001), alongside successive enquiries and media analysis (Kennedy 2001; Laming 2003) highlighting interagency communication issues, have made inter-professional learning a key focus for higher education institutions delivering professional qualification and pre-registration programmes. Additionally, 'Benchmarking Academic and Practitioner Standards' (QAA 2001) and 'The Common Core' (DfES 2005), emphasise the importance of multi-disciplinary working as a key thread to all practice and professional development.

At the University of Brighton in recent years, inter-professional learning (IPL) and the examination of multi-disciplinary practices have gained greater prominence across children and young people's workforce professional development programmes, principally through the Faculty of Education and Sport (School of Education and Chelsea School) and the Faculty of Health (Schools of Applied Social Science, Nursing and Midwifery and Health Professions). In the School of Education, for example, study at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels through the work-based learning foundation degree programme, the BA (Hons) Professional Studies in Learning and Development, and the MA Education, is beginning to more directly reflect developments in practice in the field, evident across children and young people's services.

The Faculty of Health and Social Science (FHSS) have extensive, well-established IPL activities across all faculty disciplines (nursing; midwifery; occupational therapy; physiotherapy; social work; podiatry) which link to, and work closely with Brighton and Sussex Medical School and the School of Pharmacy and Biomolecular Sciences. The work spans both pre-registration/

qualification level and post registration/qualification level, with an integrated graduate programme that enables students from all disciplines to access modules across all FHSS schools.

The initiative by the university-wide Every Child Matters (ECM) working group to develop IPL across all schools working with the children and young people's workforce, has been a proactive response to developing policy in this area that is increasingly impacting on practice, and therefore requires a wider engagement within professional training settings.

The second IPL day (November 2009) was organised through the ECM working group, comprising course leaders from professional award programmes for those working with children and young people. It involved approximately 180-200 students in their final stages of professional preparation from nursing, education, social work, youth work, early years and midwifery, alongside lecturers and practitioners in these fields. The broad purpose of the day was to foster inter-professional understanding and awareness, and so facilitate multi-disciplinary working in the field.

Supported by a University of Brighton Research Fellowship, Dr Teresa Cairns was appointed to undertake an evaluation of the 2009 IPL day. The purpose of this evaluation was to review the experience gained from the two IPL days to date, to facilitate feedback to professional practitioners and educators, and to support the IPL/ECM working group in considering the focus of future IPL work within the university. The evaluation and feedback process was also intended to inform the development of IPL work across the university and with professional groups beyond the institution. The final report was presented to the ECM working group at its meeting in February 2010, and shaped the subsequent IPL day in November 2010. The workshop held at the Learning and Teaching Conference in July 2010, focused on learning from this evaluation, and the subsequent implications for the development of IPL and boundary crossing between professions within the university and its partner colleges.

Background to professionalism and inter-professionalism

Whilst many definitions of professionalism exist, Sims et al (1993) highlight some common themes, particularly of the older, established professions. These themes relate both to the social principles of professionalism (for example, having an altruistic orientation and being subject to the sanction of the community at large), as well as *practice* orientated principles (such as a systematic body of knowledge and a monopoly of powers over its applications; a self-regulating code of ethics, an emphasis on values such as respect for the confidentiality of the client; control over the profession's own qualification and entry procedures). These more traditional principles or themes of professionalism are described by Evetts (2009) as 'occupational professionalism, where 'collegial authority' and 'discourse constructed within professional groups' (ibid: 23), are recognised and given prominence. Evett compares this with 'organisational professionalism' typified by managerialism, 'accountability and externalised forms of regulation, target-setting and performance review' (ibid: 23).

Barker (2008), in considering the development of models of practice from what might be defined as *multi-professional* but with little or no *collaboration,* to *integrated* working, represents networks thus:
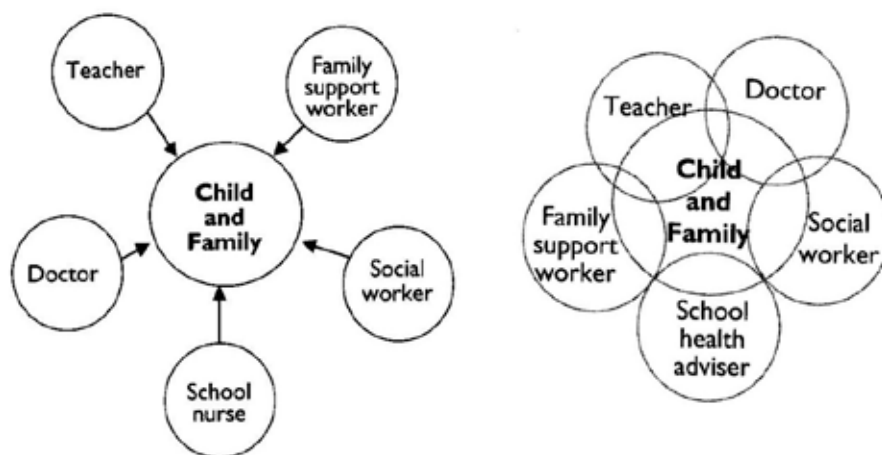
(Barker 2008)

The emphasis here is on the overlap of practice discourses and co-ordinated provision, with an identified 'lead' practitioner managing the 'team around the child'.

In promoting such inter-professional and integrated working, the 'refreshed' common core of skills and knowledge (CWDC 2010) for multi-agency working, acknowledges differences in professional understandings but places perhaps greater emphasis on 'organisational values, beliefs and cultures' (ibid: 20). The interactions between professions and professionals therefore, are likely to involve accommodation and management of different *occupational* values and cultures, as well as inter and intra organisational professional hierarchies, values and practices.

The Inter-professional learning day and the evaluation

The IPL day itself comprised four sessions, an introductory plenary, including a contextualising presentation and case study explored by panel of expert practitioners; exploration of one of two additional case studies in single professional groups, followed by exploration of the same case study in multi-professional groups (approximately 12-15 students in each group with two facilitators); final plenary question and answer session with a panel of experts.

The data analysed for this evaluation included reflections on the IPL day from six facilitators/ tutors, by email; evaluation forms returned by participants on the IPL day, divided by discipline (students were requested to indicate their occupational group at the bottom of the form); post-it notes collected during the IPL day on a comment wall; informal conversations during the day by the evaluator with a range of students and facilitators; the evaluator's own experiences of the day from attending the two plenaries and a single professional and a multi-professional case study group.

Findings from the evaluation: learning about other professional roles and responsibilities

The IPL day was considered '*very valuable as a way to spend time discussing similar issues*' with professionals from other disciplines, while the range of people involved in the day '*provided a wider diversity of opinions*' than they might normally encounter. Many students indicated that they had learned about roles they hadn't known existed, such as that of Social Work Duty Officer; others felt they had gained an understanding of how 'Every Child Matters' could be differently interpreted in practice across professions. The comment was made by a large number of students across professional groups about understanding and appreciating the different

processes and roles across sectors. Several students indicated that, through meeting people from across professional boundaries, they had increased their knowledge of other sectors and no longer saw other professionals as '*just roles set out on a page*'; they could have shared values despite having different perspectives.

The evaluations also indicated an understanding of how the professional focus of others could influence their interpretation of a problem and its solutions: '*the nursing perspective tends to see illness in everything*; *what is negative to one could be positive to another*' profession. There was also an indication in the evaluation responses of a desire to inform other professional groups about student practitioners' own fields: a social work student commented on the value of '*being able to educate other professions about the role of social workers*'; a midwifery student highlighted the midwife's role as '*a professional friend*'. Students additionally indicated an appreciation that differences in practice were not just evident across professions, but could also exist '*within the same geographic area*'. A comment from an education student encapsulates the general feeling about the day that was evident across all the evaluations: '*…powerful opportunity to meet to discuss these issues whilst in training, rather than waiting until in post*'.

Working together

Identified tensions over professional boundaries on the IPL day were found to mirror challenges within the field. For example, an emerging theme of the evaluation, was how professional boundaries become the arena for maintenance of status and power, and a particular challenge for students and practitioners alike relates to the extent to which individual professional identities can be maintained, whilst embracing the need to traverse and navigate professional boundaries within networks and partnerships.

Hudson (2002) identifies three inter-related potential barriers to effective inter-professional working:

- **identity** – how professionals understand themselves and their roles

- **status** – how professional hierarchies and different distributions of power are generated

- **discretion and accountability** – how professionals exercise discretion on a day-to-day basis

The difficulty which the evaluation of the IPL day began to uncover, was the extent to which students identify themselves professionally in the context of their membership within a professional community (reflecting *occupational* professionalism), as opposed to those who see their professional identity defined within their immediate and specific organisational role (reflecting *organisational* professionalism). For part-time students on work-based learning programmes, it could be argued that their academic study (including the IPL day), gives them opportunities to explore the subtle tensions and develop the required creativity and flexibility to manage the barriers Hudson identifies. For those on full time courses, yet to be fully immersed as practitioners, their 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave and Wenger 1991) is limited, as is their experience of occupational and organisational professionalism.

The IPL day is deliberately situated at the final stages of students' professional qualification study. Hence, as professional identities are formed and working practices become established, so the potential and actuality of inter-professional practice is explored from an increasingly firmer footing. An emergent feature from the IPL day, is the way that inter-professionalism begins to be co-constructed through the process of working together. This co-construction involves the beginnings of understanding the use and implications of emergent vocabulary spanning

professional boundaries. CWDC (2010) point to this, and some professions (perhaps those newer professions?), encourage integration of the role of boundary spanning into their practice. Sewell (2007) defines the 'boundary spanner' as:

> 'an individual who understands the specific interests and needs of the various groups involved in the change process and promotes a dialogue that transcends the familiar limitations of categorical thinking that restrict the activities of traditional managers'.

This practice and what Engeström et al (1999) refer to as 'knotworking', point to a way of working where traditional concepts of teams and stable centres of networking are regarded as insufficient. Hence inter-agency collaboration 'requires active construction of constantly changing combinations of people and artefacts over lengthy trajectories of time and widely distributed in space' (ibid). This requires a confidence and subtlety that challenges many experienced practitioners, but one that nevertheless was recognised and welcomed by students on the IPL day.

Support for tutors

There is often little attention given to the difficulties faced by teachers when assigned IP teaching. Morrison et al (2003) discuss the logistical and practical problems, while Freeth et al (2005) assert that teachers/staff require support and development to engage effectively in IP teaching. Holland (2002) indicates the importance of addressing 'the needs of the future teaching community', in order to effectively respond to the drive for inter-professional education and practice across the education and health care sectors (ibid: 221). The development of IPL is now an essential and embedded element in professional programmes, and raises issues regarding the skills, confidence and level of personal security with professional identities required of tutor/practitioners involved in delivering training programmes.

Work is needed across professional groups to explore the implications of IPL for tutors as well as for students, and a key task is to engender a greater self-confidence in working together across professions. However, it is also necessary to engage with those aspects of IPL where existing imbalances of power relations in the work situation are replicated in training and learning, and thus hamper effective and ongoing development of IPL. Facilitators reacted very differently during the IPL day to the process of facilitation according to their own experiences of IPL in their ongoing professional training. Some reported that domination of discussion by facilitators in the small working groups, may have been influenced by a conscientiousness and sense of responsibility for their role as tutor trainers, and a felt need to be seen to fully understand inter-professional working and all aspects of the wide range of professional roles involved in the case study scenarios, itself an unrealistic expectation.

Development of IPL work across professional groups

Comments from participants on the IPL day indicate that they would all value the involvement of more professional groups in IPL events. This poses some significant logistical as well as curricular challenges. The value of meeting in single professional groups before the inter-professional sessions later in the day, was widely acknowledged in the evaluation. However, these single professional group sessions might have been better held in advance of the IPL day to consider the case study scenarios as preparation for the inter-professional sessions.

The inter-professional sessions demonstrated the value of detailed consideration of cases studies from multiple angles, and illustrated the effectiveness and potential for work in inter-professional groups. However, the extent to which students' professional formation is developed and

the students' ongoing experience of their professional role in practice, has significant implications of their capacity to engage in IPL.

Ways forward

The experience of leading and facilitating the IPL day, the evaluation process, report, subsequent analysis and reflection, led the ECM group to develop the approach to the third IPL day in 2010. The case studies were explored in single professional groups prior to the day, giving more time for engagement and learning in inter-professional groups. Boreham (2007) suggests that inter-professionalism requires the development of 'collective competence' through making sense of events in the workplace, and developing a collective knowledge base and sense of inter-dependency. On future IPL days, facilitators will be encouraged to take a more *enabling* role with the groups, focusing on supporting exploration of inter-professional communication and fostering the potential for collective competence. Parallel to this, tutors and those involved in promoting IPL within the university, will need to be mindful of issues of professional power and status internally, be willing to explore the edges of professional identity themselves, and acknowledge the need to engage in boundary spanning and knotworking.

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Mark Price is programme leader for work-based learning foundation and honours degree programmes in the School of Education, where he also leads on economic and social engagement. Before coming to work at the university, Mark worked as a playworker, youth worker and secondary school teacher. He is an accredited psychotherapist, working with both adults and young people.

Mark's areas of interest include research into reflective practice and professional identity formation. His specialist teaching areas include relationships and interventions with vulnerable individuals and groups and inter-professional learning.

Dr Teresa Cairns, an independent qualitative life/oral history researcher, has worked on academic research in post-compulsory education and with third sector organisations, using participatory approaches as part of the evaluation process. She is currently researching a Mass Observation directive that she commissioned about mid-life transitions: the menopause, supported through a British Academy small research grant and a *Feminist Review* Trust award. With Denis Doran, she recently joined Ben Rogaly (University of Sussex) to work on oral histories of substance use with users in Peterborough, as part of Ben's RSA research fellowship, 'Places for all?' linked to the RSA's Connected Communities Citizen Power Project.

The ripple effect

Partnerships working to quality enhance mentor updates

■ CAROLINE HUDSON, LINNETTE KING AND TRICIA RIGBY

Abstract

This paper demonstrates how increased partnership working between service providers and a higher education institution enhances the quality of mentor update sessions for nurses and midwives (NMC 2008). It briefly outlines contemporary issues in mentoring within a context of shifting responsibilities, and discusses an evaluation of a local initiative, the 'Super mentor workshop' (SMW) and its potential as an emerging 'Community of Practice' (Wenger 1998). The three-round Delphi technique (Broomfield and Humphris 2001) was used to illuminate challenging issues for practice education facilitators (PEF's) delivering mentor updates, resulting in five themes. Selected themes were explored by filming a simulation of a mentor update, shown on a DVD at the SMW. Initial feedback will be analysed using Kirkpatrick's (2006) evaluative tool. The paper will also consider the 'value added' potential of the DVD in learning and teaching programmes, and makes recommendations for future work in the dissemination of good practice to support mentors within this emerging 'community of practice' (COP) (Wenger 1998).

Aim: To explore a partnership approach to providing mentor updates and the potential for a COP and quality enhancement.

Introduction

Effective student nurse or midwifery practice learning relies on support and assessment by mentors working with their teams in practice placements (RCN 2007). Mentors and practice placements in turn, require support from their named link lecturer (LL) or lecturer practitioner (LP) from their local higher education institution (HEI). Additional support comes from practice education facilitators (PEFs) who are contracted by the Strategic Health Authority to liaise with NHS Trusts, the practice placements and HEI lecturers. Thus, a tripartite arrangement of respective parties, all working to ensure the standards for nurse and midwifery education are met (Diagram 1)(NMC 2004; 2010).

A mentor is defined by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) as being a registrant (registered nurse or midwife on the NMC register), who has successfully completed an accredited mentor preparation programme from an approved HEI. The mentor preparation programme expects the nurse or midwife to map their learning experience against specified outcomes, to demonstrate competence that would lead to attaining mentor standards set by the regulatory

body (NMC 2008). These defined standards demonstrate that the individual nurse or midwife has achieved the knowledge, skills and competence required to support learning and assessment of students in practice.
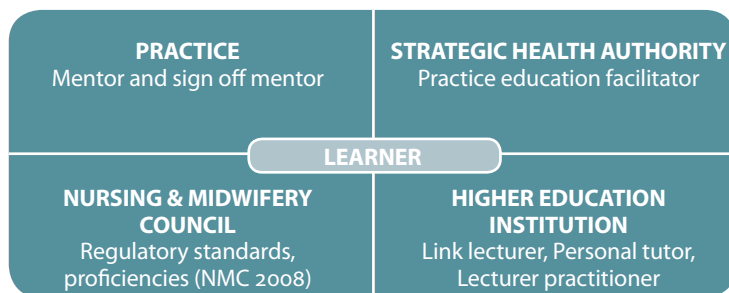
The focus of this paper is in the implementation and quality monitoring of nursing and midwifery standards for mentoring (ibid). The NMC published its standards to support learning and assessment of students of nursing and midwifery in practice in 2006, with revisions in 2008. As the regulatory body for the two professions it has a primary purpose to safeguard the public, which it does through the maintenance of a register of all nurses and midwives actively working in the UK, and by setting standards for their education, training, conduct, performance and ethics.

The revisions to those standards to support learning and assessment of students (ibid) followed the review of a number of issues, but specifically and in relation to this paper, they provided further clarification on the introduction of 'sign-off' mentors (SOM). These mentors make judgments to decide if a student has achieved the required standards of proficiency for safe and effective practice to enter the NMC register. Previously, mentors and practice teachers would provide HEI educators with confirmation of students' achievement of practice proficiency throughout the course, and the student's personal tutor (PT) would verify achievement of the practice component requirements. The change in the verification process for practice proficiency, with the 'sign-off' in practice, was a significant shift of responsibility from the HEI to mentors and SOM, alongside their established responsibility for supervision of students' learning in practice. This occurred despite concerns already raised of mentors 'failing to fail' students in practice (Duffy 2004). More recently a survey of over 2,000 mentors indicates that 37 per cent of participants have passed students, despite 'doubts over ability' (Gainsbury 2010). This is a serious concern underlying the need for quality assurance (Andrews 2010; Duffy 2004; Duffy and Watson 2001).

Recognition by mentors of the importance of their role in supporting learners and their contribution to their practice experience has been noted with variable value (Andrews 2010; Duffy 2004; Gainsbury 2010). Pre-registration students of nursing and midwifery are required to have a recognised mentor to supervise their practice learning, and to undertake their practice assessments (NMC 2008). Hence, mentors and SOM are accountable to the NMC for their assessment decision that a student is fit for practice. Fitness for practice is considered when the student is assessed by the mentor as having the necessary ability and competence in NMC practice proficiencies to become a registered nurse or midwife, which leads to a final assessment and 'sign-off' in practice.

As continuing professional development, mentors are expected to attend an annual mentor update, which can be facilitated by HEI lecturers or agreed practice educators respectively. HEI staff continue to have responsibility for overseeing the quality of standards that support learning and assessment in practice. A mentor update session outline template is provided by the mentorship co-ordinator to ensure parity of information across all mentor updates provided in the locality.

The challenge for HEIs is how to quality assure the standards of mentoring in practice by the registered mentors and SOM (NMC 2005; Andrews et al 2010), and the facilitation of mentor updates by service providers, LLs, LPs and PEFs. It was this concern for monitoring standards that led to the conception of 'super mentor update' (SMU). This is part of the education update programme managed by the HEI to support, monitor and provide evidence that regulatory requirements are being met. Led by the mentorship co-ordinator, certain lecturers (LL and LP), key practice education staff and PEFs come together to update practice and HEI staff, share the challenges of mentoring and good practice examples. The overall aims are partnerships that work through liaison and feedback to facilitate learning in practice and assessment and to ensure quality.

PRACTICE Mentor and sign off mentor	STRATEGIC HEALTH AUTHORITY Practice education facilitator
LEARNER	
NURSING & MIDWIFERY COUNCIL Regulatory standards, proficiencies (NMC 2008)	HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION Link lecturer, Personal tutor, Lecturer practitioner

Diagram 1: Practice learning in context

Background

Mentorship provision is under increasing scrutiny by the professional regulatory body (NMC 2005). The HEI and service providers have to account for their performance against a range of risk indicators for mentorship as part of the annual monitoring review (Mott MacDonald 2009). Mentorship is at centre stage in ensuring that fitness for practice (NMC 2005), and mentors and SOMs are increasingly the main 'arbiters' of assessment (West 2007). This is despite HEI concern that target driven performance on mentor training and updates may lead to a lack of mentor motivation (Jones 2005). More recently, Andrews et al (2010) suggested that reliance on the SOM to judge learners' overall attainment of proficiency may reduce the rigour of mentor assessment throughout the curriculum programme.

The shift of responsibility from HEI to practice has called for a 'recoupling' (O'Driscoll 2010) of HEI and practice, to ensure that the NMC standards can be met. Wenger's COP (1998) (Diagram 2) supports the notion that the people within the community who use knowledge in their practice, are in the best position to deliver mentor updates, and with the NMC supporting service provider involvement, a joint enterprise was proposed. Historically, mentor updates provided by HEI staff had been poorly attended, and the origins of this partnership approach arose in 2007, when local PEFs approached the mentorship co-ordinator to take part in the delivery of mentor updates.

Diagram 2: Identifying potential for a community of practice

Mentors' annual updates include an opportunity to meet with their peers and explore assessment and supervision issues of learners in practice. These two to three hour updates, are required to include exploration of the validity and reliability of mentor judgements, and in particular when assessing practice in challenging circumstances, as a group activity (NMC 2008). Anecdotally, existing practice partners reported that mentors remained passive at updates, and were faced with the challenge of enabling them to articulate their practice issues. This may in part, be due

to mentors' preconceived assumptions that they are attending to receive information updates and propositional knowledge (Eraut et al 1998), rather than expecting to engage in reflective discussion on practice. Mentor updates posed a challenge for facilitators, given the constraints of time allowed to manage the diversity of the attendees, who had had little prior contact.

Practice partners were keen to know what issues were raised at mentor updates, and how they might be managed. In this respect, participants were seeking to discover 'personal knowledge' (ibid) from experienced facilitators. Hall and Hart (2004) report in their 'imagination and inequalities' work, the need for the facilitator to share personal experience and role model this to the group. Exploration of personal issues from practice has been shown to stimulate peer group discussion, and has the potential to promote transformative learning through building trust between the facilitator and group members. Thus, a Super mentor workshop (SMW) was planned, to include simulation of a mentor update which would role model facilitation skills.
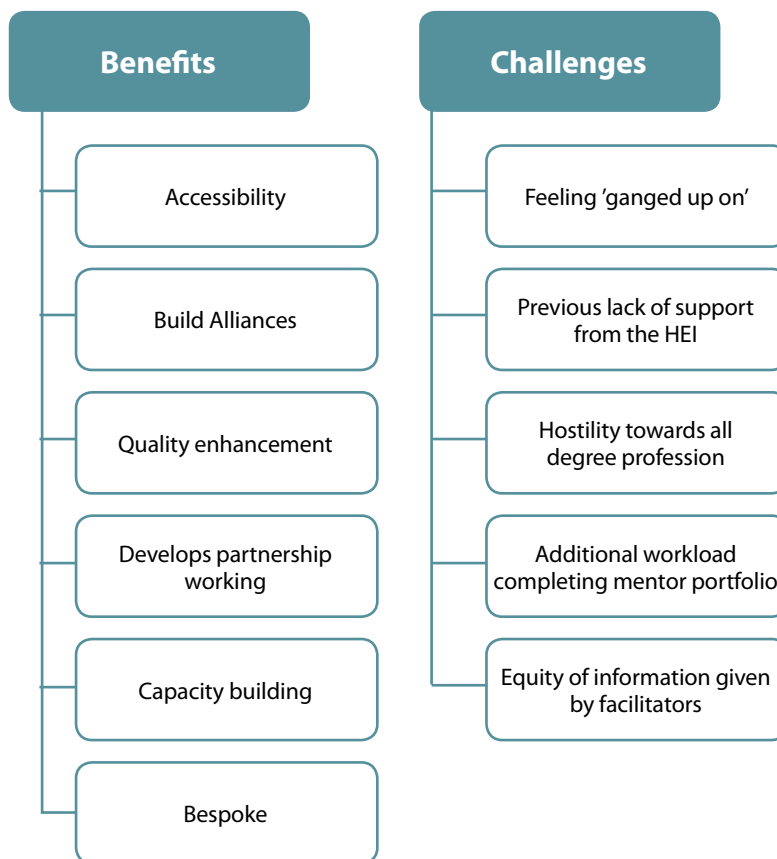
Method

In 2007, the first SMU was delivered to five PEFs as preparation to facilitate mentor updates. By 2009, attendance had grown to 28 recognised practice partners, link lecturers and LPs who actively delivered mentor updates in practice. Thus an emerging COP was growing rapidly in response to the NMC standards. Following on from the SMU, a SMW was advertised in June 2010, to meet requests for bi-annual meetings in which good practice could be shared. A request for solution focused discussion on the challenges that arose at mentor updates, and the sharing of good practice was the key focus of the agenda.

In response, the mentorship co-ordinator surveyed key challenges faced by PEFs using the three-round Delphi technique (Diagram 3)(Broomfield and Humphris 2001), to illuminate the contextual issues commonly faced by practice facilitators. This enabled the mentorship team to collate the evaluation data to inform and respond to the practice issues. Response to practice partners' requests called for a creative approach, in order to develop the skills of small group facilitation for mentor update facilitators.
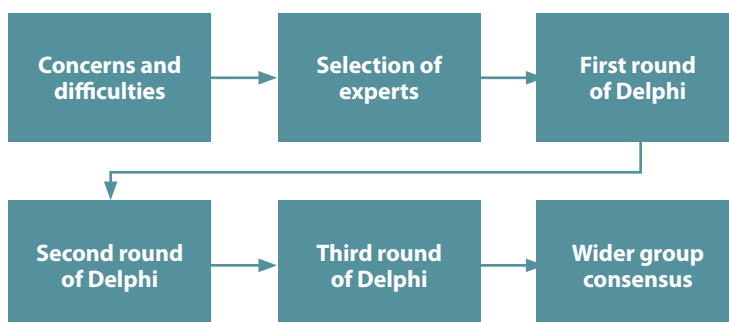
Diagram 3: The three-round Delphi technique

Seven out of eight PEFs responded on the aspects of: benefits, challenges and preparation needs of practice partners in delivering mentor updates. Results were collated and returned to the group as a second round of Delphi, with a request for them to rank and prioritise issues in practice. These were returned to the group for agreement as a third round, resulting in five key challenges being highlighted (Diagram 4). This was later shared with the wider community at the SMW to gain a consensus on practice issues. The high response rate demonstrated the motivation of these PEFs to share their experience and work in partnership.
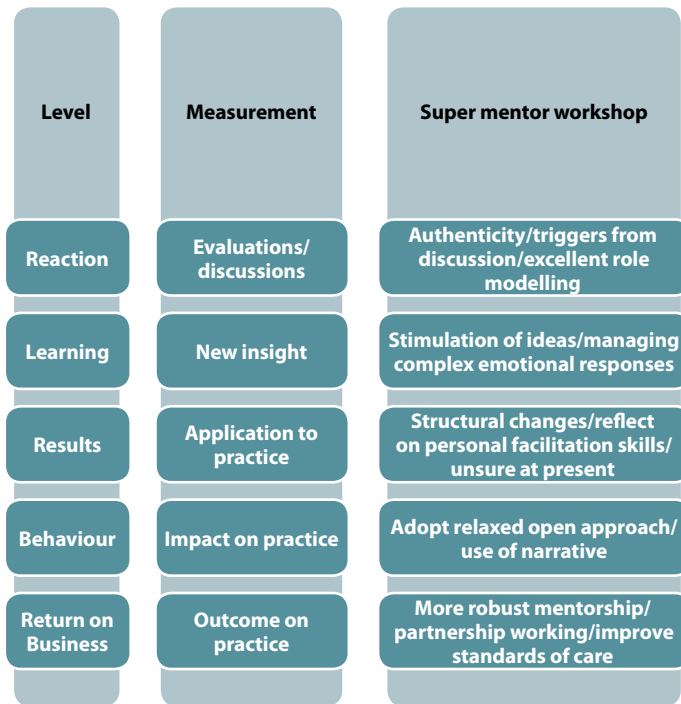
Benefits	Challenges
Accessibility	Feeling 'ganged up on'
Build Alliances	Previous lack of support from the HEI
Quality enhancement	Hostility towards all degree profession
Develops partnership working	Additional workload completing mentor portfolio
Capacity building	Equity of information given by facilitators
Bespoke	

Diagram 4: Evaluative feedback

All the PEFs identified 'quality enhancement' and 'increased partnership working' within the key benefits of their contribution to delivering mentor updates. Accessibility of the updates was improved by providing the majority within the practice settings, which has led to capacity building. This also enabled alliances between practice areas and LL to be strengthened. Bespoke sessions could be tailored to suit specific areas and the utilisation of their practice concerns and experiences.

Conversely PEFs had felt 'ganged up on' by workshop attendees whilst delivering updates, along with 'negativity' and 'hostility' towards the change to an all graduate profession. Furthermore, they found resistance from the mentors in completing the portfolio evidence to demonstrate their responsibilities and hence attainment in meeting the NMC requirements, because it was deemed an 'additional workload'. Other challenges were a perception that there was little support from the HEI, particularly with regard to equity of information being provided by facilitators.

Using key selected themes from the challenges highlighted in (Diagram 4), the mentorship team produced a simulated mentor update DVD. The simulation was unscripted, with the intention of role modelling 'in' practice. All actors had experience in mentorship and/or group facilitation skills. The DVD was shown at the planned SMW with a discussion facilitated by the 'actors'. Notes were taken by four members of the mentorship team to capture the discussion. The SMW partici-pants completed Kirkpatrick's evaluative tool (2006) to illicit individual feedback (Diagram 5).

Level	Measurement	Super mentor workshop
Reaction	Evaluations/ discussions	Authenticity/triggers from discussion/excellent role modelling
Learning	New insight	Stimulation of ideas/managing complex emotional responses
Results	Application to practice	Structural changes/reflect on personal facilitation skills/ unsure at present
Behaviour	Impact on practice	Adopt relaxed open approach/ use of narrative
Return on Business	Outcome on practice	More robust mentorship/ partnership working/improve standards of care

Diagram 5: Feedback in response to DVD at the Super mentor workshop

Kirkpatrick's evaluative tool (2006) is a tested and proven framework for the evaluation of teaching activities and considered a foundation of other training evaluation models (Gopee 2010; Tamkin et al 2002). However, it has been criticised for being too simplistic with a hierarchical value implied, leading to the organisational performance being seen as more important. There are inferences that it is subject to bias leading to erroneous conclusions, especially with a lack of causal relationship between the first two levels (Kaufman 1996; Tamkin et al 2002). Often evaluation is only completed at levels one and two, whereas all levels, including the additional level five should be conducted to ensure a robust evaluation as was the case with the SMW.

Findings

Taking each evaluative level in turn, the team was able to capture a meaningful evaluation of learning:

Reaction: Simulation enables experiential learning and provides opportunities for students to practice problem solving in a safe controlled environment (Hawkins and Todd 2008). Participants at the SMW commented on the authenticity of the actors in the DVD, and how they accurately reflected what the participants were seeing in practice. They felt it was useful to have their feelings and experiences reinforced by others in this way. It also showed different facilitation triggers through role modeling of skills that could be used to promote discussion. Teaching was not seen as just imparting knowledge, but as facilitating self discovery (ibid).

Learning: Reflection has been identified as a critical element of simulated clinical experiences (Bremner et al 2006). It aims to be student centered group discussion that, with active participation being the primary goal, helps to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement (Hawkins and Todd 2008). The SMW participants considered other teaching strategies to facilitate the mentor updates, including ways to address the management of complex emotions, and the need to 'unpick' some of the more composite issues that arise through a person centered approach. This was viewed as a contrast to their usual delivery, which followed a template based

on the NMC standards (2008). What had previously been considered a principle objective in their teaching was now eclipsed by the new information understood from their observation of the DVD.

Behaviour: Many of the SMW participants felt the need to reconsider the structure of delivery of the mentor updates, and to target the mentors' key issues. Others felt they needed to reflect on their own facilitation skills, from a realisation of the importance of using summary and acknowledgment for what the mentors have to say. There was a consensus that the DVD showed good examples of facilitation skills being role modeled. Bandura (1965) argued that people generally adopt the standards exhibited by exemplary models; however, merely exposing the observer to modeled behaviour will not ensure that behaviours are attended to. Hence it was important to follow up this learning through discussion, with challenging questions to the HEI mentorship team. A specific point raised, was that they would not know if their behaviour would change until they had facilitated a mentor update using the newly learned skills in their practice areas.

Results: Discussion showed that a definite impact on practice was expected, with a change in facilitation practices moving from a didactic to a more humanistic approach, through the use of narration, encouragement and listening skills. From listening to issues that arose from observations of the DVD, the focus of participants on the importance of accountability in the mentors' role in assessing practice proficiencies was highlighted. This focus was further enhanced after debate on the NMC standards that provide a defined statement on accountability for mentor assessment decisions that lead to students' entry on the professional register (NMC 2008).

Return on business: There was a consensus that the workshop, and especially the DVD, encouraged partnership working, opened up communication channels and shared good practice. Participants felt that by putting the skills learned into their own practice, the mentors' practice would become more robust and they would have more confidence in their responsibilities. Ultimately, this aims to improve practice experience for student nurses and midwives and to improve patient care.

Conclusion

The Delphi technique was successful in capturing current issues and promoting knowledge exchange within the COP, as evidenced through the positive evaluations at the SMW. This partnership approach achieved increased numbers of updated mentors, which in turn, enabled the HEI to meet its pre-registration nursing and midwifery curriculum requirements to support practice learning. A recent annual monitoring review by the NMC resulted in a 'good' outcome being achieved for practice learning. To further enhance the partnership approach in mentorship provision, work is ongoing to create a system of communication maintenance (Wenger 1998), for example, through a mentorship website interface.

The SMW revealed that high levels of emotional intelligence are required of facilitators to engage mentors to disclose 'challenging' practice issues. Brocklebank and McGill's (1998) 'characteristics' of facilitators, supports the humanistic approach to learning and includes qualities such as 'genuineness', 'trustworthiness' and 'empathy'. Furthermore, role modelling through simulation and discussion helped to develop 'capability' (Eraut 1994). The aim of using Kirkpatrick's evaluative tool was to collate the feedback of participants' learning (Diagram 5), which enabled the HEI mentorship team to illicit instant 'rich' data. Further investment in developing resilience in mentors is a key area of future work.

Positive evaluations would suggest that legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger 1991) occurred at the SMW. The HEI mentorship team witnessed discourse in the discussion around 'failing to fail' following the DVD, which is accepted as a healthy element within a COP

(Wenger 1998). Testimonies from individual participants support this simulation approach as appropriate to enhance 'self discovery' in learning (Hawkins et al 2008). Additionally, the DVD allows repeated exposure to the role modelling of good facilitation skills (Donaldson and Carter 2005). Quality monitoring will continue further with mentor evaluations at mentor updates, mentor feedback in students' assessment of practice documents, students practice placement evaluations and through to an overall HEI annual monitoring review.

The content of the simulation has demonstrated added value and meets the HEI requirements for more sustainable approaches within the curriculum. The DVD is now being used on the mentorship preparation module to demonstrate small group facilitation, and explore assessment issues in practice to prepare future mentors.

Initial feedback from partner individuals has been positive, and requests for copies of the DVD suggests that the SMW experience is being shared within the COP. Further evaluation is required to discover if these partnerships will make a long term difference, and the team plan to follow this up at the next SMU in November 2010. This initiative of super mentor updates and workshops, has demonstrated the positive impact of working on a project in partnership to build relationships in the locality. The Delphi technique was found to be successful in eliciting real issues from practice. Role modeling facilitation skills are developed through simulation, and can both enhance the quality of mentor updates and lead to wide dissemination through the SMW into the community of practice.

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Caroline Hudson is a senior lecturer in the School of Nursing and Midwifery. She has been the Mentorship Co-ordinator since 2008, and has worked in the area of supporting practice learning and teaching in higher education for seven years. Caroline has a masters in Professional Health Care Education and her research interests include inter-professional learning. She works in close collaboration with service providers to support the curricula and is involved in a wide variety of projects and working groups related to practice learning support and assessment. Her current interests include building resilience in mentors.

Linnette King is a principal lecturer in the School of Nursing and Midwifery and course leader for the MSc Health. She leads and co-ordinates the academic subject group of professional studies, which includes the mentorship programme. She has a masters in Nursing, in Applied Research and a masters in Law. Linnette has liaised for many years with the local hospitals NHS Trust ensuring a meaningful exchange between health service practice and the university, to provide a recognised standard of education provision. She is also a link lecturer for a range of specialist clinical areas in the locality.

Tricia Rigby is a practice education and clinical skills facilitator for Western Sussex Hospitals Trust. She has been working in this area for the past five years in collaboration with the School of Nursing and Midwifery to facilitate the provision of a high quality practice learning experience for all learners, with a primary focus on pre-registration students. Prior to this, Tricia was a ward sister in Trauma and Orthopaedics. She has a postgraduate certificate in Health and Social Care Education, and an interest in working with partners in the development and maintenance of networks to support student learning.

Being outside the box

In order to think outside the box

■ DAVID ALEXANDER

Abstract

In April 2010, University of Brighton FdA Digital Media Design students studying in the further education institution Sussex Downs College, Eastbourne, launched their interactive exhibition guides and digital interactive design work alongside the high profile Underwater exhibition at Towner, Eastbourne. Their work was the culmination of a successful partnership with the gallery, which saw students working within Towner to undertake idea generation and development. Partnership in this sense, provided the opportunity for students to work outside the usual studio environment of their college room *being* outside the box, in order to help promote *thinking* outside the box.

Introduction

Design education seeks to promote the ability in a student to consider their response to a problem from many angles; to understand their user group, context for interaction with the product and a willingness to approach solutions from unexpected places. Many of the briefs given to students on the FdA Digital Media Design (DMD) are live and outward facing, and all require a creative solution to a design problem. To this end, there are many opportunities for partnership with external bodies in the delivery of projects on such a course. Indeed the links to external design entities such as D&AD, YCN, clients and festivals are things that have been praised about the consortium of FdA DMD courses in the 'University of Brighton Partner Review' (2010). However, these projects are mainly undertaken and completed within the expected taught space of the classroom/studio at Sussex Downs College, or in the students' home environment. In response to one such project, the opportunity of a partnership with an external body (Towner) was established, where students could develop design solutions within the exact context of the intended design location. This offered an exciting opportunity to take learning in new directions and address design approaches in new ways. As the designer Hugh Dubberly is quoted by Heller and Womack, 'I believe designers should root their work in the context of its use' (2008: 97).

Partnerships create the chance for external client involvement as outlined in the HEFCE prospectus for foundation degrees (HEFCE 2000). When introducing foundation degrees in 2000, HEFCE argued that 'there was a need to better align the content and organisation of programmes with what employers required' (HEFCE 2007), and qualified this by stating that courses were to have the following features:

1   'employer involvement in the design and review of programmes

2   the development of skills relevant to a particular employment sector alongside academic learning

3   workplace experience sufficient to develop an understanding in the relevant area

4   credit accumulation to facilitate accreditation of prior learning, flexible study and transfers between courses

5   a smooth progression route to an honours degree programme' (HEFCE 2007).

It is interesting to consider point 3 in relation to this project. Students on the FdA are only required to undertake work experience as part of their studies 'sufficient to develop an understanding in the relevant area', and in the FdA DMD at the University of Brighton, the development of work and design solutions are largely expected to be undertaken in the studio space provided at the college. Design work is expected to progress in college time and this is obviously where the majority of directed teaching and learning occurs.

It is understood that for designers in the outside world, a studio will most likely be their main environment. Yet technology liberates working to anywhere with an internet connection, and in this sense, students are operating to a standard of sufficient 'workplace experience' in completion of briefs in the studio or at home. However, the Towner partnership enabled students to work towards Hubberly's idyll. To be set a brief by a client and approach design solutions with first-hand stimulus enabling them to respond to the context of a client and workplace directly - locating design solutions in the real world. This was significant for a number of reasons.

Towner, Eastbourne designed by Rick Mather Architects

The box

One of the developments to follow the introduction of foundation degrees was the initial intention of HEFCE that they could be 'taught at a further education college (FEC) under a franchise arrangement' (HEFCE 2010), with a higher education provider validating (and in some cases, running) the courses. Arts-based foundation degrees became a particularly popular choice for full time foundation degrees, studied by 22 per cent of the full time home student cohort (ibid 2010).

Since its introduction, the delivery of the FdA DMD at Sussex Downs College has slowly become more entrenched within the institution as it became harder to access working within industry, particularly in the arts context, which has created issues related to 'workplace environments' (HEFCE 2007). One impact of this restriction of working space, is the issue of students progressing from level three study within the college through to FdA study in the same environment. 'Chris',

for example, has found himself walking down the same corridor for the past five years. Now a higher education student, he is still on the same corridor that he first walked through on his BTEC first diploma in Media Production at aged 16. Studying the FdA DMD course, Chris is ostensibly a University of Brighton student, and like fellow FdA students entering the studio/classroom off this familiar corridor, he keenly feels the need for new and challenging environments.

When interviewed during research for the Centre for Learning and Teaching Fellowship awarded for this project, Chris told me *'you feel like your ideas only ever go as far as this room',* which he said, related to the familiar delivery, assessment and exhibition options on the course as much as to the environment. When considering the prospect of working elsewhere for a design project, Chris and others found the concept exciting but daunting, and in one instance, even doubted that the new context could add anything to existing modes of working – testament to the powerful perceptions some students have about their work, delivery and studio environment.

Chris and others understand the role of the studio and its use by lecturers to monitor progress, deliver software tutorials and undertake seminars, and yet they are aware that completion of design work in this space, stays the same irrespective of the brief's context. Crudely put, design students like Chris are being asked to approach design solutions for varying projects by 'thinking outside the box' when the location of their design work is majoratively undertaken in the same 'box' of the familiar studio itself. Clearly, it is encouraged for students to undertake self-managed study elsewhere, but this project sought to vary delivery and context, to ascertain if outside the box thinking could be enhanced by being in a new context-rich environment.

What exactly then, is meant by this commonly used phrase 'outside the box' thinking in relation to higher education study? A similar study into lateral thinking techniques in the biosciences suggests that it is a fundamental part of creativity itself:

> 'If creativity is regarded as the ability to generate new or novel ideas, challenge conventional points of view and make novel interpretations or judgements, then clearly, out-of-the-box thinking goes hand in hand with creative thinking' (Wakeford 2008).

The partnership sought to challenge conventional delivery methods and environments as a way to promote the outcome Wakeford describes.

The partnership

In October 2009, a partnership was established at a meeting with Helen McAleer, Education Officer of Towner, Eastbourne. Further meetings followed where it was discussed and agreed that FdA students would work in partnership with Towner to generate interactive guides and artefacts to accompy the Underwater exhibition, opening on Easter weekend, April 2010. In establishing such a partnership (which at the time of writing is flourishing into a second year), it is worth considering the gains for either side. A danger would be to seek partnerships as an educator that benefits the profile of the course or provides 'free labour' for an external client, without significantly enhancing the learning experience for the student. In their report on work-based and placement learning, the QAA concede that to stipulate a formal definition of how to deliver learning within the workplace might be 'counter-productive and act as a constraint to the further development of innovative practice in this area' (QAA 2007), yet they do make various recommendations. They reiterate the need for partners and educators to provide 'learning opportunities and support students' (ibid) ensuring that the change in a context of learning must be meaningful for learners.

Liaison between lecturers on the course and Towner began early in the academic year, and the partnership was organised to allow effective linking to assessment objectives and units of study,

thereby giving the project assessment potential, and attaching criteria beyond that expected by the client for the discussed outcome. QAA state, 'such shared responsibilities can work well so long as there is clarity about who is responsible for what' (ibid). For their part, Towner agreed to the use of their wonderful building for project development and for our new studio/classroom. Although full responsibility for design outcomes lay with the students, with McAleer as the main contact, students were encouraged to undertake research, contact third parties and utilise Towner design guides. Towner ultimately stood to gain two significant outcomes from this collaboration; significant partnership with a local education provider (a requirement of their Arts Council funding) and the tangible outcome of interactive design work linked to an exhibition pioneered by Towner, and designed to tour various other national galleries.

Delivery

Using Towner as a classroom soon presented itself as a unique and beneficial experience for the students. We were assigned the 'Fuse Box' space as our base, but were informed by McAleer and the Towner team, that the students had the 'run of the gallery'. Fuse Box contained chairs, tables, one laptop, projector and a huge whiteboard – all essentials of the modern classroom. The design of the room, with its dark walls and modern chairs, and more importantly lack of computers, created a new approach to how the students considered their learning space and through the absence of design 'creature comforts' they were forced to consider new ways of working.

Removing students from their 'comfort zone' and immediately expecting results would have been to overlook the essentials reflected in Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Needs' (1954, in Henderson 1984: 25). In order for the 'self-actualised' creative thinking to occur, it was necessary to promote a favourable and conducive environment, not simply a new one. The involvement of McAleer, the Towner team and their gallery in this respect, was invaluable. Student feedback in terms of the environment and how they felt about it was overwhelmingly positive; a challenging new space, but one in which they felt welcomed and 'part of the team' and importantly in Maslowian terms, the lack of things they had become accustomed to, actually ensured more direct interaction with their environment.

The delivery of sessions within Towner took place on Thursday afternoons over a number of weeks under the name 'Idea lab'. Idea lab covered initial idea generation, audience profiling and design responses to the space. To record their work, students kept 'idearies' which enabled them to diarise their experiences and develop designs as they went along. This is another recommendation of QAA in relation to learning outside of the institution, enabling students to take 'the responsibility for managing their own learning and professional relationships, and for tracking and recording their own progress and achievements' (QAA 2007). These idearies were also very useful in the re-location back to the studio/classroom at the end of the Towner sessions.

Idea lab

The main aim of Idea lab was to effectively enable students to respond to their new location, react to it and allow a significant change of environment to inform design ideas and solutions. Pedagogically, Idea lab was a series of tasks and explorations undertaken by students to investigate ways of originating ideas in a new space. This approach was designed to be significantly different to the delivery of briefs and idea generation undertaken in the 'everyday' institutional environment of the college. Besides taking inspiration from the location and the partner's (Towner's) involvement, students were asked to generate ideas in a number of different activities during our time there. This included idea generation based on theme words, different audience/user requirements and hypothetical situations, the processes for which, were recorded on

video camera and in idearies, and the findings presented in presentations along the way. These experiments in generating ideas were greatly enhanced by the environment of Towner. One such example, saw the adoption of two distinct design idea generation techniques to solve a problem in response to the gallery and building.

In his consideration of design idea generation, John Chris Jones (1992) outlines two distinct idea generating styles, or more appropriately 'boxes' as he refers to them, the 'glass box' and 'black box' techniques. In this Idea lab task, students were divided into two groups of three and each given a 'design' style to adopt using 'glass box' or 'black box' in their solution to a hypothetical problem within Towner. Accordingly, the 'glass box' team were encouraged to approach an idea generation task as a 'completely explicable rational process' (ibid: 46) accounting for all variables, and considering the potential issues and design constraints. The aim of the activity for this group was to split the design problem into variables, examine them in detail and identify possible approaches. In contrast, the 'black box' team were encouraged to approach idea generation as a much more emotional and analogous process, considering the design problem in terms of stories and analogies as a method to finding a solution. Jones considers either approach to be valid. But would the immediacy of access to the contextual environment play a part? Indeed, the way students approached this task was fascinating in relation to this new space they could explore.
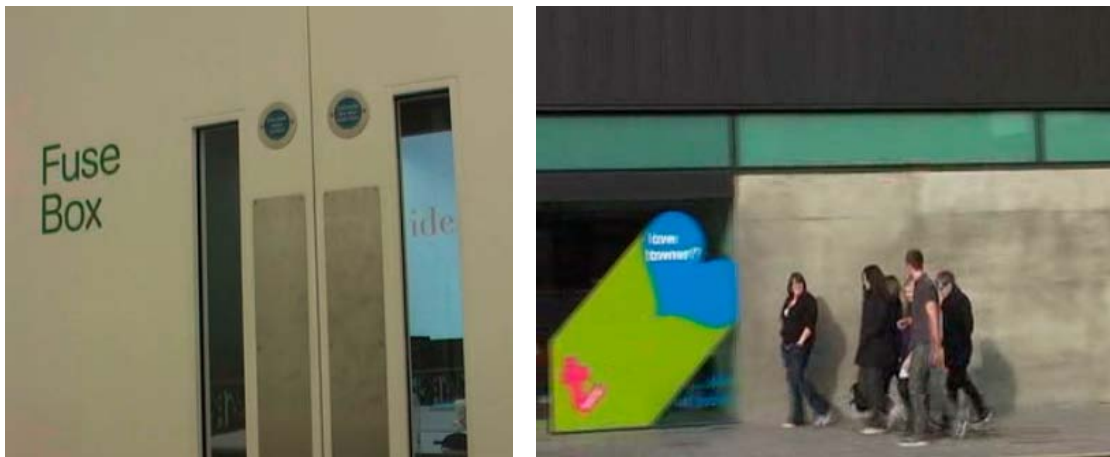
The task involved a hypothetical challenge to create an interface that would enable teenagers to get more out of the Towner experience. Each team was given video cameras to record their working with the whole of Towner as a space to respond to. The black box team almost immediately ventured out into their new space, responding to their environment, ideas flowing in conversational ways with analogies and hypothetical situations proposed in response to a particular section of the gallery or building. Discussion was recorded on cameras and when viewed, highlighted an area that hitherto had been lacking from their previous class based approach to idea generation – a lack of quick-fire, verbal responses to problems. Students were reacting to the task *and* space and moving rapidly through numerous design ideas, all of which were valid and recorded on tape. Consideration of the space, and an ability to immediately locate solutions within it, legitimised many of these ideas as well as curtailing others, speeding-up a process that often dragged in the studio or inhibited some learners. This experience provided a great leap for students from the class based reliance on working in the sketchbook, solitary computer-based research or one-to-one tutorials as a means for idea generation and initial testing.

The glass box team's video tape made for quite boring viewing for the first 10 minutes. The three students remained in the Fuse Box room, each writing notes in silence and breaking the task into its component parts. This way of working would have continued had they not been encouraged to explore the space. Although they were working within the boundaries of this

valid design approach, it meant they almost ignored their location within the Towner and the potential benefits it held. It wasn't until they took their carefully considered ideas and thoughts from the glass box style of working outside of this new and potentially restrictive room, into Towner's corridors and stairwells, that their ideas started to really develop. Again conversation was a key catalyst, together with the ability to consider issues immediately in the space, which cut down the time that would have been needed when working at college without direct access to the variables that occurred in the space provided.

Although a hypothetical situation, students stated in feedback that they were very aware of a new way of working, of the influence of the space, and of the importance of conversation, testing and responding to surroundings as useful idea generation tools. Jones' 'box states' had provided an interesting contrast to existing practices, but both states had been hugely enhanced by the role of the new environment. This was true of most tasks undertaken over the weeks in Towner, and as student confidence in the space grew, so did their design considerations.

Back in the box

After other tasks and design challenges were undertaken, students eventually developed effective design solutions, comprehensively linked to the context of Towner. This partnership was immensely useful and effective in enabling students to challenge accepted ways of generating ideas and solving problems. However, due to the nature of the discipline and project, it was inevitable that students move back to their established studio environment to access computers and follow through ideas in practical terms.

This presented another benefit of the partnership and an effective role for the Towner and McAleer as client/partner. Students had undertaken a pitch of their ideas to McAleer within Towner, and she was able to clarify objectives and specifications directly with the students. This provided them with a clear client focus in terms of outcomes required (supporting QAA recommendations), as well as enabling them to maintain a work-oriented approach for a pitch in the client's environment. The impact of the new location and partnership enabled them to see their working environment as stretching beyond the college, and their ideas and work having real legitimacy in a real-world context.

Subsequent visits were made to Towner for audience and user profiling and McAleer visited the college, which assisted in effectively blurring the line between institution and outside world. Students reflected that this contact was important, continuing the 'live' feeling of the project and preventing them from seeing the process as having two defined sections of: inside and outside.

Conclusion

On Good Friday 2010, FdA DMD students' interactive work and exhibition guides were displayed alongside work by Bill Viola at Towner. Gallery audiences could use touch screens to find information about the artists through portholes under the sea. They could have their movements and physical-self altered into constantly changing pixels made of elements from the exhibition, and experience an interpretation of the womb in sound, image and touch. These ideas had undoubtedly been shaped and informed by the unique partnership with Towner and response to the gallery space itself, generated from being outside of the normal working environment, which facilitated creative working that moved outside of the box.

Since the 'Learning Outside the Classroom' government manifesto (2006), there has been increased emphasis in schools on learning outside the classroom and growth in vocational provision at secondary and tertiary levels, creating a modern student who is very outward

facing, beyond the walls of the lecture theatre or even the campus. As technology becomes more prevalent in delivery, the need to fix learning to specific locations will diminish. Partnerships provide opportunities to meet these challenges with assistance from those with unique skills and resources. If delivery of the foundation degree is increasingly to embrace partnerships, as was intended on inception, there is a responsibility to provide accessible higher education within FECs that incorporates partnerships, and opportunities to move outside of the environment that for many, has been the site of their learning since earlier study.
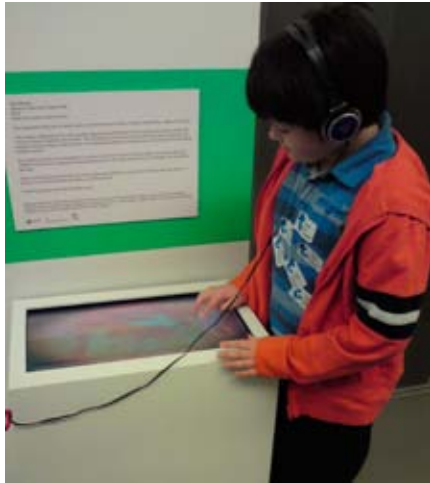
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David Alexander is a lecturer in Cultural and Critical Theory and Video Production at Sussex Downs College, Eastbourne. He was awarded a Centre for Learning and Teaching Fellowship in 2010 to undertake this project while acting course leader for the FdA Digital Media Design. David presented at the annual learning and teaching conference, 'Partnerships', and is now undertaking an MSc in Digital Media Production at the University of Brighton.