

the intention to use digital media and its associated implications. We would also suggest that verbal discussion of ethical issues and responsibilities be part of the preparation for undertaking the digital media learning task. In addition there may need to be opportunities, built in to the task, for monitoring, further guidance and/or supervision.

The study concluded that, whilst academic staff and their students are being innovative in using digital media, there is the potential to expose themselves and others to ethical risk without being aware of it. Institutions, academics, and students must recognise and understand their ethical responsibilities. Generally speaking, ethics is not well covered in university education, despite some very good reasons why it ought to be (Escámez, López and Jover, 2008). There is a need for more development and education in this area, particularly in discipline areas not naturally associated with ethics.

Despite the need for caution, this paper has begun to identify several areas of important work that, when completed, could be of value in promoting ethically responsible innovations in the use of digital media-enhanced learning.

Talking Point...

Reading Students'

Expectations: a talking point

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As with many other aspects of academic life, mechanisms to facilitate ethical appraisal of proposed innovations provide time and space to consider alternative perspectives. This framework, with further development, may provide such a mechanism for appraising the innovative use of technologies in learning and teaching.

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Introduction

This brief paper addresses the issue of graduate and postgraduate learners who have been educated in a language other than English, who subsequently relocate to England to study English. Whether this relocation is for work reasons or for leisure, the challenge of

English language acquisition can lead to learner anxiety and a range of issues, including inadvertent peer racism. Using a reflective method and drawing on my own experience of working in FE colleges, HE institutions, privately-owned language schools, and a maximum security prison, I will argue that it is frequently an institution's practice to build a class solely by the existing language attainment of each individual learner (to make a class up of students of approximately the same level of English); and that while this may work well in many cases, the fact that no notice is taken of the individual student's prior attainment in his/her original language can lead to tension if the class is not managed by the tutor. For example, there is often a challenge presented to the tutor of a class comprised of graduates from elsewhere in the world and students of the same level of English who have had no formal education and are in the UK (perhaps) seeking asylum.

What lessons can be drawn from my observations of this phenomenon in different pedagogic milieux? I suggest that a successful tutor in such a situation is much more than a sharer of knowledge and a means for engaging learner achievement through self-directed learning. The tutor also serves as a container for anxiety and a way of diffusing potential tension when intrinsically racist incidents brew.

Although issues of a similar nature will be experienced by child learners as well, given the space limitations here, this paper will only address the experiences of adult learners. Throughout this paper, the names of institutions have been expunged.

English language acquisition

It is only to be expected that adults who arrive in England with a view to remaining here for a

prolonged period of time, if not permanently, will be inclined to investigate and enrol on English language programmes. Learning English might be a priority or it might be a secondary concern; as an individual goal it might be partly for the learner's own amusement, partly for reasons of career progression (or to secure a job in general), and partly spurred on by instincts of personal safety: any combination thereof is quite likely. Whatever the learner's reasons for learning English are, a choice will need to be made as to where to study: depending on where the potential learner has chosen to live, the choices of places to study will either be bountiful or frugal; but the originator of the programme is likely to be a local college of Further Education, a privately-owned language academy, or a community-run course (for example, Adult Ed).

Whatever alternative is selected, there should follow some form of locally standardised, or nationally standardised, assessment for the four core skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. (At this point, given more space and time than we have been allocated for today's proceedings, we might discuss the efficacy of the assessment process as a method of recognising a learner's prior educational achievements.) As a result of this assessment, in whatever form it takes, the learner is assigned a class; however, has the assessment paid attention to the latent study skills of this learner? Or has the assessment merely recorded, accurately, that this particular learner has a reading level of Level 1 and a writing level of Entry 3 (for example), at least on this specific day? Is there any way of ascertaining – routinely, rather than by chance – what academic level the learner reached in his or her country of origin?

Hypothetically, ignoring the likelihood of spiky profiles, let us assume that the class will be

delivered at Entry Level 2. There is a good chance that the class will be made up of, say, twelve learners from twelve different countries, some of whom are asylum seekers from countries experiencing conflict, who might have had little previous education; some of whom have had a university education in a mother tongue other than English; and some of whom have had previous exposure to English but have not needed more than a foundation usage until now.

We can see that such a class will require a variety of approaches from the tutor, exploring and addressing the different sets of learning styles, and this in itself is no more than a challenge (it should not evolve into a problem). On the other hand, what might grow into a problem, if it is either not noticed or it is ignored, is the sense of dislike between class members that might brew as the result of learner anxiety, which may take one or more of many forms, irrespective of the learner's age, country of origin, or prior educational attainment, but which might be exaggerated, if unchecked, into cases of peer racism with some learners. In other words, put baldly, there are learners who have enjoyed a form of elevated academic standing, who do not appreciate being in the same class as learners who they perceive will slow down the class's progress, even though (as we have said) the class is all at Entry Level 2. And of course vice versa is possible: among the learners who have not been formerly educated, there might grow a perception – a perception and nothing more – that the learners who are already postgraduates feel that they 'rule' the class.

It must be said, in this same hypothetical situation, that neither set of learners have actually said that they secretly disrespect the other learners. Much of this anxiety might not even be experienced on a conscious level. But

if issues either of perceived mental sloth, or of latent aloofness, are not addressed and contained by the tutor, the risk of a gestating peer racism is increased. As Obholzer (1994) writes: 'Institutions often serve as containers for the unwanted or difficult-to-cope with aspects of ourselves' (p.172) – Obholzer here sternly convincing in his assertion that workplaces are containers for elements of anxiety, and in his implication that we might draw something analogous from our work with learners.

Allow me, then, to present a few gobbets of anecdotal evidence from my own experience of working in a variety of educational settings.

F.E. colleges and language schools

The model followed, by and large, is to fill a class with learners who share the same or very similar 'spiky' profiles, with reference to reading, writing, speaking and listening, all gathered on a specific date, with all of the vicissitudes inherent in on-the-spot testing made relevant.

Attendance at a language school is not cheap, of course, certainly not when compared with the nominal rates charged by F.E. colleges (these latter charges, in fact, having replaced the 'free' classes, government-funded, that reinvigorated the industry in the 90s and early years of the 21st Century). The cost of a course may well be a factor in the learner's decision.

Prison

While it is not correct to assume that all offenders inside a prison who are studying ESOL are from lower socio-economic demographics, it is fair to say that a high proportion of offenders have restricted levels of prior learning. Some of the learners on ESOL programmes in prison were arrested at UK airports for smuggling in drugs: the placement is often for the purposes of the prisoner's survival while inside (particularly

with reference to prisoners serving longer sentences). The irony is that many prisons bear witness to a very distinct and localised prison language among inmates – a code that goes beyond mere lexical substitution, and which adheres to its own strict logic for the purposes of misguiding staff – and if we add English for Speakers of Other Languages to the requirements imposed on the prisoners by the prisoners, this means two new 'languages' to learn.

Referring to adolescent slang, Labov (1992) writes: 'I find three main categories of terms: (1) those for labelling people; (2) those for painting people, activities, and places positively or negatively; and (3) those for ways of spending leisure, focused upon having fun... as well as doing nothing at all.' It is interesting to note that, although these categorisations are present among offenders' speech in the Prison, the referents have understandably changed. Labelling people, for example, has a fairly low currency: apart from labelling Vulnerable Prisoners 'Fraggles' and apart from the occasional disdainful reference to an offender's crime, for most offenders people were either 'on the out', 'on road' (i.e. free, outside the Prison) or 'on the in'.

Generally, prisoners seem instinctively knowledgeable on the subject of racial politics. Prison Language is a social leveller, much more so than ESOL will ever be. That said, both forms of the new uses of language act as a social adhesive.

H.E.

Theoretically, learners who arrive for an undergraduate programme should have achieved a set quantity of A Levels, at a required grade. Theoretically also, learners should have been assessed for English language capabilities. But does theory translate into practice?

(For the purposes of this paper the model for Higher Education is different anyway. Here we might be discussing ESOL classes that have been identified as a learner need, either following the induction of a particular course or before induction. This is an ESOL course as a specific learner support mechanism; it is not a course that the learner has enrolled onto as a primary goal.)

In a perfect world, in a perfect university, the learner has been identified with some language issues and yet has arrived with a set amount of previous learning accrued. Will this mean that racist incidents never occur or that racist undertones will never flow through a course? It will not. Colleagues speak of the necessity of keeping apart (as far as possible) the representatives of particular countries; but these divisions must be re-examined frequently. For example, there are learners from India who may look down on learners from Nepal – traditionally a poorer base, with associations of inadequacy – and it is well worth remembering that for many learners the caste system is as relevant today as it ever was.

Lessons learned?

What lessons can be drawn from any of these observations of this phenomenon in different pedagogic milieux? Certainly, little has emerged that has come from anywhere other than an appreciation of common sense. This does not mean, however, that it is worth ignoring – or taking for granted. While the above serves as little more than a taster, perhaps it has been sufficient to suggest that practices of streaming learners (and learning) are by no means free of pedagogic danger. Prior attainment in the learner's original language gives a learner more than a comfortable sense of achievement and the skills to use to build further learning for him- or herself; it might also exaggerate – often on

an unconscious level – emotions of a perceived superiority over others, particularly when the learner has come from a background in which conflict has been rife.

What is the tutor to do with such information? While an encyclopaedic knowledge, of course, of each learner's personal background and cultural history is impossible, an awareness of the same is beneficial. Up to a point the tutor may contain a good deal of learner anxiety; but this can never be the sole reason for the tutor's position – or even the primary one. If a tutor is to serve as a container for anxiety and a way of diffusing potential tension when intrinsically racist incidents are in embryo, there is less chance of the development of a

truly successful language course. So one question that springs to mind at the culmination of this short paper is this: Do we need to be better aware of the links between pedagogy and the containment of learner anxiety?

This is our talking point for the rest of this session.

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Standing Up for Teaching: The 'Crime' of Striving for Excellence

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Abstract

In recent years a proliferation of local and national teaching awards has occurred in many countries. The new language of excellence has led institutions and policy-makers to embrace teaching awards. Although these award schemes harbour competing and coexisting drivers and appeal to different stakeholders for different reasons, they have helped to raise the profile and importance of teaching in higher education. At the same time, the idea of recognising individuals as excellent teachers remains distasteful to many educators. Awards remain controversial as they compete with traditional ideals of egalitarianism which dominate the education profession. In the backdrop of lingering controversy, this short opinion paper reflects on the costs of standing up for teaching after applying for and

successfully winning a National Award for Sustained Excellence in Teaching. Using an acronym it describes the CRIME of excellence and makes the case for teaching awards criteria to recognise critical forms of scholarship. While definitions of excellence will always be contestable it argues that teaching awards are not mutually exclusive from an individual ethos of striving for continuous improvement. The paper concludes that the education profession does a great disservice to the status of teaching if we shame and snipe away at those judged by peers as our best.

Introduction

Over the last decade it has become increasingly common to recognise and celebrate teaching excellence. Although