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**DEVELOPING CRITICAL UNDERSTANDING IN HRM STUDENTS
– INNOVATIVE TEACHING METHODS ENCOURAGE DEEP
APPROACHES TO STUDY**

Paper for Review

DEVELOPING CRITICAL UNDERSTANDING IN HRM STUDENTS – INNOVATIVE TEACHING METHODS ENCOURAGE DEEP APPROACHES TO STUDY

‘How often could you attack it [a concept, a hope, or a desire] before it crumbled? To undo something took practice; it was a dark art and they were perfecting it. With each argument, the next would be easier, would become a compulsive act ... it would be impossible to keep away, to stop picking at wounds even if the wounds were your own.’

Kiran Desai: *The Inheritance of Loss*, p. 236

Purpose: *This research paper focuses on developing critical understanding in Human Resource Management (HRM) students in Aston Business School, UK. The paper reveals that innovative teaching methods encourage deep approaches to study, an indicator of students reaching their own understanding of material and ideas.*

Findings: *Critical understanding and transformative learning can be developed through the innovative teaching methods of enquiry-based learning (EBL) and the story method.*

Design: *Student response to two second year business modules, matched for high student approval rating, was collected through focus group discussion. One module was taught using EBL and the story method, whilst the other used traditional teaching methods. Transcripts were analysed and compared using the structure of the ASSIST measure.*

Research limitations/implications: *The limitation is that this is a single case study comparing and contrasting two business modules. The implication is that the study should be replicated and developed in different learning settings, so that there are multiple data sets to confirm the research finding.*

Practical implication: *Future curriculum development, especially in terms of HE, still needs to encourage students and lecturers to understand more about the nature of knowledge and how to learn. The application of EBL and the story method is described in a module case study – ‘Strategy for Future Leaders’.*

Originality/value: *This is a systematic study to improve understanding of how students and lecturers learn and of the context in which the learning takes place.*

Keywords

Critical understanding, Human Resource Management, innovative teaching methods in Higher Education, enquiry-based learning, the story method and deep approaches to study

Introduction

It is now almost a taken-for-granted assumption that policy on education, training and employment should be guided by the theory of human capital (Coffield, 2000b):

‘Investment in learning in the 21st century is the equivalent of investment in the machinery and technical innovation that was essential to the first great industrial revolution. Then it was physical capital; now it is human capital.’ (DfEE, 1997, p. 15.)

There is a fundamental transition from an industrial to a knowledge-based or learning society (OECD, 1996; Leadbetter, 1999). Coffield (2000a) highlights that the notion of the learning society can be sub-divided into ten models. This research paper focuses on one model – critical understanding. The focus is here because there is a minimal theoretical understanding of how students and lecturers learn and of the context in which the learning takes place (Hannan *et al.*, 2000; Dunne *et al.*, 2000).

In particular, the paper explores the specific context of Human Resource Management (HRM). David Farnham (Farnham and Smith, 2005), CIPD Chief Examiner, notes that CIPD professional standards require students to have both knowledge of the subject and to demonstrate a critical understanding of what they have learned, revealed through explanation, analysis and evaluation. Indeed, nurturing critical minds is part of a high-quality higher education (HE) experience (Malcolm, 2009), because ‘higher skills are keys to social mobility ... as well as one of competitiveness’ (Lord Mandelson, 2009). Critical understanding is used by HR managers to deliver business performance, as expressed by Sacha Romanovitch, Head of People and Culture, Grant Thornton (2009, p. 39):

‘In an increasingly service-oriented economy the differentiation for a business usually comes down to its people. To provide an outstanding service to its clients any business

needs to recruit and retain the best people – promoting and creating an effective working environment’

To this end, the paper will briefly review current literature on critical understanding in HE, reveal its implications for student learning approaches and summarise how the first author is developing the conditions for critical understanding and a deep approach to study in his teaching through enquiry-based learning (EBL) and the story method. The paper will then identify the methodology used to test the impact of the teaching methods, discuss the positive results and conclude by raising implications for future curriculum development. In short, critical understanding and transformative learning can be developed through the innovative teaching methods of EBL and the story method.

Critical Understanding in HE

Critical understanding is defined and then linked it to specific HE debates and current policy initiatives. Coffield (2000b, p. 35) defines critical understanding as:

‘In addition to a solid grounding in the major disciplines, citizens of the 21st century will require a healthy scepticism, a critical faculty to enable them to insist on politicians, experts of all kinds, and teachers and researchers providing evidence and reasoned argument rather than promotional hype.’

Eraut (1997, p. 556) emphasises critical understanding’s link to learning at different levels of analysis:

‘significant changes in capability or understanding ... can be applied to the group, organisational and societal levels as well as that of the individual person.’

Johnson (2005) draws on Newman’s view that the function of HE is to develop critical faculties so that students can see things as they are, get right to the point, discard what is irrelevant and

detect sophistry. Brockbank and McGill (2000, p. 49) go further and define critically transformative learning as:

‘not only deconstructing meanings and the taken-for-granted attitudes and myths and ways of seeing things, but also reconstructing by reconceptualizing and rebuilding – a continuous process that becomes the subject of further transformative learning.’

The student critical thinker applies the process according to the standards and requirements of her discipline, eventually breaching the settled paradigms of her world (Rimiene, 2002; Brockbank and McGill, 2000). To paraphrase the words of Kiran Desai quoted at the start of the paper, the student, facilitated by the lecturer, is trained to undo concepts through argument.

In other words, the student is like the researcher:

‘No longer all-knowing, all-seeing, objective and omnipotent’ but ‘has been forced to re-examine his or her relation to the research process, and is now acutely aware of the social and historical positioning of all subjects and the particular intellectual frameworks through which they are rendered visible, the researcher can only produce knowledge already embedded in the power of those very frameworks.’ (Clegg and Hardy, 2006, p. 435.)

This is a reflexive approach (Calas and Smircich, 1999), which Brockbank and McGill (2000) suggest has five educational values: dialogue, intention, process, modelling and personal stance.

Dialogue is the what of reflective practice. It is social engagement or facilitation, both within individuals and with others, because, as Jarvis (1987, p. 15) argues:

‘learning always takes place within a social context and ... the learner is also to some extent a social construct, so that learning should be regarded as a social phenomenon as well as an individualistic one.’

Belenky *et al.* (1986) distinguished between didactic and real talk, with real talk being associated with reflective practice. Didactic talk requires each participant to report experience, but there is no attempt among participants to join together to arrive at some new understanding.

Real talk requires each participant to listen carefully, it implies a mutually shared agreement that together you are creating the optimum setting so that ideas can grow.

Intention is the where of practice because it is the social context in which talk takes place. More than that, Brockbank and McGill (2000, p. 60, original italics) call for a

‘reflective dialogue that has as its *intention* the provision of a context and support for reflective learning.’

Real talk can only take place in environments that facilitate this form of engagement. Tiered lecture rooms, for example, may inhibit discussion because a learner sat at the back of a class, especially if the learner is shy, will find it hard to ask questions. Brockbank and McGill (2000) add that understanding unintended happenings, by reflecting on a teaching experience and by asking student learners, is often a neglected activity.

Process is the how of reflective practice. It is the particular way a teacher relates to learners – it is the activity, doing and performance. Salmon (1989) promotes the role of personal meaning in every curriculum. This dimension is associated with real talk because the teacher assumes that learners have an abundance of experience upon which to draw in a learning situation.

Modelling is the why of practice because it explains the selection of the teaching method used – this acknowledges that there is choice or a range of methods. The explanation may be articulated in internal documents, for example, a Module Outline, and in external quality assessments. Another aspect of modelling, particularly for the learner, is imitating the teacher in her practice (Schon, 1987).

Personal stance

‘refers to the positions which each of us takes up in life, this metaphor emphasises aspects of experience which goes deeper than the merely cognitive, and which reflect its essentially relational, social and agentic character.’ (Salmon, 1989, p. 231)

The teacher will read their class and the learners will read their teacher by a set of influences which create a relationship to each other. Underlying influences include age, class, race and disposition to learning. This disposition creates feelings, for example, enthusiasm for the subject being explored. The experience will change over time as the influences and feelings become modified by ongoing experience. (Brockbank and McGill, 2000.)

In order to develop reflective practice, the HEA is promoting alternative forms of teaching and one form of critically transformative learning is enquiry-based learning (EBL). The HEA (2005) defines EBL as

‘forms of learning in which learners engage with a self-determined process of enquiry. The approach is intended to foster collaborative learning and deep engagement, through enquiry, with complex, often fuzzy, problems and issues.’

EBL is distinct from problem-based learning because it

‘is perhaps more open to divergent ways of thinking about problems, more open to exploring and understanding different ways of perceiving the world and less concerned with providing firm solutions to problems that do not have simple or unique solutions.’

Jackson (2003a) frames the argument more practically ‘what knowledge, skills, capabilities, qualities underpin such processes [of enquiry]?’ and ‘knowing how to learn in order to solve particular contextualized problems with no right/wrong answers and lots of possibilities’. This practical framing is relevant to employers who are looking for HR employees who can find solutions to complex problems (Farnham and Smith, 2005; Romanovitch, 2009).

Jackson (2003a) identifies barriers to wider adoption of EBL. Students might resist because they are not prepared for this type of learning. Equally, teachers might resist because of the absence of knowledge, overwork and institutional structures demand an explicit curriculum with predictable outcomes.

Implications for Student Learning Approaches

The above discussion reveals that learning is both collaborative (social) and takes place at a deep level. The theme is influenced by the research of Entwistle and his colleagues which acknowledges that students hold conceptions of learning that tend to become increasingly sophisticated as they progress through a degree course. Drawing on Marton and Saljo's (1976) ideas about deep and surface learning, Entwistle (1990) argues that if students have a sophisticated conception of learning, knowledge and evidence, they adopt a deep approach in order to reach their own understanding of material and ideas. If students have an unsophisticated conception, they adopt a surface approach and memorise or acquire facts in order to merely meet course requirements or to respond to external influences.

Extending Marton and Saljo's (1976) work, Entwistle (1998) argues that summative assessment in HE usually encourages a strategic approach where students combine deep and surface approaches in order to achieve the best possible marks. Students using this approach become adept at organising their study time and methods, attend carefully to cues given by teachers as to what questions will come up in examinations. Increased use of explicit, detailed assessment criteria used in many courses will encourage this strategic approach.

Teasing out implications for student behaviour, Entwistle (1998) suggests that an ideal personality type in HE courses is the reasonable adventurer who combines curiosity and the ability to be critical and reflective. Entwistle, McCune and Walker (2001, p. 108) argue that:

‘the intentions to learn in deep or surface ways are mutually exclusive, although the related learning processes may sometimes become mixed in everyday experience. The combination of deep and strategic approaches is commonly found in successful students, but a deep approach on its own is not carried through with sufficient determination and effort to reach deep levels of understanding.’

Given that students, teachers and institutions can all change students’ approaches to learning (Entwistle, 2002), there are also implications for pedagogy. Ramsden and Entwistle (1981) showed that a deep approach is encouraged by students being given freedom in learning and by experiencing good teaching, with:

- good pace
- good pitch
- real-life illustrations
- empathy with students’ difficulties
- tutors being enthusiastic
- tutors offering lively and striking explanations
- constructive friction between the curriculum and teachers’ and students’ conceptions of knowledge

A surface approach is reinforced by:

- summative assessment
- a heavy workload
- lecturers who foster dependency by spoon-feeding

The approaches to learning model offers a rich, authentic account of learning in HE (Coffield *et al.*, 2004). Nevertheless, Haggis (2003) critiques the model in three ways. First, there is the danger of students who are identified as having a deep approach to learning becoming labelled as deep learners. Second, there is a danger for teachers assuming that deep approaches are more likely to result in high-quality learning outcomes. Third and last, intensive individual attention

to students' everyday learning does not seem realistic in the context of a mass system of HE with declining resources for contact between lecturers, support staff and students.

Despite the model being used to generate new ideas about teaching and learning in HE, Entwistle (1998) argues that researchers need to build up case studies by observing students studying and interviewing them about their approaches. This paper takes up that challenge. Before that, the paper will summarise how the first author is developing the conditions for critical understanding and a deep approach to study in his teaching through the pedagogy of EBL and the story method.

The Case of 'Strategy for Future Leaders'

'Strategy for Future Leaders' is a second year HRM module at Aston Business School, UK, though other business students can take the module. EBL is the underpinning philosophy of the module, guiding the selection of its critical content and assessment, and the story method is used to cohere the presentation of the course materials. EBL is discussed first and then the story method.

The Module Outline (Butler, 2009, p. 1) makes it clear that the module takes a critical perspective by arguing that:

'Strategy and leadership are two fundamental activities in an organisation. Strategy is about shaping a future direction and leadership is about co-ordinating effort to achieve the aims and objectives. Neither is easy because there are no right or wrong answers, only judgement about what to do.'

The first lecture (Week 1) and the review lectures at the end of Terms 1 (Week 10) and 2 (Week 22) reinforce the message (Table 1).

Insert Table 1

Students engage with a self-determined process of enquiry because they review strategy and leadership from a variety of theoretical perspectives (HEA, 2005). This is achieved by relating strategy and leadership (Weeks 2 and 3) to four underlying management ideologies which have significantly influenced organisational theory. In Week 4, the first ideology to be introduced is systematic management, followed by people management (Week 5), environment management (Week 7) and governance management (Week 8).

The problematic nature of management knowledge is further reinforced by the first half of the module emphasising the inconsistent links between theory and practice (all theory does not work in all situations). The second half of the module extends the learning from the first half by critiquing that learning (introducing more complex levels of analysis).

Nevertheless, the lecture programme and the management ideologies are integrated in an article published by the first author (Butler, 2006), which is uploaded onto the university's intranet system (Blackboard) and made available to students before the module starts. The use of the article draws on the related HEA agenda of linking disciplined-based research with teaching to benefit student learning (Jenkins *et al.*, 2007).

The assessment method supports the critical perspective by testing the students understanding of how to use the management ideologies to solve particular contextualized problems with no right/wrong answers and lots of possibilities (Jackson, 2003a). There are two essays and both

deal with complex and fuzzy issues. In the first essay, students select an organisation for study. Students describe their chosen organisation, analyse it in terms of the different approaches to management thinking and then make recommendations about how the organisation could change. In short, they are a Management Consultant, diagnosing how an organisation functions.

The second essay is even more reflexive. The students focus on how they might lead in the future, by creating a future ideal organisation or by drawing on examples from a range of organisations which demonstrate good practice for them. The only limiting factor is that whatever they choose, it should demonstrate the skills, knowledge and reflexivity they will have developed during the module. Students are supported in the formative development of their ideas for both essays by the module leader, discussion with peers taking the module and student writing mentors (see the tutorials in Table 1).

EBL engages the students' imagination, however, the lecturer must establish the conditions for creativity and for the student to explore the space (Jackson, 2003a; 2003b). The story method is used to cohere the presentation of the course materials. It is used to grab the audience's attention – to push aside existing thoughts, because 'He [the audience] will be pleased to make that effort only if there is a compelling enticement for him to do so.' (Minto, 2002, p. 39). Part of the enticement is structuring the story in a logical sequence which involves having 'a beginning, a middle, and an end. That is, it establishes a situation, introduces a complication, and offers a resolution.' (Minto, 2002, p. 39).

Various storytelling techniques are used, but mapping and dialogue are used most often in this module. Mapping is used at the module level to place the student's imagination in a context. By mapping it is meant emphasising at the start of the module the lecture programme and continuously reminding students where each lecture fits into the programme. This ensures that students do not get lost in their subjective discoveries, but places their learning in the context of the learning outcomes of the module.

The story method captures the real talk aspect of dialogue or the what of teaching (Brockbank and McGill, 2000). It is used at three levels: module, lecture and individual. At the module level, the importance of real talk, participants joining together to arrive at some new understanding, is clearly stated in the Module Outline (Butler, 2009, pp. 6-7):

‘Method of Teaching - The module will use a combination of lectures and tutorials.

Most importantly, your participation will be encouraged by stimulating your ideas through critical reading, by exploring your ideas and previous experiences through discussion and debate and by testing your ideas through your essay preparation. The tutorials will be the environment in which you can participate most. They will be used to prepare you for your essay submissions, by linking the lectures, your reading and your experience to organisations of your choice.’

At the lecture level, film clips, pictures and play are used to grab the audience's attention. The selection of a technique is determined by the content of the lecture. Play is a useful technique for simulating an experience, for example, acting out the potential benefits of inclusive decision-making. A situation has been established (decision-making), a complication has been introduced (the need for high performance) and a resolution has been offered (being inclusive to maximize the chances of achieving the optimal decision). The simulation is followed by a brief group

discussion. The discussion is contextualised by linking the simulation to relevant organisational theory in the main part of the lecture. The lecture ends by reviewing how the learning outcomes have been achieved and by highlighting suggested reading for the next session. Questions are continuously encouraged.

At the individual level, the story method promotes authentic self-disclosure (Egan, 1973; Brockbank and McGill, 2000). It is an attempt to reveal myself as a person and to reach the listener. The speaker is opening the door to others in the group. It contrasts the use of the first person, “I”, with the third person, “them, it and people”. It is used because it makes information interesting by dealing with real events and the feelings they evoke. There are difficulties with this approach. The story-teller is taking a risk by requesting support from listeners to engage with the purpose for the story-telling. There may also be a cultural bias against self-disclosure and the expression of emotion. Nevertheless, by sharing experiences, students and lecturers can learn from each other.

Despite receiving high student approval ratings, the first author wanted to investigate whether critical understanding and a deep approach to study are being developed through the innovative teaching methods of EBL and the story method. This led to two research questions:

- do students adapt to the teaching methods used?
- how do students benefit from the teaching methods?

Method

The development of critical understanding can be tested by identifying the approach to study that students adopt. Entwistle (1990) argues that if students have a sophisticated conception of

learning, knowledge and evidence, they adopt a deep approach. Conversely, if students have an unsophisticated conception, they adopt a surface approach.

Strategy for Future Leaders was compared with a traditionally taught module, but equivalent in other ways. It is a second year business module and the lecturer has a similar approval rating. The module is taught over one term from January to June.

Crucially, however, the lecturer in the comparison module does not create a constructive friction between the teachers' and students' conceptions of knowledge. The content of the lectures spoon-feeds information which is assessed summatively. This difference reinforces in students a surface approach to learning.

A specific example of how this is done is the lecturer throughout the session speaking two or three sentences, then stopping for a few minutes so that the students have time to copy the information. After several iterations, the lecturer will then stop and give an anecdote to explain the information. From time-to-time, the lecturer will also stop and ask a question to test the recall of the students.

The intention of transmitting factual information to students in a structured way is an important learning activity. As Coffield (2000b) states, it provides a solid grounding in a discipline. Developing critical understanding and a deep approach to study, however, is an important addition to a factual foundation because it enables students as future HR leaders to challenge expert and taken-for-granted knowledge through reasoned argument (Coffield, 2000b; Eraut, 1997; Brockbank and McGill, 2000; Rimiene, 2002; Johnson, 2005).

Data was collected by using a mixed method approach so that greater validity would be achieved, that-is-to-say, the quality of data is enhanced by being well grounded in reality (Coffield *et al.*, 2004). It also meant that there would be greater reliability or internal consistency because data from one method can be cross-checked against another (Coffield *et al.*, 2004). The first author observed the lecturer of the comparison module delivering a session to observe his pedagogy. The key data collected, however, was from running a series of focus groups with students. The second author ran two focus groups with paid participants from the target module and one from the comparison module. The second author is independent, not knowing either set of students. The focus groups took place between February and March 2006, whilst the modules were being taught simultaneously. Other quantitative measures at several time points are also being collected but are not reported here.

Student discourse in the audio taped focus group transcripts was coded into the categories used in the ASSIST (Approaches and Study Skills Inventory for Students) scoring key. The ASSIST is a version of the Approach to Study Inventory (ASI) (Entwistle and Ramsden, 1983) and may be used to identify the approach to study taken by students in each Module. Three approaches to study are identified: deep, strategic and surface apathetic (see Table 2).

Insert Table 2

Results and Discussion

Do students adapt to the teaching methods used?

For Strategy for Future Leaders, a distinctive pattern of discourse was found. 47 events (1,894 words) were coded for the Module:

- 20 for a deep approach (seeking meaning 8, relating ideas 11, interest in ideas 1)
- 3 for a strategic approach (all alertness to assessment demands)
- 1 for surface apathetic approach (fear of failure)

In preferences for different types of course and teaching there were:

- 15 for supporting understanding
- 8 for transmitting information

For the comparison module, there was also a distinctive but different pattern found. Students spoke very little about their approach to study except in relation to their preferences for different types of course and teaching. 13 events (647 words) were coded, all for the transmitting information preference.

The two patterns reveal that despite both teachers having a similar approval rating, the students benefit from the teaching methods used in different ways. Strategy for Future Leaders students benefit by developing a deep approach to study undertaken, whilst students doing the comparison module do not reveal this approach.

The data raises an implication for the role of student feedback. Students may equally like two modules taught in two ways, but one is developing the conditions for critical understanding. This

suggests the need for more sophisticated methods of comparing teachers and their teaching methods. It is important to be clear about what is being measured, is it style or is it achieving specified learning outcomes.

How do students benefit from the teaching methods?

Having identified that students do adapt to the teaching methods used, it is important to reveal how they benefit from the methods. In order to achieve this, student quotations from the transcripts will be used. The quotations will be grouped around the five educational values suggested by Brockbank and McGill (2000).

For Strategy for Future Leaders, there is evidence of all five values. Dialogue takes the form of real talk (Belenky *et al.*, 1986). Students spoke about liking the way the module supported their personal understanding and reflective learning:

‘If you’re given stuff in a way where you have to declare all your ideas and say ‘this is my idea, I think I’ve seen this somewhere before, this is why I think this works’, I’m far more motivated to actually write it.’

Another example is:

‘Coming to uni, I didn’t ever perceive that I would be doing learning about myself. You just think that you’re just going to be learning something that’s already there from books and that. So it’s quite a whole different take on university because you are here to learn about yourself as well.’

Real talk then links into the modelling value, as students think about imitating the teacher in their future managerial roles (Schon, 1987):

‘It’s what type of Managers we want to be in a business context. And like ... when we’re going through the theories, not only are we understanding it but you’re thinking ‘that’s what I want to do’ and I think that’s really important.’

Real talk also links into intention, because the context for reflective learning (Brockbank and McGill, 2000) is not just established in the lecture room, but extended outside it, both at university:

‘When I’m sat there I’m like, oh yeah, nodding because I think I understand it and I’ll get outside the lecture and go ‘what, what was all that about?’ So then I have to go away and really look around the subject rather than just take the lecture.’

And in the workplace:

‘You’ve got to actually really think about how you can apply it to an organisation or yourself, more than in other modules.’

The personal stance value changes over time as the feelings to the module become modified by ongoing experience. Students talked about it being a difficult journey towards reflective learning:

‘At the beginning of last term, I would have said no, I absolutely hated it because I felt really uncomfortable. But now I do actually enjoy it and I think it’s really good and I do get a lot out of it.’

Another example is:

‘After every lecture in the first term, I used to say to my friend ‘what is the relevance of this?’ Just because I was so used to coming from a lecture knowing totally what it was about. But that’s because I wasn’t used to this whole new way of learning about it. But I do really enjoy it now, just because I understand the work better and I understand the ideas.’

The difficult journey means that some students would prefer the conventional view of process (Salmon, 1989), more transmission of information:

‘There’s no actual guidelines for any of this work. As to what he actually expects. I don’t ... you know, I understand, I mean appreciate and know how I have to do it all myself and that’s fair but maybe just a bit more of like an outline of what he wants.’

Brockbank and McGill (2000) anticipate this type of reaction with the story method because the story-teller is taking a risk by requesting support from listeners to engage with the purpose for the story-telling. It is interesting that this reaction is revealed during the focus groups and not to the lecturer. There is a need to be sensitive to the students’ journey and the establishment of a trusting relationship so that students and lecturers learn from each other to establish a process that works.

In contrast, the popularity of the comparison module rests on two foundations which students found difficult to disentangle. The first, unlike Strategy for Future Leaders, is the use of the conventional view of the process value, the highly structured programme in which students would prepare answers to seminar topics and could be selected to answer questions in class:

‘Yeah, because compared to other modules, I’d say it was very structured, yes. (Do you like the structure?) Definitely, yeah, yeah.’

‘...and (he will) say ‘okay, you over there, what do you think ... about this?’ So it actually picks up people, which I think is quite good as well.’

The second, like Strategy for Future Leaders, is an aspect of personal stance, the disposition to learning or the personal qualities of the teacher (Brockbank and McGill, 2000):

‘This is one of the best (modules) ... purely because of the lecturer I’d say. ... while he’s doing the lecture ... he’ll make sure everyone keeps interested and concentrates. He’ll just say little jokes on the side or tell stories or something like that or relate to examples and things like that. So there are the lecturers who I’d say are a bit boring, I mean you can fall asleep in some lectures.’

Again there are two patterns, revealing that the students adapt to the teaching methods used in different ways. The deep approach to study undertaken in Strategy for Future Leaders is supported by adopting the majority of Brockbank and McGill's (2000) five education values, whilst learning in the comparison module is not supported by such a range. From this data, it can be argued that developing the conditions for critical understanding and a deep approach to study is a complex process involving the integration of a variety of teaching methods.

The data raises an implication for the role of lecturer education. Placing teachers in the lecture room without being made aware of the broad needs of learners, undermines the transformatory learning in higher education. New teachers need not just a sound education, but continuous mentoring in the needs of learners. Many universities now have learning and teaching policies and structures which lead to teaching qualifications, but how effective are they in coaching teachers in the underlying educational values of the kind suggested by Brockbank and McGill (2000).

Conclusions

The research reported here used the approach to study adopted by students in two similar modules but with differing teaching methods to test the development of critical understanding. In short, do HRM students adapt to EBL and the story method and how do they benefit from the methods. A positive impact was found, with students revealing a deep approach to study and benefiting in terms of the five educational values of reflective practice (Brockbank and McGill,

2000). The research finding confirms that students, teachers and institutions can all change students' approaches to learning (Entwistle, 2002).

To overcome the limitation that this is a single case study comparing and contrasting two business modules, the study should be replicated and developed in different learning settings, so that there are multiple data sets to confirm the research finding. Future research questions could include evaluating the long-term impact of these results, especially if and how HR managers are better equipped to provide performance improvement.

The agenda set out by Coffield and Williamson (1997) a decade ago, in their book on repositioning HE, is still unresolved. Universities still need to open up the curriculum to enable more flexible forms of study placing much greater emphasis on helping students and lecturers to acquire a knowledge of how to learn. Students should expect high standards of teaching, learning support and resources for effective study, especially in the area of flexible learning opportunities.

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Table 1: Module Content – Strategy for Future Leaders

Week	Module Content
<i>Teaching Period 1 – Establishing the Variety of Approaches to Management Thinking</i>	
1	Lecture: Scoping the Module – Overview, Ways of Working and Key Issues
2	Lecture: Introducing Strategy Tutorial: Developing Your Critical Skills
3	Lecture: Introducing Leadership Tutorial: Developing Your Critical Skills
4	Lecture: The Origins of Management Thinking – Organisations Tutorial: Setting First Essay
5	Lecture: New Management Thinking – People and Organisations Tutorial: Setting First Essay
6	Reading Week – Prepare Essay Plan
7	Lecture: More New Management Thinking – Environments and Organisations Tutorial: Review of Essay Plan with Writing Mentors
8	Lecture: Emergent Management Thinking – Governance and Organisations Tutorial: Review of Essay Plan with Writing Mentors
9	Lecture: Guest Speaker Tutorial: Peer Review of Essay
10	Lecture: Review – So What? ... Expectations of first essay Tutorial: Peer Review of Essay
11	Hand in first essay
<i>Teaching Period 2 – Critiquing the Variety of Approaches to Management Thinking</i>	
12&13	Exam Week
14	Lecture: Feedback on first essay Tutorial: Power
15	Lecture: Critique of Systematic Management – The Myth of Lean Production? Tutorial: Power
16	Lecture: Critique of Human Relations – The Myth of the End of Trade Unionism? Tutorial: Setting Second Essay
17	Lecture: Guest Speaker Tutorial: Setting Second Essay
18	Reading Week
19	Lecture: Critique of Open Systems – The Myth of Globalization? Tutorial: Review of Essay Plan with Writing Mentors
20	Lecture: Critique of Governance – The Myth of the Female Takeover? Tutorial: Review of Essay Plan with Writing Mentors
21	Lecture: Strategy, Leadership and You Tutorial: Peer Review of Essay
22	Lecture: Second Review – Synthesising the module and expectations of second essay Tutorial: Peer Review of Essay
23	Prepare essay
24	Hand in second essay
25	Marking

Table 2: ASSIST Scoring Key

Deep Approach

- seeking meaning
- relating ideas
- use of evidence
- interest in ideas

Strategic Approach

- organised studying
- time management
- alertness to assessment demands
- achieving
- monitoring effectiveness

Surface Apathetic Approach

- lack of purpose
- unrelated memorising
- syllabus-boundness
- fear of failure

Preferences for different types of course and teaching

- supporting understanding
- transmitting information