

# EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

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## How is it for us? Living with Quality Enhancement Strategies in Scottish HE – a View from Educational Developers

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### Context

The authors are members of the Scottish Higher Education Developers (SHED) group, a sub-committee of Universities Scotland Learning and Teaching Committee. The group has educational development representatives from each of the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) member universities and takes a collective overview of matters pertinent to the progression of educational development in the Scottish sector. The group reflects a collaborative approach taken towards enhancing the student learning experience in the Scottish sector.

Every Scottish higher education institution (HEI) has educational development provision, ranging from established units of many years standing to units that are embryonic in form. Some have large teams working on a number of strategic projects; others are essentially 'one-person-bands' drawing on expertise within cognate areas to help develop issues. We consider ourselves 'agents for change' and were involved in enhancing the learning experience before it became 'fashionable'. The work covers a range of activities but, typically, consists of professional development programmes, facilitating staff to identify and assimilate effective practice, pedagogical research and evaluating at 'the chalkface'.

The quality assurance model for the student learning experience in Scottish universities has developed significantly over the last fifteen years. In the early 90s the model had a strong externally determined measure of quality through 'teaching quality assessment' and was similar to the approach taken in the rest of the UK. This became the Institutional Audit (systems and processes in institutions) and Subject Review (quality of discipline-level provision) models, again externally measured and reasonably similar to the rest of the UK.

A step-change in the Scottish model happened in 2003 with the development of the Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) (QAAHE, 2003a) – this introduced a significantly different model from the rest of the UK. This is based on the concept of enhancement-led quality assurance or 'prospective QA' (Biggs, 2002) and is predicated on a review of the previous models which concluded that in general the quality of provision at subject level and of internal systems and processes in Scottish Universities was of good standing. The new Framework emerged from

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*Education developers from Scotland enjoying a break at their Summer Conference at Sabhal Mor Ostaig College in Skye.*

collaborative sector/students/Quality Assurance Agency (Scotland)/SFC discussions on the review, to the satisfaction of all involved.

The Framework is characterised by a commitment to:

- a model with enhancement of the student learning experience at its heart
- taking a long-term view of 'quality improvement'
- shifting the 'culture' of quality measurement in institutions from top-down compliance to ownership of the model at the practitioner level through a reflective evaluation of practice
- collaborative partnerships in which change by consensus is actively promoted.

The higher education sector in Scotland also influenced the fundamental basis of the model by being justifiably proud and protective of institutional autonomy and having long-standing suspicious and antagonist views of externally based evaluative models.

The definition adopted is that QE is about taking 'deliberate steps' to improve the quality of the student learning experience – such steps will be managed strategically by institutions in an environment in which a risk-taking approach to innovation is encouraged (QAAHE, 2003b).

The Framework consists of the five 'pillars' of:

- internally organised and owned subject review
- comprehensive information on institutions in the public domain
- student involvement in quality processes
- external review through an Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR) process
- enhancement themes

The first three of these are also happening in the rest of the UK, but with either subtle (public information, internal review), or significant (student involvement), differences in approach and level of engagement.

The Framework has been evaluated by the University of Lancaster and their report on the first evaluation of the model was published earlier this year (SFC, 2007).

In addition to the collaborative culture existing in Scottish HE, the Framework has to be viewed against other significant background features. The sector has developed strategic approaches to learning and teaching without direct ‘top-sliced’ funding for this purpose and without the benefit of funding council initiatives elsewhere such as the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund, National Teaching Fellowship scheme and Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning scheme. Although the impact of these has still to be evaluated it is nevertheless felt by many of us in Scotland that incentivisation at the practitioner level has been compromised by the lack of tangible ‘rewards’ for engaging with the new Framework. It has to be said, however, that senior management in Scottish HEIs took a collective decision some years ago not to have ‘top-sliced’ funding for major initiatives, which could be looked at now as being hoisted with one’s own petard!

### Internal Review

Each Scottish institution has developed its own internal review model around a generic set of guidelines. Some institutions, notably those ‘post-92’, have well-established models from their previous history of quality assurance development through the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA). Both pre- and post-92 universities have long established involvement in other quality assurance measures such as External Examiners and through working with Professional and Statutory Bodies.

Many institutions have developed their internal models around a framework that mirrors characteristics of ELIR (see below). The involvement of educational development units in this process has been variable, ranging from helping staff to identify good practice, training them for review and assisting with action plans. The generally held view is that we have had an increasing influence over the last three years though it should be said that this influence can range from extensive to none at all.

Our view is that this part of the QEF has been successful and certainly less intrusive than any previous externally driven model. It has given institutions confidence and the opportunity to be masters of their own identity within a robust process. Some institutions have also successfully taken the opportunity of involving students as equal-status internal reviewers and external subject experts from academia and industry.

### ELIR

All Scottish Universities have now taken part in an external review under the guidelines of the ELIR model (QAAHE, 2003b). This allows institutions wide-ranging scope to develop individual agenda from their self-evaluation, culminating in a ‘Reflective Analysis’ document (similar to the good-old SED from earlier days of QA). This document forms the basis of the external review process. We are encouraged to be truly reflective in this process about overall approaches to enhancement and how we have managed ‘risk’.

The relative balance between ‘assurance’ and enhancement’ has changed since 2003 and it has been an interesting journey, to say the least. Institutions reviewed in the first year of the cycle felt that the balance was still firmly towards

assurance, probably due both to approaches taken within institutions themselves and the approach of the external reviewers. Reviews conducted in the later years of the cycle have shown a welcome tipping of the balance towards a more enhancement-led approach, probably reflecting the maturation of the model in the eyes of both institutions and reviewers.

A consistent message running through most but not all of the public reports (QAAHE, 2007a) is the importance and involvement of educational development units in institutions in actively promoting enhancement approaches and in directly influencing both strategy and practice with respect to developing enhanced reflective practice in staff.

The ELIR process has required institutions to develop appropriate strategies for enhancement ranging from ‘quality enhancement strategies’ themselves to concepts of linked strategies such as teaching and learning, research, wider access and employability. It is here that the integrative and ‘networked’ aspects of the overall QEF begin to influence the approaches taken within institutions. As this has evolved, we have become increasingly aware of the potential impact on practitioner performance and enhanced learning. Institutions have taken stock of the impact of educational development units on such practice and, in most cases, taken steps to strengthen these – a welcome move. However, this is not universal practice and in at least one case, an educational development unit has been disbanded as part of the reflective analysis process!

To what extent has ELIR engaged staff at practitioner level? Variably, is the answer. It appears to depend on how the institution has engaged with staff in the past (which brings us back in part to the strength or otherwise of links to us as educational developers), particularly in the writing of the Reflective Analysis document and in preparing for review. It also seems to depend on how familiar staff are with the process of developing innovative teaching approaches and how much enthusiasm there is for this. An acid-test of an institution’s eventual success with the ELIR process is how sustainable its enhancement strategy is and how well staff continue (or even start) to engage with an enhancement agenda.

Institutional experiences have not always been positive. Most have seen the benefit of the early preparation of the Reflective Analysis document when staff were reflecting on their approach and addressing issues that would be raised in the review. Gaps in an institution’s process and practice were identified and action plans implemented. However, the closer to the review itself, the more the production side of things took over, and any reflective process tended to go out the window for some institutions. In short, some have experienced this period as counter-productive to staff satisfaction. Couple this with instances of external reviewers being neither well trained nor very switched on to Scottish HE structures or even QE agenda, and a recipe for potential disaster was upon an institution. One has likened the process in their case as not dissimilar from an old-style audit/subject review. This illustrates the traumas and frustrations in that institution and an almost complete failing of the ELIR review process.

## Enhancement Themes

The original Themes concept was and still is a good one – take an area of current pedagogical importance to the sector, fund it, bring international experts in to debate issues with practitioners and give the whole Theme a burst of energy (QAAHE, 2007b). Reality has, on the other hand, been different, with engagement levels with the Themes varying across HEIs. Some can track engagement from strategy to practitioner quite well and show that staff are at least thinking about outputs from the Themes. In some cases this has resulted in developing innovative practice in conjunction with educational developers. In others the link is much more tenuous. Themes are proving important at the strategic level for some – if not shaping development, then either reinforcing or challenging an institution's own approach to practice or at the very least raising and maintaining awareness in staff.

Regarding impact of the Themes, it is of course nonsense to say that practitioners don't have anything to do with an issue such as 'Assessment' or 'Student Needs' (two of the Themes) as these are fundamental to any learning environment. Yet, to what extent can it be said that that practitioner engagement has been prompted by a national Theme as opposed to a personal or institutionally supported process of regular practitioner reflection and development of practice? The answer we are afraid is a bit complex to fathom just yet – but we are working on it!

So why has engagement at practitioner level been patchy? This may in fact be a premature question to ask. There is a feeling of practitioners being 'swamped' with the introduction of two new Themes each year since 2004. Although a Theme is no longer funded after its initial 12-18 month period of activity, it remains active, at the very least enshrined in the learning and teaching strategies of some institutions. But introducing two new Themes per year does not give practitioners an adequate opportunity to absorb or interact with the period of funded activity before they also have to start thinking about the new Themes that are being introduced. Also, some of the Themes don't necessarily map onto the priorities for those of the institution at that particular time – the jury is still out on this one as to what that actually means from an external review perspective.

All Themes have a Steering Group which oversees development during the main 'active period' chaired by a prominent academic from the sector. Although all Chairs have been enthusiastic supporters of the concept, there has been a tendency for some Themes to be unduly influenced by these individuals who sometimes share very strong views – not always a good success recipe at the practitioner level.

Nonetheless, the approach to the Themes has changed over this period – and, it could be argued, in response to feedback from the sector. Management of Themes has changed including the introduction of 'institutional contacts'; funding projects on a competitive-bidding basis; and small but welcome resource allocations for each HEI to support 'institutional Theme discussions'. The first of these has potentially opened up better dissemination channels within institutions and where institutions have embraced this and supported their 'contacts', there is evidence that dissemination at practitioner level has improved.

Additionally, but not always, when the 'contact' has direct links to educational developers, the channels for interaction tend to be better integrated with the normal operating process of the educational development unit. A further strong point is the way in which the 'contacts' have become an interactive 'network' in their own right in some of the more recent Themes.

At senior levels in the Sector, management of the Themes has also changed since inception, largely for the better. After initial adverse comments from the sector over the seemingly *ad hoc* and aggressive introduction of new Themes early on, a new 'macro-steering group' was formed called the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee, otherwise affectionately known as SHEEC. The membership comprises the senior Learning and Teaching managers from several institutions and the group is charged with overseeing future development of the Themes concept. It has certainly tried to address this issue, being responsible for the above-mentioned changes and for taking a strategic view of future Theme planning. But it is true to say that it has not fully addressed the relentless nature of the programme of new Themes, nor really sorted out what priorities institutional practitioners want to see addressed.

## Public Information

Most institutions have developed their systems and processes to deal with this – thus programme specifications now exist for all courses and a variety of other information sources have been identified and made available. One area where Scotland has always resisted issuing public information is in External Examiner's reports. We believe that the impartiality, honesty and well-earned and trusted QA benefit of the external examiner process is 'sacrosanct' and best served by keeping these reports confidential.

## Student Involvement in Quality Processes

Each ELIR review has had a student on the visiting team as a full participating member which has been largely well received. Such students have been trained in conjunction with a commissioned agency set up for the purpose. SPARQS (Student Participation in Quality Scotland) has largely been a success. However, there is still a danger in this part of the QEF in that the considerable time needed for student reviewers to be trained and act as members of a review team can only usually be given by sabbatical student officers, who are not necessarily always best placed for this.

## The Role of the Higher Education Academy (HEA)

The Academy used to have a lower profile in Scotland than in the rest of the UK, but they have taken a more active role of late in helping the Scottish sector develop the enhancement agenda, especially through Subject Centres.

Positive discussions with HEA staff in Scotland have explored the potential for subject networks in Scotland to develop in ways that support greater engagement with the Themes: by providing input to scoping for a Theme; involvement in activities of Themes; providing a resource for Steering Committees by identifying examples of good practice and, importantly, in supporting HEIs and staff in taking forward Theme outcomes. The HEA is also supporting a pilot study – the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Research

(SHEER) project – focusing on five discipline areas and five HEIs in the Scottish sector, looking at the ways in which educational developers and Subject Centres, both individually and collectively, are supporting the implementation of the QEF at the subject level. A word of caution – at this crucial stage of Theme development, we urge the Academy and QAA to continue to strive for a common approach so as to prevent Academy and QAA ‘themes’ becoming misaligned in any way.

## Conclusions

The need for maturation of the QE model over time is an important point which neither the QAA in Scotland nor the Funding Council has apparently taken time to address so far but which is crucial in understanding individuals’ responses to the QEF. In previous years, the sector underwent an external process in which audit and assurance were the priorities and as such a resultant culture of ‘them and us’ emerged. The sector cannot unlearn that overnight. Suddenly trusting the same bodies which audited them, when the emphasis is now on innovation, risk-taking and sharing, is not a rational response. Some institutions are still looking for the subtext, no matter how well-meaning the message.

The debate continues as to what is meant by ‘enhancement’ in practice, but increasingly, there seems to be a consensus emerging that identifying and disseminating good practice is the easy bit – embedding this in practice is much more difficult and is sometimes not appropriate. It is also true that the ‘self-reflective’ ethos of the model at individual practitioner level has still a long way to go to be fully realised. It has mostly been a good thing from a Teaching and Learning perspective – although it has not been welcomed by all staff as it has undeniably generated more work with an emphasis on increased activity with a high visibility.

Some institutions have approached the QEF with a kind of ‘tick the boxes’ attitude – nevertheless, even this has had genuinely deeper effects by promoting the involvement of the educational development unit as part of a strategic approach on the part of the institution. As a result, we have had our ‘street cred’ enhanced and in some cases we are now viewed as being actually needed for our skills by senior managers asking us for help as a trigger or a catalyst or the ‘radar of the horizon’ – a welcome change!

Other institutions have said that the QEF pushed them towards a totally different approach, and has put enhancement activity agenda much further up the ladder and much quicker than might have been countenanced had things been left to institutions’ own priority-setting agenda. In a way the QEF has clarified for senior managers why it’s important to do certain things that might not have been seen as important in the past (for example educational development) and have accepted these as a necessary part of the Framework. Some institutions have tried to overcome the lack of funding council incentives for engagement by setting up their own internal strategic enhancement learning fund.

Whilst it is excellent that the views of students are actively pursued in the overall enhancement model, more cognisance needs to be taken of the view of the practitioners themselves. The official overall evaluations and the steering committee for

the Themes mainly reflect the views of middle/senior management and this is a missed opportunity.

We, as educational developers, have taken an active role in the development of some, but not all of the Themes – for example doing scoping studies on some of the Themes by talking to practitioners and students about their needs in these areas. The problem is that this involvement has not been consistent and this has possibly exacerbated the perceived lack of practitioner engagement in Theme activities.

We see ourselves as central to the overall enhancement process and fundamentally linked to the QEF. Our experience in acting as conduits to practitioners learning from others in both their own institutions and elsewhere is now happening more strongly.

What’s next? There is concern that the storm clouds are gathering after only one cycle of the ELIR process and four years of Themes. There are already indications that the SFC may be going to jettison (or at least water down) the QEF for a more QA-based approach – students, educational developers, practitioners, middle and senior management, some within the SFC and the QAA in Scotland, are all unanimous in seeing this as a sad and unnecessary backward step as a good deal of value exists in the current system with the potential for greater development. Hold on to your hats for a bumpy ride ahead!

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# Assessing 'wicked' competences

Anna Page and Peter Knight, Open University

## Introduction

During 2006 we did a small-scale study of the assessment of 'wicked' competences in six subject areas (Social Work, Nursing, Youth Work, Accounting, Early Years Education and Secondary School Teaching), which was sponsored by the UK Practice-based Professional Learning Centre. The study was carried out between March and December 2006, with the report appearing in January 2007 ([http://cctl.open.ac.uk/pbpl/p4\\_2.shtml](http://cctl.open.ac.uk/pbpl/p4_2.shtml)).

'Wicked' problems in professional life are those that resist definition, shift shape and are never 'solved' (see also Conklin, 2003). This may also include complex achievements, which cannot be neatly pre-specified, develop over time and resist measurement-based approaches to assessment. The idea is developed with reference to work-integrated learning, which, in this article, is treated as professional learning in formal higher education programmes. Empirical and other enquiries indicate that assessing such competences is likely to be problematic, which is unfortunate as they include 'soft skills' and other performances and dispositions which are important and desirable outcomes of higher education and are valuable to employers.

A questionnaire survey reported fewer problems in the assessment of 'wicked' competences than we had anticipated. One of three competing explanations is that 'false consciousness' is at work here, with practitioners simply not realising the limitations of their assessment activities. If that is the case, then not only is there a problem of improving assessment, there is a problem of raising awareness of the problem itself. This also raises the issue of how best to foster the formation of 'wicked' competences in higher education.

## Defining and Assessing 'Wicked' Competences

Employers value graduates who have 'soft' skills, graduate attributes and complex achievements (Knight and Yorke, 2003), all of which can be described as 'wicked' competences. For example, creativity or critical thinking are achievements which cannot be precisely defined, take on different shapes in different contexts, are likely to keep on developing and are difficult to measure for assessment purposes. Not only are such 'wicked' competences valued by employers, but they are also necessary for successful study in university and college because they smooth the progress of study and research.<sup>1</sup> There is also a view that a purpose of higher education is the development of identity, of which the formation of 'wicked' competences is a part (Barnett and Coate, 2005). It follows that higher education should strengthen such competences. At first sight, work-integrated learning seems to have particular power to help here.

But, even if work-integrated learning might help in the formation of 'wicked' competences, how can ill-defined achievements be assessed – and do assessment practices raise any implications for work-integrated learning practices? These questions are important for at least two reasons:

- so that employers and other stakeholders in higher education can know what new graduates understand and can do
- so that work-integrated learning is optimally organised to foster these achievements and competences more comprehensively and consistently.

It was anticipated that there would be acute problems assessing 'wicked' competences as:

- Higher education assessment practices tend to be defective because:
  - (a) 'measurement' approaches to assessment tend to dominate and are clearly unsuited to 'fuzzy' or complex competences (Knight and Yorke, 2003)
  - (b) 'measurement' approaches often fall short of good standards of measurement practice (Knight, 2002)
  - (c) where 'formative' assessment is used as an alternative, important practice requirements are not regularly met (Knight and Yorke, 2003)
  - (d) programme-level or integrated assessment is important when 'wicked' competences are concerned but is also inadequately applied (Knight, 2000)
  - (e) university judgements of achievement are local, poorly expressed and often mistrusted (Knight 2006).
- Research into method in social science either sets standards that are seldom met by university enquiries into students' 'wicked' competences or shows that there will tend to be multiple understandings of social phenomena (Law, 2004). Both critiques can be applied to university assessment practices, especially when those practices relate to the assessment of 'fuzzy' phenomena, such as 'wicked' competences.

## The Study

Key informants in the six subject areas helped us to identify nine 'wicked' competences, as shown in Table 1. The competences nominated were often not those valued by professional bodies – key informants' preferences were respected on grounds of practitioner authenticity.

Table 1: The nine competences in the empirical study

Competence	Subject areas
Developing supportive relationships	Secondary teaching, Youth work
Emotional intelligence	Youth work
Group work	Accounting
Listening and assimilating	Nursing
Oral communication	Accounting, Early years teaching
Professional subject knowledge	Social work
Relating to clients	Nursing, Secondary teaching
Self-management (confidence and effectiveness)	Early years teaching
'Taking it onwards' – acting on diagnoses	Social work

First of all, a web search was done to expand understanding of the current usage of each target competence in the associated subject areas. Incoherence, platitudes and confusion were widespread.

Secondly, the key informants, as well as others recruited through Higher Education Academy subject networks and professional bodies, were asked, by on-line survey<sup>2</sup>, about assessment practices, purposes, problems and possibilities in respect of the target competences. Eighty-three respondents reported on eight of the nine competences (there were no responses for secondary teaching regarding 'relating to clients'). Findings were organised around three themes: the difficulties of assessing these competences; the priority given to assessing them in higher education; and the means by which they were assessed.

There are no particular surprises in the means used to assess these competences; nor was it surprising to see that assessing them did not always get the priority that might have been expected. The surprising finding was that they were not seen to be especially difficult to assess. The web search of current usage of the target competences had only added to expectations that assessment would prove to be problematic, a supposition confirmed by key informants. Three main lines of explanation for this surprising finding were proposed:

- 'wicked' competences are not really hard to assess and

suppositions to the contrary had been wrong

- the enquiry methods used were not fit for the purpose
- there was a degree of 'false consciousness' among respondents, which is to say that they did not recognise the problems that actually were manifest in their practice.

The third activity of the study involved interviewing a sub-sample of fourteen informants from the three best-represented subject areas, namely:

- Accounting: oral communication
- Social Work: taking it onwards – acting on 'diagnosis' (assessment of situation)
- Nursing: relating to clients.

These people were contacted by phone in December 2006 to elaborate points revealed by the analysis of the survey data. Interview data were thematically analysed following established qualitative methods, aided by Nvivo7 software. Interviews did disclose a lot of problems in the assessment of 'wicked' competences and favour the second and third explanations. However, they do not allow us to prefer one over the other and it is possible that they are both valid. The interviews do support the supposition that the assessment of 'wicked' competences is problematic.

### Recommendations and Further Study

These enquiries, empirical and otherwise, prompt three recommendations:

- There is reason to suppose that the formation and assessment of 'wicked' competences should best be conceived in terms of programme<sup>3</sup>, not course design (Knight and Yorke, 2003), although there is little research into programme design and less on programme assessment. However, work (Huber *et al.*, 2007) in the USA on integrative learning seems to be tracking similar territory to this enquiry into 'wicked' competences, with two crucial differences. First this 'wicked' competences work also attends to means of fostering such competences, and second, it is adamant that programme approaches are necessary – American work is less insistent on this point
- Any interventions to enhance the assessment of 'wicked' competences should begin by helping colleagues to appreciate the inadequacies of current practices that are typically – and wrongly – assumed to be 'good enough'. This is a double challenge for innovators. Not only does assessment practice have to be improved, but colleagues need to be convinced of the need to improve it in the first place
- Creating assessment practices that engage with 'wicked' competences involves thinking about learning and teaching practices, and the design of other aspects of curriculum. The steer given by Boud and Falchikov (2007), with their emphasis on assessment arrangements that favour learning that will last, is helpful here. Knight (2007), writing in their book, makes some suggestions for curriculum design and associated high-stakes assessment arrangements.

Broad suggestions for superior assessment practice, at the level of teachers, departments and universities, are in Chapter 3 of the project report ([http://cetl.open.ac.uk/pbpl/p4\\_2.shtml](http://cetl.open.ac.uk/pbpl/p4_2.shtml)).

Finally, this is the inevitable plea for

more research. 'Close-up' study of programme assessment practices in a handful of departments would greatly enhance our understanding of the problems and possibilities. We'd be delighted to help colleagues considering doing it.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>To be scrupulous, there is some evidence that a lack of 'wicked' competences, employability skills and the like on graduation may not matter after three years of graduate employment. Mason and colleagues (2003) found some indications that differences become evened out through (probably non-formal) learning in the workplace. There is a catch, though. Those with employability skills or 'wicked' competences were more likely to be employed in the first place. If that is the case, institutions concerned with employability will be equally concerned that their graduates are engaged in ways that foster the competences that get them on the job ladder.

<sup>2</sup>The survey was available in three formats, including hard copy, but only on-line responses were received.

<sup>3</sup>A programme is the set of units, courses or modules leading to an award, such as a Diploma, bachelor's or doctoral degree.

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# How will they ever learn?

(With apologies to Pete Seeger)

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## Introduction

In recent times postgraduate certificates in learning and teaching in higher education have come under much scrutiny. A recurring theme is the balance between generic and discipline contents. A study initiated by Peter Knight, 'The effects of post graduate certificates' (August 2006), is currently being continued by INSPIRE at Anglia Ruskin University. Peter's paper followed fairly closely on the report (May 2006) of the HEA's evaluation of accredited programmes and other research reports over the last couple of years on the effects of, and participant attitudes to, postgraduate certificate programmes (Gibbs and Coffey, 2004; Knight *et al.*, 2006). At the November 2006 meeting of Heads of Educational Development Group (HEDG) a pod-cast of Peter Knight and Jo Tait in conversation was viewed and resulted in a vibrant discussion.

This led Tony Brand and Sue Burkill to reflect on the purpose of this research and discuss the implications for those of us who are running these programmes. It appears to us that they seem to have been scrutinised and evaluated more than most awards and that they get more than their fair share of critical analysis.

With this in mind, the Post Graduate Certificate (PgCert) teaching team at the University of Plymouth (UoP) agreed to spend a lunchtime reflecting on the Knight (2006) paper and considering answers to questions put to us by Tony. The discussion was recorded and some key issues that emerged were reported in this virtual 'fireside chat'.

For those who have not read the paper, it suggests (like several before it) that participants on PgCert courses are only modestly happy with their experiences and, given the option, they feel that they would learn their teaching roles as effectively (if not more so) by simply 'doing the job'; in other words, engaging in non-formal workplace interactions. Several other issues emerged as a result of the research, some of which particularly caught the interest of the team at Plymouth and these will be apparent below.

As an aside, it is worth reporting that there was a fairly intense discussion about the appropriateness of the methodologies used to collect and analyse the data and about the poor alignment between the report's conclusions and the data presented. Readers of this discussion might like to access the paper online themselves to form their own opinions.

## What are the key messages in Knight's paper for us?

Reviewing the paper allowed each of us to think about our PgCert in a more detached and disengaged way than we are

normally able to do. It was interesting that each of the team had different viewpoints on the paper. This may be linked to their level of involvement with the PgCert, which ranged from programme manager to part-time tutor. The paper also acted as a catalyst to encourage reflection and discussion about wider issues, such as the purpose and structure of PgCerts in supporting the growing diversity of staff in HE.

The group discussed perceptions arising from Peter Knight's paper which we subsequently divided into three categories: those we felt we readily recognised; those which implicitly we felt were true for our PgCert; and others, where we felt the paper was at odds with our own experiences. These are outlined below with quotations from the discussions that took place around the issues.

### Readily recognised issues

There were several examples of issues we definitely recognised. For example, the paper highlighted the tensions between time required to complete the programme and participants' competing departmental and professional priorities – so much so that the themes 'lack of time' and 'multiple role demands' had been identified in the analysis. In particular, one challenge for some individuals is the conflicting pressures of research and teaching while undertaking this programme. This resonates with our experience. However, the team concluded that whilst this is undoubtedly an issue in many institutions, it is not necessarily a reason to criticise the PgCert course. An alternative approach would be to challenge the institutional culture which puts intense pressure on new staff both in terms of high teaching load, responsibilities and research expectations:

*'I think some of the issues they raised were institutional rather than to do with the [PgCert] course and that this was not really highlighted enough. For example, the need for the re-assessment of the workload for a new lecturer. If they don't have time to do it, they are going to be fed up with doing it. Perhaps it's not appropriate to start with lots of research.'*

Another example we definitely recognised was the importance of having a discipline element built into the programme. Here, at the UoP, there has been a strong institutional steer to incorporate discipline-specific activities and involve schools and faculties as a response to internal review and evaluation.

### Implicit issues

The paper highlighted things which we felt were probably lurking below the surface of our own programme. Raising

these, the paper allowed the group to discuss these issues in a detached way. For example, it was clear from the study that participants on PgCert programmes frequently felt they were over-assessed. This theme was supported by comments from participants about the levels of stress they encountered; these resonate with what participants on our PgCert report to us.

‘Simply doing the job of teaching in HE’ was ranked highest in the study as a way of learning to teach in HE. Clearly there are insights to be gained from exploring this aspect of informal learning and development:

*‘The frustrating thing is that the literature base in the paper suggests that the informal workplace interactions are what people learn best from. My concern is that the study doesn’t then go and address this issue.’*

At Plymouth, we are highly aware of the significant number of hours participants spend in their departments and schools learning alongside colleagues and we may underestimate how much this informal learning helps their professional development. However, there are also limitations to this approach. One issue raised in our discussion was the risk that new staff will simply acquire bad habits from more experienced staff, or will adopt departmental policies uncritically. A major advantage of having new staff brought into contact with the latest pedagogic research findings is that they should then be in a position to encourage their colleagues to update their teaching methods and approaches if necessary.

A really interesting unexpected outcome that emerged from this study was the low ranking of online learning as a way of learning to teach. Research undertaken at the UoP which asked staff about a proposed online version of our PgCert met with similar reactions. Opportunities to network and meet face-to-face to discuss and debate issues were perceived to be very important elements of the PgCert by participants from our partner colleges in particular:

*‘Table after table indicates there is something there in the data about the distaste for online learning...We have already done some research in this area and got much the same answers, for example the HE in FE tutors we surveyed two years ago. This is something that is very powerful and has huge implications for the way institutions design courses.’*

#### **Issues which did not resonate with our experience**

There were one or two issues which were highlighted in the paper which did not align with the group’s thinking and experience. For example, it was suggested that the background literature about the professional training of school teachers could help inform the training of lecturers teaching in HE. We felt that school teacher training was not comparable for two reasons. Firstly, school teachers are generally trained in the discipline and secondly they

generally complete their training before they obtain their first teaching post. As one of the group stated:

*‘Interesting why they put so much focus on PGCEs because there are huge differences between PGCEs and what people do on a Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education. Not least the fact that you have to do the PGCE before you get the job...it’s a completely different concept. Actually lots of people don’t get to the end of PGCEs as they are not up to it and perhaps some of them shouldn’t get to the end of the PgCert in HE.’*

Some members of the group were in total disagreement with the suggestion that lecturers can learn to teach without formal support. The issue regarding the quality of informal and unplanned experiences was also a problem for some:

*‘I make the comparison with what someone who wants to teach in schools goes through in order to teach and the assumption – and I come back to the word arrogant – that someone who is going to teach in a University doesn’t have to do any of that ... or can learn it all by osmosis. There are still an awful lot of poor lecturers out there.’*

#### **What have we done at Plymouth already to address the issues outlined above?**

During the discussion, we started asking ourselves about how we are already responding to the issues the paper had revealed. Subsequently we realised the discussion covered five key themes:

1. the structure of programmes
2. the amount of assessment
3. the flexibility of programmes and, in particular, the acceptability of online learning
4. the disciplinary element
5. the feasibility of supporting informal learning approaches.

The conversation highlighted some of the recent developments we have introduced at Plymouth where we felt we have begun to make changes to address all these themes. For example, we have introduced structural changes to the PgCert programme. Participants have the option to undertake the programme over the three years of their probation based on a learning agreement negotiated with their Head of School. Different pathways and option modules offer a curriculum which helps to meet the growing diversity of the participants enrolling on the programme; selected elements of the programme are online. By taking this approach, our aim is to provide them with the flexibility and opportunity to meet the competing priorities they face and the pressures of time. We have made significant changes to the assessment to try and respond to such pressures. The course no longer uses the time-honoured portfolio approach: instead we have short assignments which can be submitted over three years.

With regard to the generic versus discipline input to our programme, we have explored different models of delivery

over the last three years with varying degrees of success. For example, one model involved some modules on the PgCert incorporating designated discipline-specific workshops delivered by colleagues from the faculties. The assessment associated with these modules focuses on enhancing participants' teaching and learning practice in the discipline by adopting an action research approach. Using the Supporting New Academic Staff (SNAS) online evaluation tool we were able to pinpoint changes in our programme including investing in a resource co-ordinator to ensure participants had access to cognate resources to support such approaches. Involving colleagues from the faculties in the programme both as contributors and mentors facilitates the informal learning aspects to the individuals' development in their own discipline area. However, it was also noted that the advantages of a disciplinary element to the PgCert should not be used to the detriment of cross-disciplinary interaction and engagement. The silo mentality that governs so much of the activity in Higher Education should not be allowed to dominate all areas!

### What might we do in the future?

As our discussion progressed, so the group began to think about ways in which the outcomes of the paper challenged us to think again about the programme. Towards the end, we were considering how we might design a programme if we started with a blank slate.

### What would a new programme look like?

Some of the group talked about the basic level of engagement and progression for individuals which could help meet the national driver for institutions in aligning themselves to the National Professional Standards framework:

*'The point being made quite strongly here [in the paper] is that a fairly basic "tips for teachers" type course may be quite sufficient for some. Does it have to be a master's level course?'*

*'If they have basic information about assessment, legislation etc., perhaps that is enough.'*

Others noted the difficulty of meeting the needs of such a divergent range of staff. For example, our PgCert can include lecturers with a doctorate, a wealth of research experience and sometimes considerable teaching experience. It can also include staff who have never undertaken research or teaching before. Catering to a group with such different backgrounds is highly problematic, especially in the light of increasing numbers on the course and pressure on (PgCert tutors') time:

*'I think having unmoveable systems for a really wide range of staff is an issue. Because people [new staff] have such different backgrounds, understandings and starting points it does make it really difficult and I think that is something we really have to think about and engage with.'*

### How would we assess if indeed we should assess?

This led on to a discussion of whether we should assess or how we might assess achievement on such a programme:

*'If we can run the courses without assessment, I think we would have much higher levels of satisfaction and quite different sorts of thinking. Should we be doing this at M level? Should they be being assessed? We should challenge right to the baseline – how did this come about?'*

One member of the team had had experience of a novel approach regarding the self-assessment of teachers that could be employed:

*'One type of assessment that I have been involved with in the past at Lancaster was facilitating self assessment based on a video recording of an individual's educational practice. The individual takes control, by choosing what they want to critique and share with the tutor. They are encouraged to think about it and then facilitated by a tutor to adopt a critically reflective approach. This approach empowers people to establish professional developing practice and judgement.'*

### How can we support and facilitate the experience of informal learning?

The group did have different opinions as to the value of this type of learning, which is understandable given there were little or no data to support its claim to importance in the paper. However, other research (Carkett, 2002 (unpublished thesis); Rogers and Carkett, 2004) suggests that apprenticeship models of learning on the job involving 'natural' settings do provide valuable learning experiences:

*'Can we organise informal things. For example, I wondered if we had more observations and feedback and each of us had about 10 people we were responsible for and we worked in co-ordination with their mentor—it is kind of a half-way house.'*

*'This is what we are moving towards in our second-term module.'*

*'In researching my PhD new graduates would "sit with Nellie" [colleagues] who would mentor them and work with them in bringing them to develop their intuitive gut feelings in working with materials and machinery that the apprenticeship route would have given them.'*

It is possible that the course could be used to inform and structure the informal learning experiences which are provided through the disciplines, ensuring that participants have evidence from the educational literature to enable them to critique—rather than simply adopt—current practices where appropriate.

### How can we further develop the discipline element into PgCert programmes?

We need to think creatively about how we can include peers and disciplinary colleagues more extensively. One thing we

probably do not do enough of is to explore how the HE Academy Subject Centres can support such developments. Whilst we recognise that the disciplinary element is important in the programme, we have had some challenges in encouraging the faculties and schools to support us. Recently we have recruited Faculty-based Professional Developers to support individuals in the schools who are on the programme. One of their remits is to help identify school/faculty activities which would help new staff to develop their professional identity. In many ways this initiative is an attempt to provide a support structure for informal learning:

*'We need to get people who are confident and competent teachers in their own disciplinary areas. This means providing opportunities for these mentors to be developed themselves.'*

### How can we align the programme more creatively with institutional drivers? For example, recognising the positive and negative effects of power relationships?

One person's view was:

*'It is extremely difficult to get people to give genuine and authentic views about teaching and learning related programmes in an institutional climate which primarily rewards discipline-based research activities. This makes it all the more important that programmes like these foster conditions under which people feel able to express views and reflect on their role. Institutional drivers can set up the conditions for causing stress and pressure for participants, which can be wrongly attributed to having to do the PgCert. It is important to get faculties and schools on board to foster the view that doing a PgCert course is an opportunity rather than a problem.'*

### What further research and guidelines are needed?

We think that the messages about 'competing pressures', 'tribal allegiances', 'over assessment' and 'template teaching' have been well researched and we have already taken on board the implications. We now have a wish list for additional research which would help us make research-informed decisions about our course in the future. Central to this is the need to research 'informal learning' in the HE context. Assume that about 80 hours (out of the 600 which are meant to contribute to a PgCert at M level) are formally given to face-to-face contact and about another 50 hours may be spent on assessment – the rest are informal and work based. We wonder:

- whether we put enough effort into reviewing the quality of the experience in the remaining 470 hours?
- how do we know that 'informal' is effective in improving teaching /student learning?
- what does it look like?
- how has it been used elsewhere?
- what research do we have access to which proves that this works well?
- what problems have arisen which we need to anticipate?

A proper evaluation of this approach is needed to explore whether people can really learn by 'osmosis' and how they learn best in informal contexts so that we can move our course on over the next few years.

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# Becoming a Professional Educator: induction of newly appointed lecturers in teacher and nurse education

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## Professional Educators

We now work in higher education, one of us in academic development, but we have had previous practitioner roles and identities as a nurse and as a school teacher. Our ongoing project is investigating the experiences of newly appointed lecturers in professional subject discipline areas, seeking to evaluate relevant concepts from literature on workplace learning and enhance academic induction for these groups of staff. We are focusing on the experiences of new lecturers in nursing and in initial teacher education who have been appointed to higher education lecturer posts after professional experience respectively in nursing and in school-teaching. Successful expert professionals suddenly find themselves to be novices in many aspects of their new role as an academic. In addition, the educational partnerships and subject disciplines in which they work involve considerable tensions between professional and academic perspectives.

The project is supported by the Higher Education Academy subject centres in Education (ESCalate) and in Health Sciences and Practice. One outcome of the project has been the publication of guidelines for the induction of new teacher educators (Boyd, Harris and Murray, 2007).

## Workplace Learning

Trowler and Knight (2000), in their generic study of academic induction, argue that the team level is the most important context for induction to higher education. In their view it is the university which provides the structural context for work, but it is the community of practice (variously defined as the department, the research group or the teaching team)

which develops the day-to-day behavioural and discursive practices for the new academic (p.159). The limitations of trying to improve induction through changes to formal processes and structures must be borne in mind and the conclusion of Trowler and Knight is pertinent: that the '*quality of communication and relationships in daily practice is more significant than centrally determined induction arrangements*' (p.37). Non-formal, local, departmental and teaching team provision for induction appears likely to be very significant (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Eraut, 2000). In applying situated-learning theory and the concept of communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) to complex educational contexts, Fuller *et al.* (2005) identify its lack of focus on the role of formal professional development activities, and on the experience, skills and values that newcomers bring to the existing community. In terms of organisational design, the voluntary, organic, self-directed nature of successful communities of practice means that it is not possible to control their development (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002). It seems necessary to accept that whilst it is possible to design formal structures and processes (Dill, 1999), it is not possible to control the practice that will emerge in response to them. It appears to be possible to set out principles for cultivating communities of practice (Wenger *et al.*, 2002) but not to provide a template for their design.

Evans *et al.* (2006) suggest that the focus should be on the interactions between individuals and the workplace culture. Application of activity theory perspectives (Engestrom 1999, 2001) suggests that educational

development work needs to engage with departments and teams, with a focus on rules, tools and division of labour (Knight, Tait and Yorke, 2006). The concept of an 'expansive learning environment' was developed by Fuller and Unwin (2003) building on work by Engestrom (2001). An expansive learning environment is one that presents wide-ranging opportunities for learning and a culture that promotes such learning. Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2005: 124) present a view of expansive learning environments for school teachers that includes: close collaborative working; professional learning being seen as a priority; promotion of opportunities to cross boundaries and extend experience; encouragement of innovation and use of a wide range of learning and teaching approaches. Overall then, the literature appears to suggest that academic developers may need to combine work with individuals with efforts to influence the nature of the academic workplace and the collaborative work of teams.

## The Experiences of New Nurse and Teacher Educators

Our project involved analysis of semi-structured interviews with a total sample of 24 new (within their first four years in HE) nurse educators and teacher educators in a post-1992 higher education institution. The schools of nursing (75 academic staff) and education (130 academic staff) are reasonably large and are based on more than one site. The first and main question on the interview schedule was designed to invite narrative on the interviewees' experience of moving from a practitioner role into higher education.

The new lecturers commented on high levels of stress and difficulty involved

during their transition into higher education. On top of the normal challenges of joining a new organisation and starting a new role they experienced a change from being experienced, respected, and often senior, expert practitioners to being novices in many aspects of their new role as lecturers in professional subject disciplines.

These feelings were compounded by 'in at the deep end' issues of workload, time pressures, finding it difficult to prioritise and hard to say 'no'. In their first year or two both subject groups of new lecturers felt that their focus was to be seen as a 'credible' practitioner; by this they mean that students would see them as an experienced and competent *nurse* or *schoolteacher*. Being viewed by students as a credible nurse or schoolteacher was seen as more important than establishing credibility as an 'academic'. However, one difference was that the nurse educators felt far more pressure to retain 'currency' in terms of recent experience as a practitioner whereas teacher educators tended to see themselves as still teaching, and therefore still being a 'teacher'.

The new lecturers reported very varied experiences of their membership of departmental and teaching teams. In some cases a small team provided strong support and high levels of collaboration. At the other extreme were some of those teaching on several large programmes; despite numerous day-to-day contacts, some new educators found that none of these relationships were sustained or significant enough to prevent a feeling of isolation. They felt that mentoring was a key element of support but reported very varied experiences in terms of the role of their 'official' mentor. However, many were able to identify significant non-formal mentors who they saw as very important sources of advice and support.

Those interviewees undertaking the post-graduate course for new lecturers (and other Masters level programmes) were positive about this as support for induction and claimed that this had enhanced their understanding of

pedagogy in higher education and helped them to develop a more holistic view of higher education and of the student experience. They identified the assessment process in higher education as a key knowledge gap, and marking student work was a particular concern. Workshops held by the central learning unit were valued but 'point of need' non-formal support provided by colleagues in departments was especially welcomed, for example when marking and moderation were seen and used as a significant learning opportunity.

The new lecturers' narratives included elements of re-construction of their existing education experience and skills into their new role in adult education. This was more explicit for the teacher educators, who felt able to 'transfer' their teaching skills into the higher education context, feeling that they were still 'a teacher'. This was entangled with wide variation among the teacher educators in their understanding of 'modelling' as part of teacher education. Nurse educators emphasised the professional knowledge and experience that they had brought with them into higher education, and although they viewed formal teaching as a new area of work they were aware that the post-graduate course for new lecturers and the institution more widely did not appear to recognise the nurse education experience, with patients, carers and colleagues, that they brought with them from years of experience in practice.

## Conclusions

As the project has progressed we have come to view induction as an individualised three-year process and would suggest that mentoring, formal and non-formal, is likely to be a useful support strategy. The head of department is seen as holding a key responsibility for supporting the new lecturer through role design, support for the mentor and in helping to create a collaborative working environment. Our findings suggest that these new lecturers need to be supported in a critical engagement with the pedagogy of their subject discipline and a suitably designed formal course appears to be one

possible solution to this. Our findings also strongly suggest, at least within the case study context, that teacher educators should not be exempted from participation in such a course on the basis of qualification and experience of school teaching. The greatest challenge for induction is probably the development of scholarship and research activity by these professional subject discipline groups of staff. Considerable support for building research capacity appears to be required, and emphasising and strengthening the links between research and teaching may provide a suitable approach (Jenkins and Healey, 2007).

Boud (2001) argues convincingly that too much research and work on academic development issues is generic, and there is considerable potential in grounding some of it in particular subject disciplines. This project considers specific professional subject disciplines as creating unique contexts for workplace learning. We suggest that further practitioner research into other specific subject disciplines, and into some of the particular strategies for induction and professional development support, for example mentoring, is required in order to inform local and more general academic development work.

New nurse and teacher educators bring specific strengths and professional development needs. They work within subject disciplines and educational partnerships that have significant tensions and implications for their professional learning and their emerging identities as academics. We consider that those supporting these newly appointed academics, including mentors, heads of department, and academic developers, need to understand and take into account these subject-specific characteristics.

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## Tackling racism, whiteness and Eurocentrism in learning and teaching

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The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 has directly led to increasingly serious consideration of how higher education institutions (HEIs) should address issues of racial discrimination and racial equality in learning and teaching. In responding to the relative vacuum in guidance available for HEIs, at the early stages, a toolkit was developed by Law, Turney and Phillips which included discussion and suggestion as to how these issues could be addressed, but within a more ambitious conceptual framework that brought together notions of institutional racism, whiteness and Eurocentrism (this is available for download at [www.leeds.cers.ac.uk](http://www.leeds.cers.ac.uk)). Subsequently, Universities Scotland has produced a race equality toolkit specifically addressing learning and teaching (available at [www.universitiesscotland.ac.uk/raceequalitytoolkit](http://www.universitiesscotland.ac.uk/raceequalitytoolkit)). In addition many institutions have now developed their own statements and guidance on these issues and these

statements are publicly available on the web, for example the University of St Andrews' 'Race Equality and the Curriculum' document. These toolkits and documents provide a sound basis for the development of policy and practice and raise a wide-ranging agenda of issues that institutions need to consider. This article identifies key lessons emerging from the two toolkits noted above, which provide further evidence and discussion on this and a wider set of related institutional topics.

The Leeds Antiracist Toolkit provides tools to help institutions address issues relevant to teaching and learning. These issues are integral to the question of student support and perceptions of the institution from the 'outside'. Institutions need to reflect upon assessment procedures and the curriculum in order to take into consideration the various ways in which current content and practice may

discriminate against Black and minority ethnic students via the use of inappropriate resources and a Eurocentric perspective.

A key issue is that of identifying to what extent racial, ethnic and cultural stereotypes of students are operating in the perceptions of teachers, the extent to which they may be leading to racial discrimination in teaching and assessment and dealing with and deconstructing these sets of ideas. Black and minority ethnic groups experience different kinds of assumptions and stereotypes, which are compounded by issues of, for example, gender, religion, sexuality and disability. Different Black and minority ethnic groups are stereotyped in different ways, some, for example, are seen as very hard working and academic, some seen as passive, some as assertive, 'happy-go-lucky', lazy and so on. Research undertaken in schools illustrates how teachers' perceptions of students can impact negatively on, for example, discipline and Black Caribbean boys; assumptions that South Asian students will be hard working, South Asian girls passive and helpful and so on. It would, of course, be naïve to assume that these stereotypes and assumptions have no currency in the HE sector. These individuals are drawing on and experiencing attitudes and understandings based on stereotypes and assumptions. These may have far-reaching effects for those being cast into a 'type'. For example, are Asian students assisted to a lesser degree than students from other groups? Are they spoken to negatively, and with hostility, given less than helpful advice and so on? Is the Black student assessed, assisted, encouraged in any way differently from other 'White' students? In terms of dealing with stereotypes, there are clear training issues. However, the embedded nature of racialised assumptions will often mean that people respond and interact with different peoples based on their assumptions about 'race' and ethnicity as well as gender, social class, religion and disability.

The curricula of HEI departments, schools and faculties are diverse and, of course, reflect the particular biases of individual academics and academic units. What courses are provided, what courses look at, what is included, what is excluded, who, what and where are deemed to be 'important' or worthy of study, are complex social, cultural and political questions that are not easily answered. Some scholars have criticised the arts, humanities and social sciences, for example, for being Eurocentric; but these issues have also impacted on other areas such as mathematics, medicine and healthcare. Some questions here include: do your institution's curricula reflect the changing needs and views of a modern, diverse society? Do your institution's resources, courses *etc.* reflect and promote the needs of a multicultural society?

The development of subject areas and disciplines has also been critiqued as reproducing and reinforcing a Eurocentric world-view which peripheralises and fails to value that which is seen to lie 'outside' the West. Relevant questions to ask in this respect are: are the literatures, music, arts, histories and religions *etc.* of 'non-Western'/'not-white' peoples peripheralised and tokenised in the curriculum? Are the literatures, music, arts, histories and religions *etc.* of

'non-Western'/'not-white' peoples positioned as inferior, primitive? And are cultures *etc.* other than the dominant culture of the HEI valued, displayed, celebrated, promoted? Staff and departments should be mindful to consider the inclusion and integration of voices, perspectives, works and ideas that come from beyond a 'white', 'Eurocentric' core.

There are a number of issues to be mindful of in terms of considering the learning environment and the needs of students. The process of learning needs to be inclusive and should consider the needs of all learners in terms of ethnicity, gender, disability, religion and so on. Lecturers, tutors *etc.* should be aware that their own expectations of students may be based on stereotypes and assumptions about what particular Black and minority ethnic groups 'are like' or the kinds of expected aptitude for particular activities, subjects, approaches *etc.* As such, care should be taken to avoid making assumptions and having expectations about students based on these stereotypes. International students are particularly vulnerable here as assumptions of academic inferiority often circulate with reference to students from non-Western countries.

Other issues to be taken into consideration are that: assessment of students' language abilities should not influence assessment of other skills; assessment is monitored by ethnicity, gender *etc.* so that, if appropriate, positive action should be taken to redress any inequalities via the removal of any obstacles that may impede or disadvantage particular groups; and that examinations and assessment procedures should be sensitive and culturally inclusive in terms of reference points *etc.* A thorough approach to these issues would require institutions to include consideration of racism, whiteness and Eurocentrism in the process of learning and teaching quality management and enhancement, so, for example, regular inclusion of these issues in programme and module review would follow.

The Universities Scotland toolkit highlights firstly that as part of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) in Scotland issued guidance for further and higher education institutions. The CRE guidance recommends that academic staff consider the following questions in relation to race equality in teaching and learning: what do you do to encourage students to understand and value cultural and ethnic diversity? How do you make sure that your teaching creates an environment free of prejudice, discrimination and harassment, where students can contribute fully and freely and feel valued? How does your teaching take account of students' cultural backgrounds, language needs and different learning styles? How do extra-curricular activities and events cater for the interests or needs of all students, and take account of any concerns about religion or culture? In relation to the curriculum questions raised include: how does the curriculum deal with questions of racism and diversity? What do you do to take account of the needs of students from different racial groups when planning the curriculum? How do you build race equality aims into all your programmes? How do you make sure that departments monitor and assess their curricula to see that they meet the expectations of



students from different racial groups? What do you do to take account of the needs of students from different racial groups when planning the curriculum? How do you build race equality aims into all your programmes?

It is necessary to move beyond a simplistic 'legal' set of considerations, and the Universities Scotland toolkit does this by examining relevant strategies and practice examples in relation to curriculum design, teaching, and assessment. This provides a helpful set of examples and practice guidance. On curriculum design, they stress the values of providing students with an opportunity to engage with issues of racism and ethnic diversity, the necessity of addressing teacher stereotypes and expectations and the value of internationalising the curriculum and avoiding an overly Western-centric approach. On teaching, a number of issues are examined including how lecturers can improve their management of inter-ethnic and inter-cultural differences. It highlights how a range of factors may create disagreement or conflict, for example:

*'...differing background, values and experiences may create barriers rather than clear pathways to a shared sense of being part of the same learner community: for example, some cultures value the group as opposed to the individual and others do the opposite. Communication styles and learning approaches may differ: for example, lack of eye contact can be a mark of respect for some and a sign of disrespect or lack of understanding for others.'*

On assessment, this toolkit also stresses the need to ensure that all assignments are understood by students, that there is consideration of ensuring little room for potential discrimination through anonymous marking and consideration of scheduling and dealing with potential conflicts over, for example, religious observance.

Although the legislation and the required race equality documents embody a potentially far-reaching set of requirements, it may be argued that they fall woefully short of an agenda that could emerge from a more fundamental and serious consideration of a combination of anti-racist, multicultural and racial equality questions and issues. The privileging of race equality for institutional policy-making as a result of legal duties also carries with it a downplaying of alternative policy priorities. Promoting multiculturalism or anti-racism as a policy goal may involve very different institutional questions and strategies. Historically, universities have largely catered for white privileged males, and a white, elitist, masculinist and Eurocentric culture still pervades many of the older-established institutions today.

Although there has been considerable research into race equality issues in schools in the UK, there has been less analysis of 'race equality' and racism in higher education institutions. This is perhaps indicative of the complacency that has pervaded the higher education sector. There is nevertheless a series of emerging concerns. These relate to ethnic inequalities in student access, racial discrimination by admissions tutors, the racist experiences of Black and Asian students on entering higher education institutions,

disillusionment with the lack of diversity in the teaching and learning environment, racist discrimination in marking and assessment, racism in work placements and race discrimination in graduate access to employment. In addition, racism and racial discrimination suffered by staff in universities are increasingly being exposed in individual cases and organisational audits. Evidence from academics and support staff in the old universities revealed that racialised tensions are common in universities, with Black and minority ethnic staff often experiencing racial harassment, feeling unfairly treated in job applications, and believing institutional racism exists in the academic workplace.

It is time for higher education institutions in the UK to re-conceptualise their role and responsibilities in a contemporary multi-cultural society. Experience has shown that race equality will not be achieved easily and it is unlikely to be attained through the implementation of an all-encompassing 'equal opportunities' programme. This could well lead to the marginalisation of race equality initiatives after the initial 'kick-start' that the legislation has given has faded. There is a need to create an anti-racist culture within higher education institutions in general, and, most urgently, in the older established institutions in order to challenge entrenched systems of white privilege. Progress will only occur if anti-racism becomes part of the professionalism of staff, the code of conduct for students and is embedded in working relationships with the external community. Success is dependent on the support and goodwill of staff at all levels. Many staff and students in universities have ambivalent or hostile attitudes to anti-racist and race equality strategies, as they believe that the system is 'already fair' and that any new measures will favour minority ethnic groups over white people. Institutional cultures are, however, rapidly changing and the value of the changing legal context has undoubtedly been a significant factor in promoting progress in this field.

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# Teaching methods for active student participation in a Rocks and Minerals Practical

Fraukje M. Brouwer, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and Silke Wehr, University of Berne

## Introduction

This article was prepared within the framework of a postgraduate course taught at the University of Berne. It offers a comparison of the deductive teaching methods used in a practical for first-year Geology students with the inductive approach of the nineteenth-century icon of natural history and its teaching, Louis Agassiz. On the basis of this comparison, suggestions are made for the implementation of aspects of Agassiz' inductive and individual approach, with a view to improving student learning in practical sessions.

## Background concerning teaching methods

*Deductive thinking/teaching:* when using a deductive approach the starting point is a generalisation or concept. It is developed through logical argument and then illustrated by examples (Ki, 2002). Ideas proceed from generalisations, principles, rules, laws, propositions, or theories to specific applications. The deductive sequence involves presenting a generalisation and then seeking or providing examples (Saskatchewan Learning, 1991).

*Inductive thinking/teaching:* in inductive thinking the individual makes a number of observations, which are then sorted into a concept or generalisation; the individual does not have prior knowledge of the abstraction but arrives at it after observing and analysing the observations (Ki, 2002). Students are encouraged to analyse information and hypothesise, discover a pattern, or draw a conclusion. The inductive sequence moves from examples to discovery or presentation of the generalisation (Saskatchewan Learning, 1991).

*Implementing inductive teaching:* the choice of inductive teaching has important implications for the instructor's role (Ki, 2002). The instructor acts as a facilitator, helping the students make observations and combining these into an abstraction by collecting observations from the whole group and helping to clarify students' remarks. Students need time to process the information gathered and analyse the information. They should not be edged along by the instructor. Students have the responsibility for verification of their inferences. The teacher should assume a questioning posture and require pupils to validate conclusions with the data presented. Once students' inferences are validated by data, the teacher can bring the lesson to a close by verifying the abstraction, asking students to verbalise it, and by presenting additional examples to reinforce pupil learning.

*Levels of learning:* levels of learning are reflected in the skills

students acquire. Low- to high-order skills can be ranked as follows (Anderson et al. (2001) revision of Bloom's Taxonomy (1956); adapted from McKeachie, 2002):

Remember: retrieve pertinent facts from long-term memory;		Low
Understand: construct new meanings by mixing new material with existing ideas;		
Apply: use procedures to solve problems or complete tasks;		
Analyse: subdivide content into meaningful parts and relate the parts;		
Evaluate: come to a conclusion about something based on standards or criteria;		
Create: reorganise elements into a new pattern, structure or purpose.		High

## The Rocks and Minerals practical at Berne

The course analysed is a Rocks and Minerals practical the first author taught to first-year students in the Institute of Geological Sciences at the University of Berne between 2002 and 2005. The practical is taught in parallel to lectures given by the professorial staff of the department. In the practical, the students gain their first hands-on experience with minerals and rocks and learn how to determine the properties of minerals and how to identify them. They then learn to determine the mineral assemblages in rock samples and to classify the rocks accordingly. The systematics of mineralogy and rock classification are discussed in the lecture before the students apply this knowledge to natural samples in the practical. Each session is attended by 16 to 24 students who work in pairs on a set of prepared samples. After a short introduction students work on the exercise, whilst the instructor and assistants are available for questions. Towards the end of each session, the instructor usually presents the answers and, time permitting, discusses them with the class.

## Louis Agassiz' method of teaching (based in part on Cooper, 1945)

Louis Agassiz (1807-1873) was a Swiss naturalist who, after working as professor of Natural History at the University of Neuchâtel between 1832-1842, emigrated to the United States and took up a professorship at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1848. Agassiz was an excellent scientist and in addition to his achievements in research, he is renowned for his innovative approach towards instructing his students. His teaching philosophy was firmly based in his

work in systematics and evolutionary biology, where he constructed classifications of organisms that depended solely on observable properties, without relying on assumptions of what processes generated them. When the question was put to Agassiz, 'What do you regard as your greatest work?', he replied: 'I have taught men to observe.' And in the preamble to his will he described himself in three words as 'Louis Agassiz, Teacher.' Agassiz' teaching methods are illustrated very well by the way he introduced new students to the basics of zoology.

### Recollections of Agassiz' teaching

When Nathaniel Shaler applied to Agassiz to study in his laboratory he was given a specimen of a fish to study, with the instruction not to talk to others about his topic, nor look up any literature about it. He was left with the instruction to 'Find out what you can without damaging the specimen; when I think you have done the work I will question you.' Subsequently Agassiz left Shaler alone for an entire week; during this time he became interested in details such as the ordering of the scales, etc. After Shaler presented his observations for an hour he was told: 'That's not right,' without any additional information. Shaler then 'went to the task anew, discarded [his] first notes, and in another week of ten-hours-a-day labour [he] had results which astonished [himself] and satisfied [Agassiz].' Subsequent tasks entailed the study of the bones of a different fish, and then fish of various species. Each time, Shaler worked completely independently, with the sole guidance of Agassiz' regular comment 'that's not right'. As a result, he learned the art of observing and comparing objects. Only after this was he allowed to read and discuss with others.

Samuel Scudder came to Agassiz to study zoology, especially insects. Agassiz told him: 'Take this fish and look at it; we call it a haemulon; by and by I will ask you what you have seen.' Scudder felt he was done within ten minutes, but could not find Agassiz for hours and was thus forced to continue studying the specimen. Out of boredom he decided to draw the fish, only to find that he observed even more. Agassiz: 'That is right, a pencil is one of the best of eyes.' Scudder then told Agassiz what he observed and was told that he must look again, because he missed so much. At the end of the day Agassiz announced he would question Scudder the next morning, forcing him to think about what he observed without looking at the specimen. He then mentioned the symmetry that Agassiz was after, and was told to look at the same sample again (no tools allowed). This continued for three days. Scudder: "'Look, look, look'" was his repeated injunction.' This exercise was followed by a second fish to focus on resemblances and differences and then additional samples to complete the family of haemulons. In total, Scudder spent eight months studying fish, before moving on to insects.

### Differences and similarities

There are clear parallels between Agassiz' teaching in zoology and the Rocks and Minerals practical in Berne. In both cases, novice students familiarise themselves with the identification, nomenclature and systematics of natural

samples (in our case minerals and rocks, in Agassiz' case animals and fossils). Nevertheless, there are marked differences in the circumstances as well as the approach to teaching and learning in the two cases described above.

Agassiz taught inductively, letting his students start with working on a single sample and following that up with more, similar cases. His students were expected to use the differences and similarities of the specimens to deduce their systematics or classification, thus achieving a higher level of abstraction. In addition, he let the students work completely by themselves, without any guidance from him, other students, or even the literature. This way, he forced them to persevere until they observed everything there was to the specific sample they were working on. Agassiz' students were trained individually, rather than in groups.

In contrast, the Introductory Earth Sciences course at Berne is set up with a deductive teaching strategy. The background and systematics are presented to the students in the lectures, after which they apply the acquired knowledge in the practicals on rock and mineral identification. Even within each practical, students are reminded of the background to that particular exercise and are given a detailed outline of how to proceed. At the end of most sessions, answers to the exercises are provided. In short, learning in the practicals is strongly guided by the teaching staff, rather than student-driven. Finally, the practicals are run in groups of 16 to 24 students.

### What works best and why?

Students will usually be more involved in the learning experience and tend to participate more actively when an inductive approach is used. In addition, students tend to understand and remember the content covered when learning occurs inductively (Saskatchewan Learning, 1991). Therefore, inductive learning is likely to instil the principles of observation, identification and systematics better in the students than deductive learning, and their level of learning (cf. Bloom, 1956; McKeachie, 2002) is likely to be higher. Intuitively, the same would be expected for individual study, especially when it is as intensive as the work of Agassiz' students (Cooper, 1945). However, Agassiz' way of teaching is very time-consuming, and therefore entirely unfeasible in the context of a current university curriculum.

The deductive approach is faster and can be an efficient way to teach large numbers of facts and concrete concepts (Saskatchewan Learning, 1991). The current strongly guided and deductive setup of the Introductory Earth Sciences course, of which the Rocks and Minerals practical is part, is designed to maximise the content covered in the time available, in such a way that students develop a solid basis for the rest of their courses in Earth Science.

### Possible improvements to the setup of the practical

Based on the analysis presented above, it is likely that a more inductive and student-driven setup of the Rocks and Minerals practical will enhance student involvement and induce higher levels of learning. However, the time and

group size constraints of present-day university teaching prevent the implementation of Agassiz' methods as he used them. Below, we suggest two ways in which parts of Agassiz' approach to teaching may be implemented in the practical.

### Student activation and independent learning - Jigsaw

Cooperative learning makes students responsible for their own learning, as well as that of other members of their group. Jigsaw is one method to implement cooperative learning and a simplified version (cf. Slavin, 1990) has been successfully applied to Rocks and Minerals practicals (Constantopoulos, 1994). Students working in groups of four to six are assigned material to read. Material may be divided among the students (jigsaw I) or all students may read all material, but focus on specific topics at which they become an 'expert' (jigsaw II). Students from different groups meet and discuss their common topic, thus becoming the 'expert group' on that topic. The 'experts' then return to their original groups and teach their topic to the other members. After a complete sequence each student will have taught a topic to the other students in the group, and all members are responsible for all topics covered.

In a modified jigsaw, developed by Constantopoulos (1994), students work in groups of four, required to identify 20 minerals in two hours. Each student is assigned five minerals on which he/she will become 'expert'. After about 30 minutes of individual work to identify their five minerals, 'experts' on a single set of minerals meet and agree on the identification. After checking with the instructor, they spend a little more time observing additional features and pointing these out to each other. The 'experts' then return to their original groups to show the other members the properties of the five minerals and to argue their identification. Ultimately, each student is responsible for learning to identify all 20 minerals.

Students were more motivated and less rushed in this class, since five minerals seems a much more reasonable number than 20, which leads them to study their samples more carefully and to observe more properties. The more positive learning environment enhanced participation, motivation and enthusiasm, directly leading to improved grades. Finally, students tend to turn to other students in their normal or 'expert' group for help, and truly work together (Constantopoulos, 1994). One should realise that cooperative learning tends to be more time-consuming than more traditional teaching methods, allowing treatment of a smaller number of topics in greater depth, leading to an emphasis on higher-order learning (Perkins, 2005).

### Inductive and active

It is possible to implement inductive teaching in practicals concerning the identification of rocks. Rather than presenting the students with a diagram for the classification of rocks in the lecture, the students can be asked to design a classification scheme based on a carefully selected set of samples. In a first round, the jigsaw method described above could be used to describe and identify each of the rocks. In the second round, each group designs a classification scheme. The schemes can be presented to the entire class,

and their merits may then be discussed. The instructor could then present the standard classification diagram, after which the groups should discuss the differences and the merits of each scheme.

In selecting the samples it is important to realise that examples for illustrating a generalisation must not only illustrate the concepts contained in the generalisation, but most also illustrate the relationships within the concept (Ki, 2002). Again, it is likely that more time will be required to carry out the full exercise than in the current setup. To compensate, some of the time currently allotted to lectures could be spent on this practical, since presentation of the classification scheme in the lecture is no longer necessary.

### Summary of results, conclusions, and recommendations

- The current Rocks and Minerals practical is based on deductive teaching of large groups of students and is strongly guided.
- Agassiz' teaching of his students was inductive, individual and driven by student activity.
- Inductive methods and active participation of students lead to better retention of the knowledge acquired and to higher levels of learning.
- The jigsaw method of cooperative learning can be applied in practicals on the identification of rocks and minerals and has been shown to lead to increased student participation and motivation.
- Inductive learning could be implemented in some of the practicals where classification schemes are used, which could be developed instead.
- These methods are expected to improve the quality (level) of student learning, but are likely to be more time-consuming than traditional teaching methods. To compensate, other parts of the course must be condensed, or some content must be discarded.
- Evaluation of the experiences of students and instructors with the new setup are vital to keep a check on the quality of the course and to guide further modifications or a movement back to more traditional teaching methods.

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## So what's the problem with eating your greens?

Jacqueline Tuson, Southampton Solent University

Southampton Solent University has recently been part of the Ofsted pilot for the inspection of FE in HE and, as a consequence, the issue of classroom observation has been much discussed. Ofsted inspectors grade classroom observations against standards derived from the Common Inspection Framework. They also expect FE colleges to conduct and grade observations themselves and to present these internally-given grades for external inspection.

The grading of classroom observations on a 1-4 scale where 1 is 'excellent' and 4 'inadequate' is as accepted in FE as it would be anathema in HE. Historically, and for cultural reasons, teaching observation within HE is usually undertaken as peer observation. It is rarely mandatory and it is regarded as part of the developmental process.

The QAA Review of Staff Support and Development Arrangements (2005) reported that 69 out of the 70 institutions questioned had some form of peer observation in place, with many respondents claiming that such a process enhances best practice. Classroom observation is also used extensively on Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PgCLTHE) courses as an encouragement to reflection. Our feedback from PgC groups is very

positive about the opportunity classroom observation provides for 'modelling of practice' and, intriguingly, observers appear to derive benefit along with the observed. Similarly, those of us who team-teach, or who are regularly reviewed by our academic colleagues because we offer staff development sessions, will know the inestimable worth of observing or being observed by another practitioner and discussing elements of practice with them.

Despite these indications of observation being valued, in many HEIs, there is no jostling queue of volunteers wishing to open up their practice to debate between colleagues (D'Andrea and Gosling, 2005). Union representatives are, reportedly, very tender on the subject of observation against performance indicators and the QAA report cited very few examples of HEIs where observation is being used as an integral part of a developmental cycle.

So just in the same way that we all know that greens are good for us but we do not necessarily relish them, what appear to be the issues preventing wider and better use of peer observation in HE?

*Do we feel that there are already sufficient indicators of best practice from students without the need for feedback from colleagues?*

Statistics showing retention, repeat business, achievement and distance travelled indicate quality learning and teaching, as do course satisfaction surveys. However, the Ofsted project team, while declaring that graded observations were not 'necessary', pressed us to provide them with equally valid proof of what actually goes on in the classroom. More importantly, we and they recognised that, grading and policing aside, opportunities to learn from each other and share practice were very limited if there was no robust system of peer observation in place.

*Do we doubt the usefulness of feedback about our teaching 'performance'?*

Ofsted inspectors are looking at more than 'teaching'. The teacher's 'performance' is only one aspect of learning. They ask to see schemes of work, assessment schemes and teaching resources (increasingly important aspects of quality learning in HE, according to Gosling and Mason O'Connor, 2006). Obviously, Ofsted inspections check 'hygiene factors' such as student attendance, but their focus is student engagement, progress and achievement.

*Is it that teaching in HE is so highly specialist that it is difficult for others to comment on its value?*

During Ofsted inspections, the team will be made up of inspectors from the disciplines that they are inspecting. Obviously, there are general pedagogic principles that underlie their judgments, but their sense of whether student achievement is appropriate, for example, is gained by their having an understanding of the subject matter and their having seen a range of other students in the same discipline, at the same level, in other institutions. In HE, while the peer may be from a similar discipline, they may not have worked in other HEIs or be sure of the general principles that evidence good learning.

*Is it that we don't know what we are looking for in terms of 'best practice'?*

The general principles of teaching are increasingly based on the encouragement of learning and this is what the observer should be evidencing. The work of Robinson and Udall (2003) reveals some of the techniques that a teacher can use to encourage engagement but these indications are far less specific than those given in the Common Inspection Framework. Several HEIs give access to their peer observation documents and they range from templates, the trigger points for which align closely with many FE observation sheets, to the rather less-focused approach that is used in many PgCLTHEs.

*Is it that we are not good at giving and receiving feedback?*

Ofsted inspectors are trained to conduct observations. Should HE peer observers be trained in the same way? In the 2005 QAA review of staff development, Anglia Polytechnic University was commended for its 'informative handbook for staff explaining the rationale for peer observation'. Portsmouth University provide illustrative examples of specific and 'evidential' feedback to support observers and stress the need for SMART development objectives that can be tracked and measured. Few HEIs appear to use the resultant information to full developmental advantage, however. The QAA reveals Bath University using peer observation within appraisal and also disseminating observed practice through quality

circles but, generally, there is resistance to sharing the outcomes of such observations and using them to 'break through the barrier of silence on matters relating to teaching and student learning' (D'Andrea and Gosling, 2005:69).

*Are we hiding our inadequacies as professional pedagogues behind the walls of our ivory research towers?*

This resistance to being observed is deep rooted and yet, generally, HE encourages a climate of scholarly critique that Barnett (1990) argues differentiates HE from FE. It may be that 'research universities' derive their sense of academic pride from subject specialism rather than pedagogy. But many post-1992 Universities pride themselves on the quality of their teaching and recognise that the widening participation agenda and the massification of HE have resulted in a body of students who have wider learning needs (NAO, 2002). Recently, even those Universities with prestigious research records are coming under pressure from students (and their parents) to provide more teaching and greater support for learning.

## Students 'pay more but receive less'

Report condemns 'compromised' academic standards and reduction of access to lecturers

**Anushka Asthana and Liz Biggs**  
**Sunday February 11, 2007**  
**The Observer**

*Undergraduates are increasingly demanding more from university life because of rising fees. Final year history students at the University of Bristol, who pay £1,200 a year in fees, complained recently when teaching hours were slashed by two-thirds to just two hours a week.*

Importantly, we are judged on our teaching whether there is a system of observation in place or not. Our students judge us, as do our colleagues. Even more importantly, these judgments are not always based on objective criteria and are rarely presented to us in such a way as to help us develop our practice.

*Fundamentally, are the benefits of observation too few to warrant the time and effort?*

There is no doubt that peer observation takes time and effort but Dorothy Haslehurst's unpublished evaluation data from Portsmouth University (2004-2006) reveals that a majority of staff perceive benefits from peer observation and that many measurable outputs result from this activity. Opponents of observation present the spectre of thought-police or the kind of league tables of teaching performance that exist in some American universities, but one could equally argue that a failure to provide peer observation fails both staff and students. This is particularly important where staff are new to teaching as well as new to the organisation. Students have mechanisms for alerting the University if a tutor is struggling but these checks take a while to filter through and yet the first few weeks can make or break a new tutor's confidence and their relationship with a group. There are very few other professional arenas where untrained staff have a licence to practise, unsupervised, and yet we allow claims of 'professionalism' to get in the way of supporting our colleagues and assuring the student experience.

These responses to the seven reasons for NOT conducting observations give rise to seven suggestions for how observations can be made more worthwhile:

1 Bringing the outcomes of observations into annual course reviews and into meetings with externals would produce added value. It is the dissemination and comparison of practice that provides the developmental value.

2 Extending the observation discussion

to include aligned assessment and differentiation and including the student perception would put the focus on learning, not teaching.

3 Ensuring that there are subject-specialist mentors to conduct peer observations with new teachers. This arrangement would need to be made contractual – an obligation on both the university and the incoming staff member – just as completion of a PgC is now a contractual obligation for new academics in many HEIs. (cf. Kell and Lloyd, 2006)

4 Providing an observation template with triggers for discussion and an action plan that can be followed up as part of appraisal would focus feedback and highlight development.

5 Sharing of practice on an in-house notice-board would encourage discussion and cross-fertilisation. The onus could be placed on the observer to post up the 'lessons' that (s)he has derived from observing another's practice. Online advice and question boards produce a PBL approach to best practice that is totally appropriate to the 'messy' business of teaching and learning.

6 In an age of 'supercomplexity' (Barnett, 2000) Universities have lost

the sole guardianship of knowledge. Thus aiming to be centres of excellence for teaching and learning provides them with a more relevant and realistic role.

7 Part of being an educational professional is engaging in reflective practice and ongoing CPD (Eraut, 1994). Peer observation enables reflection in a structured and productive way. That being so, it is not about whether we can afford to do it but whether we can afford not to.

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## Book Reviews

### Teaching Inclusively: Resources for Course, Department and Institutional Change in Higher Education

Mathew L Ouellett, Editor

ISBN 158107113-2

New Forums Press Inc, Oklahoma 2005

This is a rich source of material which goes beyond race to discuss gender, sexuality and disability. It avoids the use of jargon so is accessible to even a newcomer to the field of diversity although readers may be surprised that the use of the word 'queer' is acceptable in the USA context.

The 46 chapters are divided into four sections. Part 1 focuses on theoretical frameworks and useful models in which the emphasis is on making clear what values and beliefs underpin work in this area, while Part 2 is concerned with

departmental or programme-based change initiatives which bring staff together. Part 3 focuses on systemic change initiatives at institutional level and Part 4 on best practices and methods for individual staff with detailed descriptions of proven examples. The importance of diversity in the classroom is thoroughly explained from the perspective of both staff and the students. The theoretical models are useful for reflecting on the current positioning of both oneself and the institution in which the reader might be situated.

Unusually for an American book it includes chapters written by British academics. Bland Tomkinson of the University of Manchester contributes a powerful article on teaching international students. Drawing on the theories of Lego, Hall and Hoffstede, he offers a variety of ways in which to integrate these students and details of activities designed to encourage all students to value the cultural differences in the learning environment. Philip Frame and Jennifer O'Connor of Middlesex University Business School are also concerned with promoting dialogue about diversity issues in their department. They stress not only the value to the students of

exploring their own identity and attitudes but also the value of co-teaching with academics from different backgrounds. This links to the chapter co-written by the editor which is concerned with interracial team-teaching and provides the questionnaire which was used to explore the experience of the staff. Other chapters also provide the evaluation/development sheets for use by the reader in their own situation including advice on how to prepare oneself to work with other departments as a consultant.

This is an important book as institutions frame their Equality Schemes for disability, race and gender and, more importantly, consider how to enhance their practice in the area of diversity. At 687 pages it may seem daunting but the articles are accessible and easily read while the strategies they describe are transferable to Higher Education on this side of the Atlantic. There is something for everyone with an interest in working with inclusivity and an all-round taster for those just developing an awareness or concern and wanting to know what to do about it.

**Dr Michelle Haynes** is Educational Developer in the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement at Middlesex University.

### The Handbook of Work Based Learning

Ian Cunningham, Graham Dawes and Ben Bennett

Gower, 2004, 297pp.

Although this text has been around for a couple of years it is useful to look at what it has to offer us, given the current and future strategic importance given to this area. The authors, all 'Directors of Strategic Developments International Limited', have taken a taxonomic approach to their subject – it might almost be re-titled 'A Dictionary of Work Based Learning'. Structured in five parts, Part 1 examines the rationale for work-based learning, providing a rationale for developers as well as a rationale for senior managers/decision-makers. Importantly, the intended audience is 'people who are in work and who see learning to be more effective at work as an important activity'. It is not a book that encompasses the full scope of UK higher education's interest in the area or one that engages with curriculum development, assessment and all of the other development activities that concern academic and educational developers. The approach of the authors is tuned more to the needs of HR and personnel departments. Work-related learning, an important element in higher education's approach to employability and employer engagement, is not mentioned, for example. So is there anything to commend it to the *Educational Developments* reader?

Yes, there is. First, since it is written with providers of work in mind, it is a useful introduction to the area for any potential organisation that might engage with one's institution and students, and the authors are keen to point out that their focus is work, not employment – the text is equally appropriate to someone working as a volunteer in an organisation or someone who is in permanent paid employment. Secondly, Parts 2, 3 and 4 do provide a number of helpful hints and tips for the intending practitioner. Part 2 is focused on 'Strategies for Work Based Learning and Development'. The ten elements begin with *Action Learning*

and end with *Team Development*. As with Parts 3 and 4, each element is three or four pages long and is structured to provide a description of the activity, examples of use, possible benefits, possible limitations and operating hints. Chapter 2.7, for example, is entitled *Networks and Communities* and distinguishes between the two. *Networks*, we are told, have the possible benefit of gaining 'access to other sources of knowledge – for example, by tapping into other people's networks'. An operating hint for networking suggests that we should 'note that our focus is on learning so it's worth asking yourself where you can best get the knowledge you need and getting those people into your network' (page 79). The following section on *Communities* is a little longer and more sophisticated, drawing on Wenger's work on communities of practice.

Part 3 of the book is focused on 'Tactics for Work Based Learning and Development' and similarly lists, alphabetically, eleven such tactics – from *Appraisal and Performance Reviews* through to *Secondments and Related Approaches*. Although one might raise an eyebrow at the possibility of the strengths, limitations and operating hints for e-learning being summarised in four pages, the text does provide an agenda for colleagues wishing to get a 'bird's eye view' of the possibilities. By far the longest of these indicative sections is Part 4 which contains 37 'Methods for Work Based Learning and Development'. The section starts with *360° Feedback* and ends with *Writing*. This chapter includes structured activities such as *Repertory Grid Method – Understanding Your World* (p. 226) through to an appreciative view of making mistakes.

The final part comprises three appendices. Appendix I, 'A Declaration on Learning – A Call to Action', is really a manifesto for organisational learning and development. It includes a section where the authors present their assertions about the nature of learning; assertions that might well irritate colleagues.

*'Learning is frequently associated with formal teaching and training which, too often, comes to be seen to be irrelevant to daily life and work. Most learning takes place outside controlled classroom environments and this needs to be recognized – especially by educators and governments.'* (p.271)

Appendix II is a most useful summary of an approach taken by Middlesex University to enabling students to gain qualifications through WBL. Whilst this is not the only approach, it does illustrate very briefly a curriculum structure.

The final appendix, 'Why Isn't Work Based Learning More Supported?', follows a critique of organisational trainings but also suggests the possibility that organisational leaders do not really desire their work forces to undertake significant learning since this might stimulate change (p. 285).

Finally, readers might be interested in the ideas the authors have about the role of developers in 1.3 and one can only be reminded of the critique of the whole notion of 'development' made by Graham Webb over ten years ago (Webb, G. (1996) *Understanding Staff Development*, Buckingham SRHE/OU Press).

**Steve Outram** is Senior Adviser at the Higher Education Academy.



# International Institute for New Faculty Developers – Ottawa, June 2007

Celia Popovic, University of Central England, Birmingham



Ottawa campus

After several years' experience, I recently took up my first post as the Head of an Educational Staff Development Unit. The invitation to the International Institute for New Faculty Developers suggested that it would be relevant for newcomers at every level. I am glad I took a second look at that e-mail.

The course runs every two years in the US. This year, in order to appeal to an international audience, the venue moved over the border to Ottawa.

I arrived on the Sunday night, too late for the welcoming dinner, and too late it seems for the welcome. Not only had all the organisers vanished but so had my accommodation booking! As it was 3am in the UK at this stage, there was little I could do other than take the only accommodation on offer – a two-bedroom suite.

On the Monday, with over a hundred delegates attending, I quickly started networking. The majority were from the US, and a significant number from Canada. Many other countries were

represented, including Australia, Sri Lanka, Palestine and just two from the UK. However, the North American presence was dominant throughout the week. I rapidly learnt to translate and I became almost fluent in US Faculty Development Speak – but I will be forever confused by *evaluation* and *assessment*, as both terms seem to mean the direct opposite in the US, except when they don't!

The delegates were mainly people directly involved in development, either full time in a unit or as seconded academics and with a range of experience from none (a few were attending before taking up their post in September) to 20+ years in the field.

Forget about the next Harry Potter book – I now know what my summer reading will be. Two names kept cropping up as influential in the field: Parker Palmer and Stephen Brookfield, although our own Graham Gibbs did get a bit of a look in! I found the sharing of booklists and resources one of the most valuable benefits of the

course. In general, the issues and approaches taken by US colleagues are not hugely different from ours in the UK. I was not sure whether to be comforted by this or slightly disappointed, as I had hoped that I would be inspired by radically different perspectives.

Although described as a course, the week felt much more like a conference. It may have been the large numbers – many of the sessions were in full plenary – or it may have been the absence of assessment. (Or do I mean evaluation? Actually I mean both – regardless of definition!)

## Monday Getting started: Overview and Introduction to Faculty Development

Mary Deane Sorcinelli briefly summarised developments in the field over the last 5 decades and finished with the prediction that in the next few years we will need to face issues around active learning, the increasingly diverse and creative use of technology and an expanding definition of scholarship.

### Faculty Development Scholarship and Its Contribution to Our Practice

Nancy Van Note Chism and Marilla Svinicki led an entertaining session in which they explored the main strands of scholarship informing faculty development work. They encouraged us all to increase our involvement in research and publication. They argued that while we tend to use and refer to the research of others, through literature reviews or using ideas from scholarly literature in our workshops and courses, we ought to engage in original research and encourage others to do the same. I came away from this session inspired to write up some papers I have been putting off for months!

### Panel Discussion: Examining a Range of Faculty Development Programs and Models

Several presenters described their organisations, ranging from a huge department with over 80 members to one with only two. It was interesting to hear the different issues and opportunities afforded by the various models, but all were in a North American context – it would have been more interesting to hear about the situations in other countries, and may have helped to legitimise the use of the word ‘International’ in the title.

### Tuesday

#### Helping Faculty Explore Learning Theories and Introducing Faculty to Motivational Theory

Dieter Schonwetter took us on a lightning trip over the key learning theories that most staff developers use. Marilla Svinicki did the same with motivational theory. Although both sessions were very interactive and engaging, I found myself questioning who this was aimed at. If someone had any experience in staff development, I would expect them to know about the key theories, since any PG Cert would cover them, on the other hand, if they really were new, then the brevity of the overview would lead to a superficial grasp of the concepts. But the presenters were both excellent and I will be shamelessly stealing some of their ideas to illustrate key theories!

### Consultation Techniques for the Faculty Developer

This session exposed the biggest



*Group work*

differences so far between staff development in the US and our own context. Once I had managed the translation, I discovered that in the US staff expect to have their class evaluated by an independent colleague with findings which can be used for performance review. We were shown the wealth of data available and possible uses. However, it was so detailed and extensive that I wondered who would find time to analyse it all. I now understand why US colleagues might have troubled relationships with lecturers if they take on this policing role as well as that of a developer or critical friend. In the UK, we should consider if we would want to travel in a similar direction.

The highlight of the day was the Institute Dinner at a restaurant overlooking the river. A personal highlight for me was the school bus used to get us there!

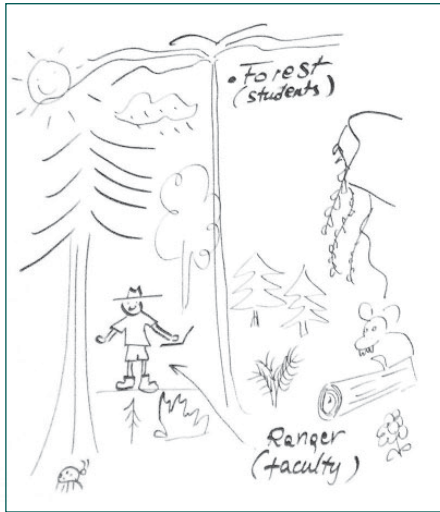
### Wednesday Course design

Peg Weissinger led a session on course design in which she shared her top tips. She combined an overview of the theory with practical exercises which could easily be used with academics. After asking us to think about a learning experience that was particularly positive, she then asked groups to draw a metaphor summarising how students learn. This led to great hilarity and engagement,



*The author, on the way to the Institute Dinner*

with an impressive range of metaphors from student as tree, to student as ant colony (don't ask!), student as boat, student as Canadian wilderness...and so forth.



Metaphor – how students learn

### Curriculum assessment and design

Peter Wolf continued with the theme of metaphor in his model of curriculum design representing each course as a star, linked together to form a constellation. Universities in Canada have extensive freedom from central government to run their own affairs. However, several in Ontario have collaborated to produce six generic attributes for a university graduate. Peter's University has added and refined these attributes into 10 learning objectives for every course. Faculty then identify the key learning outcomes for their course. These are mapped to the curriculum to identify any that are missing or weak. The course is then redesigned to be aligned with the intended learning outcomes.

### Career stages for faculty developers

In this session I was most surprised to see two Brits on the stage – David Gosling and Ray Land joined a panel in an interesting discussion about how people get into faculty development, and where they go once they are there! The most appealing aspect of this session was that it was the first with a truly international flavour, albeit UK-heavy – the panel represented England, Scotland, Canada and Australia.

### Promoting your department

This session illustrated some interesting cultural differences across institutions and nations. The main concern was to

avoid being associated with a deficit model, in other words, staff believing that it is the place to go if you are in trouble or even to be punished! Also, it was seen as important to market oneself with management as well as with the target audience.

### Thursday's concurrent sessions Directing a Teaching and Learning Centre

This plenary session exposed the wide range of set-ups from one-man bands to centres with 80 or more staff. This was an excellent opportunity to network with people in similar-sized departments and type of institution. Several people mentioned the potential isolation felt by many faculty developers, and commented on the value of being able to discuss ideas with someone detached from one's own institution but who understands the issues.

### Professional development strategies for educational developers

The phrase 'physician heal thyself' seemed to apply to this session: what sort of professional development should educational developers be engaged in? Several suggestions were made, including advice on how to reduce stress as well as activities that improve one's CV.

### Promoting Classroom Civility

This was a very popular choice. I was both comforted and depressed to find that the problems faced by lecturers from students in the UK are echoed elsewhere around the world. We focused on methods to deal with the most commonly exhibited undesirable student behaviours. I am sure I am not the only participant who left determined to run some workshops on this topic.

### Working with administrators

In this plenary session we explored the issues encountered by faculty developers in their interaction with administrators or senior management. Despite the US focus, the issues were very familiar and the advice was relevant, regardless of context. The main take-home message for me was to remember that we are all human!

### Friday

At the end of a long week, Friday finally arrived, and with it a demonstration by

Canada's First Nation – rail routes and major highways were blockaded as the aboriginal people protested to their Government, and as it was the National Holiday weekend (Canada Day), the protest possibly alienated some potential supporters. As a consequence, several of the participants left the capital a day early. Fortunately for the rest of us, the air flights from Ottawa were largely unaffected.

### Assessment of Faculty Development

I was, however, left wondering why we needed this final day. There was just the one session on the assessment of faculty development, and as this had been the topic of one of the alternative sessions earlier, it did feel repetitive. But the session was very good – as it helped me to think about the wealth of data we could have about what we do, with whom and to what effect. Remember – 'assessment' in this context means 'evaluation' in the UK. I have been inspired to investigate creating a database of records. First, I shall find out what information we already record but do not use, so for instance, does one faculty make more use of us than another? Do we have repeat business with the same person turning up to lots of things? Who are we missing, and why? I could even develop this into a research project into the effectiveness of our activities.

I left Ottawa with my head buzzing with ideas, a wallet full of business cards and several resolutions for actions to take on my return to the UK. The major resolution is to make use of the ideas and stimulation from this week, and not to let it dissipate as the demands of the everyday job get in the way.

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## Editorial

This edition of *Educational Developments* arrives on our desks with a timely set of articles. In England and Wales we are at the start of a new QAA audit methodology which will focus upon *enhancement*. Institutions are watching to see what indicators are being used by the audit teams to determine if enhancement is being achieved. David Ross *et al.* share with us the experience of enhancement-focused strategies in the Scottish system. The inevitable tension between assurance and enhancement is signalled in the article and, ominously, a concern that there are signs of a backward drift to an assurance approach.

An on-going discussion about the balance between discipline and generic content in postgraduate certificates in learning and teaching is taken up by Rachael Carkett and colleagues from the University of Plymouth. In the article – a fireside chat – the ways in which discipline elements are included is reviewed. A typical PGCert consisting of 600 hours might indicatively have only around 130 hours linked with contact and assessment. The authors therefore question how participants experience the remaining 470 hours which are presumably predominantly discipline based.

Readers will note that the past works of Peter Knight are frequently cited by authors. Indeed, we are also publishing 'Assessing Wicked Competencies' – co-authored with Anna Page – in this edition. All of which indicates the significant impact which Peter had upon our work in higher education. In October, a Peter Knight Memorial Seminar is to be held at the Headingley Carnegie stadium conference rooms of Leeds Metropolitan University (see adjacent advert).

**Anthony Brand** is Director of Learning and Teaching at Anglia Ruskin University.

## Peter Knight memorial influence seminar

In order to remember the impact Peter Knight has had on the professional lives of many in educational and staff development, a one-day seminar will be held on Wednesday 17th October 2007 at the Headingley Carnegie stadium conference rooms of Leeds Metropolitan University. No charge will be made for this event, and delegates will be able to purchase refreshments in the cafeteria area on the ground floor. The programme, running from 9.30-4.30, will comprise workshops led by colleagues who have found working with Peter has changed their lives. Please contact Sally Brown (s.brown@leedsmet.ac.uk) if you would like to offer to present a workshop and Rhiannon (r.thomas-osborne@leedsmet.ac.uk) if you would like to book a delegate place at the conference. A full programme will be circulated to attendees in advance of the event.

Delegates wishing to stay overnight might like to book themselves into the adjacent Headingley Lodge Hotel, which is co-located at the Headingley Rugby/Cricket Ground where the conference rooms are also located.

12th Annual SEDA Conference 2007

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