Creating Communities: developing, enhancing and sustaining learning communities across the University of Bedfordshire

Edited by Mark Atlay and Annika Coughlin with introductions by Petia Petrova, Peter Norrington and Arti Kumar

This book can also be found as a PDF on the University of Bedfordshire Learning Resources Centre online catalogue. Further information about the retreats can be found at www.beds.ac.uk/learning/support/retreat

Contents

Preface

Section 3: Research informed teaching
Introduction by Petia Petrova

Section 4: Transitions
Introduction by Peter Norrington

Both are available online: www.beds.ac.uk/learning/curriculum/structures/cre8

Preface

Creaton in Northamptonshire was the venue for the writing retreat that contributed to this volume of articles – the University's second writing retreat. Hard on the heels of the success of the first event (Creating Bridges) a group of staff from across the University met during Easter week 2010 to discuss, review and write the various chapters in this volume. A wider cross-section of staff was involved this time extending beyond the CETL to encompass staff involved in research informed teaching and teaching and learning projects or those who just wanted to write about their own teaching and learning practices. Not forgetting our guest external, Jamie Thompson, a National Teaching Fellow at the University of Northumbria, who has been working with us on various projects.

The supportive and developmental atmosphere once again proved conducive to the creative process. Interaction with colleagues both broadens articles and deepens reflection – enriching the writing process. Lively, challenging, tiring and fruitful were the words used by those present to reflect the week and the writing process. Lasting contacts were made between colleagues who would not normally have met – and productive joint ventures are planned or already underway. Yet again my appreciation goes to all those involved in writing, editing and publishing this volume and for making it such a pleasant learning experience for all involved.

Mark Atlay

Director of Teaching and Learning

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Section 1

Learner Development

Introduction by Mark Atlay

All education, at all levels, is about learner development in some shape or form but development is a purposeful activity with the broad framework set by external expectations and by the University's vision for its graduates:

> Our vision is of a University of Bedfordshire graduate who is knowledgeable, critical and creative; who understands who they are and what they want to achieve; who can communicate effectively, evidence attainments and function in context, and who has the skills, self-confidence and self-regulatory abilities to manage their own development. Such a graduate is eminently employable, capable of working with and learning from others, of adding significantly to their local community and prepared for life in an ever-changing environment.

What conditions make for effective learner development and how can we work with our students to focus and maximise their development? How do we develop learners to be prepared to enter a complex, competitive and changing global environment? This section considers aspects of this challenge with links to the research informed teaching agenda discussed in section 3 and employability covered in the subsequent section.

In Chapter 1, *Dispositions to Learn: Supporting personal development for success in Higher Education*, Jamie Thompson our guest author from the University of Northumbria, discusses the emerging outcomes from a joint project with which the University of Bedfordshire is involved. *Dispositions to Stay* is using the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) as a means to explore the conditions that support learner development and which lead to higher attainment and whether ELLI can be used as a means to identify those students more at risk of leaving early. The particular dimensions of ELLI that seem to have most impact are 'critical curiosity', 'change and learning' and 'strategic awareness'. Knowing the importance of these dimensions can then lead to planned interventions.

Central to our vision statement is that we want our students to be able work with and learn from others. In Chapter 2, *Skills development within the classroom*, John Beaumont-Kerridge and colleagues discuss how co-operative group working has been supported within the Business Pods. The roles of student and tutors are explored and a diagnostic

instrument developed and evaluated to aid groups and individuals with their development.

Evidence of learner development and the achievement of our vision of a University of Bedfordshire graduate should be most evident in the final project or dissertation – the culmination of a student's studies. In Chapter 3, *Defining reflection to enhance student attainment*, Andrea Raiker discusses the development and evidencing of students reflective skills through the final project in Education. Reflection is often seen as an important aspect of 'graduateness' and an essential skill for professional practice. It contributes to students having the ability to self-regulate and manage their own development as specified in our vision statement yet often we don't explicitly develop this aspect expecting students to pick up on less formal cues to its importance.

The priorities for learner development vary from subject to subject and can extend beyond knowledge and understanding. In Health, for example, students may need to be sensitive to issues of spirituality. In Chapter 4, *Beyond competency: Spirituality and Mental Health*, Susan Sapsed explores one student's struggle to grasp the nature and importance of spirituality in their work and to meet professional body requirements. She suggests that consistent and concerted action is required to take this beyond a 'tick-box' exercise and to help students see how important this aspect of their work is in their future practice.

Finally in this section we return to our students as individual learners. To understand their priorities we need to understand more about their backgrounds, aims and ambitions. In Chapter 5, *Eastern Europeans fit in easily*, Maja Jankowska explores the reasons behind the relatively high achievements of Eastern European students compared to those of some home and wider international groupings. This chapter is being published externally and only an abstract is printed here but it stresses the importance of internal drivers and of not making assumptions on the basis of culture or nationality.

Chapter 1

Dispositions to Learn: Supporting personal development for success in Higher Education

Jamie Thompson

Abstract

The Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) describes seven dimensions to lifelong / powerful learning. An on-line instrument identifies individual and cohort profiles in relation to these seven dimensions. Originally developed in schools largely in the UK, over the last four years ELLI has been developed and applied in a Higher Education (HE) context. Recent and ongoing research has been exploring the relationship between the seven learning dimensions (as measured by ELLI) and student retention and success as part of a funded project involving four HE institutions in the UK. The early identification of three dimensions that appear to be significantly associated with student success (Critical Curiosity - as opposed to passivity, orientation to Change and Learning - rather than to notions of fixed potential and Strategic Awareness - not a robotic approach to learning) is the basis of current attempts to identify, where appropriate to develop, and to evaluate interventions (in learning and teaching processes and environments) to support development and growth in these areas. Interesting but inconclusive data suggests that students who leave HE early may be characterised by a range of strong learning dimensions and current work seeks to explore this further. Here, the project research is contextualised and the findings to date summarised. The complexities of evaluating 'interventions' in an HE environment is illustrated with reference to a case study relating to the dimension Change and Learning. The case study provides a vehicle for speculation about the notion of learning as change and the possible consequent relevance of some theories of motivation to change, in particular the relevance of intrinsic motivation and cognitive dissonance.

Keywords

ELLI; learning power; personal development; retention; motivation

Evolution of the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI)

An important motivation for the research to develop the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) (Deakin Crick et al, 2004) was concern that in an ever more complex and uncertain world it is increasingly important to be a good learner. Despite this, an instrumental approach to learning and teaching dominates formal education with typically, codified curricula and high stakes assessment in the form of tests of knowledge, skills and understanding.

The ELLI research was an empirical study with school age children that sought to:

> ... identify the elements that define a good learner…....devise an instrument that could be used to assess where an individual located in relation to these elements at any given time, and …context .... (ibid: 248)

A review of existing research evidence first identified the likely factors characterising individual attitudes and approaches to lifelong learning. Multi-disciplinary expert advice, literature review and particular learning dispositions research (Ball, 2001) contributed to the design of a draft instrument which after testing and statistical analysis was reduced to seven scales representing seven theorized dimensions of learning (see Coughlin, 2010 for a more detailed description of ELLI). These dimensions were subsequently described in a polarised form as seven dimensions of learning 'energy' (see Appendix 1). Learning Power refers to:

> A form of consciousness characterised by particular dispositions, values and attitudes, expressed through the story of our lives and through the relationships and connections we make with other people and our world. (Crick, 2006 quoted in Coughlin, 2010:137)

It was in considering both the extent to which the ELLI research had successfully produced a robust model for understanding individual and situated (malleable) learning power as well as a shared desire to look beyond measured performance and achievement that its resonance with important contemporary HE issues became apparent.

ELLI in Higher Education (HE)

Alongside and subsequent to this development a number of projects were established using ELLI in a range of environments where learners and teachers created interventions to support learner development e.g. a variety of school settings, with incarcerated young offenders and with young unemployed people. Interesting materials

were developed and used. See Cole, Small, & Deakin Crick (2007), Deakin Crick (2006), Millner, Small, & Deakin Crick (2006), Small (2006).

A context of PDP

In HE in the UK, the issue to which ELLI connected was Personal Development Planning (PDP). A requirement across the sector in the UK (Quality Assurance Agency, 2009) PDP is expressed in contrasting ways. Alongside attempts to manage the requirement to deliver PDP has run a debate that resonates with the original ELLI research perceived need for an assessment tool 'concerned with something more than measuring performance and achievement'. Although drawing on liberal educational values (e.g. belief in the intrinsic value of education) this position is primarily pragmatic; HE has a responsibility to students and society to encourage and promote lifelong learning; to develop skills, motivations and dispositions to learn and change and not to constrain the aims of HE in terms of achievement of assured codifications of knowledge, skills and understanding.

Similarly pragmatic are arguments for PDP integrated with curriculum because of the complex needs of the workplace and workplace learning. These arguments draw on an eclectic literature (Schon 1991, Revans, 1998, Erault 1994, Coffield 2001, Whitehead and Thompson, 2004).

Meanwhile, a range of questions have emerged in relation to PDP for example how you can evaluate PDP interventions (Peters 2007, Baume 2007). Beyond learning how-to-learn and processes of review and planning, the 'development' in PDP has been ill-defined and measuring it (or its effect) inconclusive, e.g. through attempts to demonstrate variable achievement between students with differing levels of engagement with PDP.

The collaborative pilot research project.

The Leitch Report (HMSO, 2006) pressed universities to lead in making the UK a world leader in delivering skills-for-work. Again the sector was implicitly reminded of the inadequacy of codified curricula to meet the constantly changing needs of the modern workplace or imminent environmental, political and economic global challenges.

By 2006 and 2007 the relevance and attraction of ELLI to an eclectic group from HE in UK was based on three factors;

- ELLI identifies the dimensions of a particular notion of learner development

- ELLI measures these dimensions
- ELLI uses a language that enjoys face validity with learners and learning facilitators who hear it.

For many responsible for developing PDP and who have experienced difficulty in persuading academic colleagues about its relevance and importance, these were recognised as useful factors. Also ELLI's learner-centeredness resonated with much HE learning and teaching community philosophy.

A collaboration of 13 institutions worked together to prepare for and deliver a pilot project of ELLI in HE between March 2007 and October 2008 (Small and Deakin Crick, 2008). The project aims were to:

- explore the validity and reliability of the ELLI instrument in an HE context
- investigate the levels of learning power reported in various settings in HE
- explore the impact of selected interventions and practices on learning power
- explore the relationship between learning power and measures of achievement
- investigate the relationship between other environmental factors (ibid p4-5)

The pilot research findings - some key themes (qualitative evidence)

- ELLI applicability to a wide range of HE contexts including work-based learning and PDP
- high face-validity and accessibility
- potential to raise awareness of self and others as learners, stimulate positive personal change and improve learning relationships
- wide recognition of the value of ELLI and its positive potential impact upon learner qualities essential to success in HE and beyond, for both traditional and non-traditional learners, especially: reflection, self-awareness, self-regulation, strategic personal development - and also the quality of provision in HE, especially in:, providing a language for discussion about learning, encouraging student reflection, managing learner transitions, improving teaching and learning, managing PDP (ibid p46-47)

The pilot research findings - some key themes (quantitative evidence)

- the scales for the seven dimensions of learning power remain reliable and valid with this population, and are consistent with other studies (Deakin Crick et al 2004; Deakin Crick and Yu, 2008)
- levels of learning power vary with individuals, groups, institutions, modes of study, discipline and age
- learning power is malleable and impacted by wide-ranging variables (e.g. mode of study, institution, gender, age)
- a significant variable is whether a student arrives from school (the lowest levels of learning power) or are in work-based learning (the highest levels of learning power and the lowest levels of fragility and dependence)
- age continues to be significant in terms of levels of learning power. 18-24 year-olds, reported the lowest level of learning power on each dimensions, but mean scores increase with age
- learning power is improvable given the right circumstances. Tutor practice in universities does make a difference to how students understand what it means to be a learner and act as learners (ibid p48).

ELLI and student success

Despite positive findings, the sustainability of ELLI work is dependent on some volatile factors: the enthusiasm and energy of colleagues; small-scale funding for ELLI; maintenance and administration and perhaps most significantly the articulation of a relationship between ELLI and not simply a complex and contested policy theme (e.g. PDP) but an unequivocal mainstream HE purpose.

Student retention in UK HE is a multi-layered issue. Measured by the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) it consists of two factors; the proportion of students staying at an institution into the start of the second year of their programme and the proportion who leave the institution with the award for which they enrolled. With the ageing of the 'baby boom' generation, the traditional entry population is falling in the UK and the economics of retention have taken on fresh significance for most institutions. Retention strategies sit alongside strategies to compete for the shrinking traditional market and the creation of new markets (principally of international students and work-based, continuing professional development and employer-sponsored students).

Alongside this basic marketplace imperative, student retention has also become closely associated with the more subtle and politically-loaded marketplace issue of widening participation. Even this shrinking population of traditional school leaving-age students is contingent on government policy to increase the proportion of young people benefiting from HE.

Finally, student retention has become conflated with other factors as part of a broader notion of student success by which it is suggested UK HE might measure its effectiveness; student success includes the elements of student retention but might also be measured in terms of progression, attainment, employability and even by elements of student satisfaction.

Here then is an issue that offered the opportunity to move ELLI from the periphery to the illumination of a central policy strand in the sector and within institutions. A successful bid to HEFCE to illuminate and improve student retention and success across the sector in the UK with reference to ELLI was closely argued but was based on three simple hypotheses:

- Some students are more disposed to stay (and thrive) at university than others
- These dispositions to stay are malleable and can be strengthened by strategies to raise student awareness and support personal development
- Whilst institution-wide strategies are important these need to be supported by personalised and situated approaches to be fully effective.

Implicit in these hypotheses is a theory (or explanation) of retention, progression and completion. The evidence of our institutions' experience, and the published experience of others, suggests that institutional, problem-based approaches (finance, accommodation, support services etc) improve the context of the student experience, but fail to address retention, progression and success in HE as consequences of predisposition, expectation, personal engagement and individual development.

The bid proposed that successful retention strategies need to be both personalised and part of an integrated approach to supporting the student experience. A key factor in addressing retention is students' understanding of HE; what it is to be an (independent, self-regulating) learner in HE, the nature of the relationship between student and university and, crucially, students' belief that HE is for them, that they can succeed and that their learning and development while at university is relevant and will result in long-term benefits. ELLI provides a framework enabling students to understand their learning (and to regulate themselves accordingly) as well as a language for structured dialogue about learning in HE. Beyond retention and completion rates it is anticipated that engagement with ELLI will improve attainment, develop students as learners, raise

staff awareness of individualised approaches to learning and development and ultimately will transform curricula.

Interim findings regarding student success (Dispositions to Stay)

Dispositions to Stay is an action-research project. It aims to create and promote initiatives to boost student retention and success. Stage One involved examining the relationship between dispositions to learn, as measured by ELLI, and academic performance and available retention data. In addition to statistical measures stage one also considered perspectives of staff and students on the role of reflection on the dispositions in promoting academic and personal growth.

In Stage Two (nearing the end at the time of writing) more ELLI data and retention and success data has been collected from a bigger and wider cross-section of students. The results from Stage One have given traction and impetus to an exploration of learning and teaching implications; broadly, in what ways can learning environments and processes impact on the development and support of specific learning dispositions? Staff and students have been engaged in a variety of ways in addressing a range of strategic and pedagogic questions: When is the best time to introduce ELLI to students? How can the use of ELLI contribute to productive and awareness raising conversations between a student and their tutor? How and when should ELLI be re-used to measure change and perceived change in students' learning power? In what ways can ELLI be integrated into the student experience to maximize awareness raising and potential for personal development?

In Stage Three of the project, and following the analysis of the large data sets generated in Stage Two, the project will seek to evaluate a range of planned interventions using ELLI to improve learning power and academic attainment.

The project is now poised at a crucial stage. At the end of Stage One both the quantitative and qualitative data identified three of the ELLI dispositions that are significantly correlated to student success in the first year i.e. associated with high achievement good marks. This was an important finding in terms of the project momentum as it offered us new and more focused hypotheses to explore:

- Critical Curiosity, Strategic Awareness and Change Orientation are associated with student success
- Self awareness in relation to Critical Curiosity, Strategic Awareness and Change Orientation can develop these dispositions and improve academic performance
- Planned interventions can support and develop dispositions of Critical Curiosity, Strategic Awareness and Change Orientation and improve academic performance.

In Stage Two the project has continued to engage large numbers of students from across a wide range of disciplines and institutions and ELLI data will still be matched with achievement data. In this way the first phase findings will be enriched and illuminated, in particular allowing more significant demographic analysis e.g. exploring the impact of subject, level and mode of delivery as well as gender and age.

However in addition, during this second stage, students have had the opportunity to complete a second ELLI test and to see their new profile superimposed on their first profile. In parallel to this, teaching staff have had the opportunity to explore ways of using engagement with ELLI both to accommodate the possibility of second testing and to devise interventions or processes or environments that might address the target dispositions of Critical Curiosity, Strategic Awareness and Change Orientation.

This work will inform the planning and delivery in Stage Three of ELLI engagement alongside interventions intended to improve the target dispositions and raise academic achievement. At one level ELLI itself is the intervention (and here the debate is about when and how it is introduced and explained and supported) but beyond this ELLI will provide a framework for a range of learning processes.

The 'Right stuff'

For many the target dispositions will resonate with experience of successful students:

Strategically Aware. These students are able to see themselves as a resource to be used effectively; they plan the use of their time, identify key sources of information and support, prioritise and target learning and ensure they have a clear understanding about what is required for assessment tasks. They are savvy and understand that to succeed in assessed learning environments it is necessary to learn the rules of the game and to plan their learning around the resources they have available.

Although perhaps harder to idealise than other dimensions Strategic Awareness is a quality relevant to the real world. It represents realism and pragmatism and is a key skill for a range of activities; project management, problem solving, career planning etc. How can we support and develop the disposition to be Strategically Aware? It may be that some students have learned strategies for success in formal learning environments that they apply successfully in Higher Education without fully realising the relevance and transferability of this strategic thinking. Unlike some of the dispositions this one is not hard to understand but awareness of its relevance in an HE environment and beyond can be raised by explanation, exemplification and reflection. There should be no tension between teaching and offering strategic advice about success as part of that teaching. Is there a place for teaching more strategically?

Critically Curious. These students associate learning with questioning. They expect to be interested in their learning and this curiosity is driven both by a desire and a perceived need to understand properly. Curiosity then is not simply a child-like enthusiasm for

new knowledge or a symptom of a passion for a subject (though it is both of these), it is also a way of taking some control of learning and seeking to make individual sense of learning. It is an essential constituent of active learning. Curious students want to learn – they are keen.

Easy to see as a crucial disposition for success in HE and beyond, curiosity is often not nurtured, protected nor developed in teaching and learning processes and environments. School based ELLI research showed dips in curiosity that coincided with SATs and GCSE exam periods and it seems clear that codified curricula tend to drive down curiosity. The problem here is to find ways of structuring curricula and assessment in ways that are learner-centred (as far as possible starting from where the student is at) and built around questions. Enquiry based and problem based approaches are a way forward. More radically, approaches that re-orientate the teacher role towards guidance, support and mentoring of learning are well placed to encourage curiosity and to harness it. In many subjects it is argued that learning has to be scaffolded – that to get to the stuff that generates curiosity it is necessary to gain knowledge skills and understanding of essential basics. There may be ways to integrate this block building with other activity but perhaps when gratification of curiosity has to be suspended in this way it is particularly important to be transparent about it.

Oriented to Change. These students believe that if they apply themselves they are capable of achieving their goals. They have a sense of their own self-efficacy and are distinguished from other students who have fixed notions about their ability and a fatalistic view of their prospects. Students who are oriented to Change are confident.

Again the issue of delivering orientation to Change is complex. Self-belief begins with self-awareness and ELLI can provide a way of generating self-awareness. Lack of self-belief is largely learned and to reverse this, processes of dialogue and feedback and formative assessment can motivate and positively reinforce learner development. Even at its crudest, Personal Development Planning can offer learners the opportunity to identify where they are now, where they are trying to get to, what they need to do to get there and subsequently reflect and learn from the process.

So we can see the student with the right stuff before us now; savvy, keen and confident. Less clear is how we are to support and promote these characteristics and to evaluate the outcomes.

Change, learning and motivation: initial thoughts

Orientation to change then is about learner self-belief, self-efficacy and motivation. These are words from another lexicon, from the currency of other professional worlds e.g. health and social care. Can perspectives from these worlds illuminate how we might develop these qualities in learners?

Some aspects of motivational theory may suggest ways in which motivational environments and processes can be developed in HE. Intrinsic motivation is more sustainable than extrinsic – it is hard to make people motivated, difficult to give people motivation. The most effective motivation, a motivation that can be sustained is one that is developed by the subject themselves. Cognitive dissonance is the tension experienced when becoming aware of a gap between hopes, aspirations, plans etc and actual behaviour. The experience of cognitive dissonance is a trigger point for change and motivation (Miller and Rollnick, 2002). Change is a process through recognizable stages – motivation to change begins with awareness, involves preparatory thought and when started needs to be sustained (Prochaska, DiClemente et al, 1991). Taking three core elements of teaching in HE a grid is suggested to begin thinking about potential motivational approaches (Table 1).

	Assessment	Learning processes/environments	Individual support
Intrinsic v Extrinsic	- Self assessment - Assessment dialogue - Students pre-assess own work	- Student-centred approaches - Rewarding questions - Choice/flexibility	- Avoidance of non-motivational behaviour - Modelling the learner - Listening - Encouraging - Relationship of care and trust - 'Change is constant' - 'Where are you going and what do you want?'
Cognitive Dissonance	- Clarity about what is needed for higher marks - For career entry - Formative feedback	- Presenting models of success - Senior student mentors - Mentors from employment world	
Stages of Change	- Encourage articulation of plans and ambitions - Target marks?	- PDP - Where I'm going and how I'm going to get there?	

Table 1: Motivation in Higher Education Contexts

Conclusion

As the research enters Stage Three it faces a range of challenges. Without control groups it will be very difficult to demonstrate causal relationships between interventions and changes in either learning dispositions as measured by ELLI or improved success as measured by academic results. Nevertheless if the First Stage findings continue to be confirmed with larger populations i.e. that Change Orientation, Critical Curiosity and Strategic Awareness are significantly related to academic success – and if it is possible to demonstrate raised scores in these dimensions following interventions then the case for sustained exploration through research and practice will be very strong.

It is likely that the analysis of Stage Two data will begin to identify significant demographic findings. Early indications are that these will be particularly interesting in

relation to age, mode of study, gender, subject and institution. Although only small numbers of first year leavers who had undertaken ELLI were identified in Stage One their universally strong ELLI profiles may be significant and with implications about funding policies that penalise institutions with high attrition rates. It may also suggest that the focus needs to be less on those who leave the institution early but rather those who think about leaving but in fact stay, unengaged and unmotivated.

A short reflection about the relationship between learning and motivation raises further questions about the confidence and competence of academic staff to deliver motivation. Clearly many learners in HE are inspired and highly motivated by their contact with academics. However to what extent has this changed and is this changing in the face of increasingly codified curricula and assessment? To what extent is the motivation of students perceived as a happy by-product for some rather than a key part of the learning experience; a necessary strand to academic legitimacy?

About the author

Jamie Thompson is a Learning and Teaching Advisor at Northumbria University. He was a probation officer for nearly twenty years working in a wide range of settings and specialisms. A joint appointment between the University and the Probation Service for six years he has been a full time academic for the last twelve years. As an educational developer he has worked and disseminated in a number of areas including, work-based and work related learning, PDP, ePortfolio and Internationalising the Curriculum. In the last few years he has been involved in the development and use of the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) in a Higher Educational context, most recently in the HEFCE funded Dispositions to Stay project. He teaches as part of the Northumbria post graduate teaching and CPD award for staff and is a National Teaching Fellow.

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Appendix 1

Seven dimensions of learning energy

Growth orientation

Some learners appear to regard learning itself as learnable. They believe that, through effort, their minds can get bigger and stronger, just as their bodies can. They see learning as a lifelong process, and gain pleasure and self-esteem from expanding their ability to learn. Having to try is experienced positively: it's when you are trying that your `learning muscles' are being exercised. A growth orientation includes a sense of getting better at learning over time, and of growing and changing and adapting as a learner in the whole of life. There is a sense of history and hope. The opposite of growth orientation is fixity. Other learners appear to believe that the ability to learn is fixed. They therefore experience difficulty negatively, as revealing their limitations. They are less likely to see challenging situations as opportunities to become a better learner.

Critical curiosity

Some learners manifest a desire to find things out. They like to get below the surface of things and try to find out what is going on. They value `getting at the truth', and are

more likely to adopt `deep' rather than `surface' learning strategies. They are less likely to accept what they are told uncritically, enjoy asking questions, and are more willing to reveal their questions and uncertainties in public. They like to come to their own conclusions about things, and are inclined to see knowledge as a product of human inquiry. They take ownership of their own learning and enjoy a challenge. The opposite pole is passivity. Passive learners are more likely to accept what they are told uncritically, and to believe that `received wisdom' is necessarily true. They appear to be less thoughtful, and less likely to engage spontaneously in active speculation and exploratory kinds of discussion.

Meaning-making

Some learners are on the lookout for links between what they are learning and what they already know. They get pleasure from seeing how things `fit together'. They like it when they can make sense of new things in terms of their own experience, and when they can see how learning relates to their own concerns. Their questions reflect this orientation towards coherence. They are interested in the big picture and how the new learning fits within it. They like to learn about what really matters to them. The opposite pole is fragmentation. Some learners are more likely to approach learning situations piecemeal, and to respond to them on their own individual merits. They may be more interested in knowing the criteria for successful performance than in looking for joined-up meanings and associations.

Dependence and fragility

Dependent and fragile learners are more easily disheartened when they get stuck or make mistakes. Their ability to persevere is less, and they are likely to seek and prefer less challenging situations. They are dependent upon other people and external structures for their learning and for their sense of self-esteem. They are passive imbibers of knowledge, rather than active agents of their own learning. The opposite of dependence appears to be resilience & robustness. Learners with these characteristics like a challenge, and are willing to `give it a go' even when the outcome and the way to proceed are uncertain. They accept that learning is sometimes hard for everyone, and are not frightened of finding things difficult. They have a high level of `stickability', and can readily recover from frustration. They are able to `hang in' with learning even though they may, for a while, feel somewhat confused or even anxious. They don't mind making mistakes every so often, and can learn from them.

Creativity

Those learners who score highly on this dimension are able to look at things in different ways. They like playing with ideas and taking different perspectives, even when they don't quite know where their trains of thought are leading. They are receptive to hunches and inklings that bubble up into their minds, and make use of imagination, visual imagery and pictures and diagrams in their learning. They understand that learning often needs playfulness as well as purposeful, systematic

thinking. The opposite pole is literalness or rule boundness. These learners tend to be less imaginative. They prefer clear-cut information and tried-and-tested ways of looking at things, and they feel safer when they know how they are meant to proceed. They function well in routine problem-solving situations, but are more at sea when greater creativity is required.

Relationships/interdependence

Learners who score highly on this dimension are good at managing the balance between being sociable and being private in their learning. They are not completely independent, nor are they dependent. They like to learn with and from others, and to share their difficulties, when it is appropriate. They acknowledge that there are important other people in their lives who help them learn, though they may vary in who those people are, e.g. family, friends or teachers. They know the value of learning by watching and emulating other people, including their peers. They make use of others as resources, as partners and as sources of emotional support. And they also know that effective learning may also require times of studying - or `dreaming' - on their own. The opposite pole is dependence. Some learners are more likely to be stuck either in their over-dependency on others for reassurance or guidance; or in their lack of engagement with other people.

Strategic awareness

Some learners appear to be more sensitive to their own learning. They are interested in becoming more knowledgeable and more aware of themselves as learners. They like trying out different approaches to learning to see what happens. They are reflective and good at self-evaluation. They can judge how much time, or what resources, a learning task will require. They are able to talk about learning and about themselves as learners. They know how to repair their own emotional mood when they get frustrated or disappointed. They like being given responsibility for planning and organizing their own learning. The opposite of `strategic' is robotic. Learners with these characteristics appear to be less self-aware, and are more likely to confuse self-awareness with self-consciousness.'

(Deakin Crick et al, 2004, pp254-256)

Chapter 2

Skills development within the classroom: an instrument to determine perceptual differences of the individual, their group and their class

John Beaumont-Kerridge, Guy Parrott and Elizabeth Parkin

Abstract

Skills development for students in Higher Education is currently a key element of the contemporary learning and teaching approaches of undergraduate subjects. A key skill is to be able to work effectively in groups. It is important that appropriate information is obtained to support the variety of intervention techniques by tutors in the classroom to facilitate effective teamwork. The intention of this study was to develop an exploratory diagnostic instrument which individuals and groups could use within their collaborative process. This study incorporated personal reflective essays, completed regularly by students within the business pods, to gain a detailed insight with regard to the student experience. With this data, a mapping exercise was then undertaken and close approximations were found to a skills framework. This enabled an indicator instrument to be developed in the form of a questionnaire. This can be used by each student in a class as a reflective instrument, to indicate the extent of their own skills development, comparing their results to overall totals. This also gives tutors comparative measurements which can provide a useful foundation for intervention and guidance. Although this indicator questionnaire was developed within the Business Pod environment, further research is intended to test this in other undergraduate business studies environments.

Keywords

Audit tool; skills; research; assessment; group learning; experiential learning; reflection

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Background

Engaging with students via group work to guide skills development is an important aspect of contemporary learning in Higher Education. Guiding students through the variety of experiences to achieve successful outcomes in these areas requires, at the very least, good information flows between tutors and students. Whilst the richness of face-to-face learning and teaching provide a well grounded traditional and useful approach for tutors to inform and influence behaviour, this does not necessarily provide all the data required. Certainly, despite the best efforts of tutors, for a variety of reasons some groups do not function well. The review of a student's perception about a given situation by a tutor has traditionally relied upon the skills of listening, observation of behaviour, deduction and other related skills. It has often not been able to obtain a full view of the group dynamics involved because much of the discussion and work can occur outside of the classroom. In contemporary education, 'outside the classroom' now includes informal discussion on social networking websites such as Facebook™.

The sharing of personal viewpoints is important for both students and tutors to determine future activity within a collaborative exercise. Eliciting appropriate data from students in a face-to-face learning situation can sometimes be difficult, especially by students in front of peers with whom they may not have a defined relationship, or indeed may be in some form of perceived competition e.g. grading on performance. The relationship of an individual student with a tutor however, differ since this is often developed upon assumed trust and support to provide the necessary foundations for a learning process to occur (Hargreaves, 2002). It would appear the nature of the online environment provides an environment for individuals to express their reflected thoughts. Once initial relationships have been established, individuals provide much more information through this medium than in the equivalent face-to-face meetings (Salmon, 2000; 2003). It is this additional source of information that could perhaps help tutors be informed better about the nature and process of individual's learning. The advantage of this two way communications medium, and the ability to manage what is seen, by whom and when enables tutors and students to develop a trusting, positive working relationship. Contemporary business environments present a competitive situation where graduates must demonstrate the ability to demonstrate good communication and collaborative skills. The development of these skills in addition to the knowledge base of the academic subject areas presents challenges. The need for individuals to effectively undertake these roles, and work at a number of hierarchical levels within an organisation is now seen as critical, encouraging innovative approaches to teaching and learning by business schools. The recognition and enhancement of group dynamics for students' cooperative learning within traditional lectures and seminars, from a pedagogic perspective, presents many difficulties. Monitoring and intervention are seen as necessary from the tutor's perspective to assist, guide and develop students in the pursuit of achieving stated learning outcomes.

Whilst the development of the real world curriculum, named the 'Business Pods' at the University of Bedfordshire Business School has been reported as providing a significant improvement in the ability of students to develop the necessary interpersonal skills (Beaumont-Kerridge et al, 2010); even so the ability of the tutor to detect the progress of group dynamics from the student perspective can be limited. There are many reasons for this including straightforward pragmatic issues such as that much of the work students undertake is outside the classroom. Students also may not want to divulge important information about their interactive relations with others. Indeed, unless students are aware of the characteristics of group dynamics they also may not be consciously aware of the situation in which they may find themselves. It is therefore very important that tutors are able to find out the necessary information to help broaden their options to determine the nature and progress of individuals doing group work. The intention of this study was therefore to develop an exploratory diagnostic instrument which individuals and groups could use within their collaborative process.

Cooperative working in the classroom

Within Higher Education, whilst the important feature of collaborative working has become an important feature of contemporary learning and teaching, it is beyond the purpose of this study to explore fully group dynamics. Although there are some important aspects which need to be established both from a pragmatic and theoretical perspective, the role of this study is to identify important indicators for tutors in order to provide the necessary guidance to support group work. There are important steps which groups or teams must accomplish in order to be successful. They include the identification of the tasks necessary for a given project, the pragmatic steps appropriate and the individual contributions that would necessarily follow from this (Benjamin et al., 1997; Deol and Sawdon, 1999, Johnson and Johnson, 2003). The activities that occur include both formal and informal roles of leadership, co-facilitation and communication. A group of people, need (from a base of individual values) to share beliefs, establish norms all in the process of forming what may be a group identity to complete common tasks effectively (Benson, 2001). The management of planning and reviewing goals, with the understanding of the dynamic influence of power relationships with the possible introduction of controversy and conflict all add to a rich combination of human interactions.

Whilst it is recognised that experienced tutors can understand and appropriately intervene to improve group working where necessary, it would appear there is only a limited evidential base upon which tutors can critically evaluate a rationale for their actions. This is especially important where a team's group dynamics turn sour, even with significant contributions from the best that tutors can offer. Under such circumstances it is often difficult to determine the reasons for problems arising. Data of the group activity is often incomplete and / or inconsistent. If tutors are to be effective, it would logically follow for certain conditions, some form of behaviours would enable them to intervene, redirecting a group of individuals to successful outcomes.

Some studies have indicated students' insufficient preparation for group work. "While (students) are given criteria for success they are not given techniques to overcome difficulties. In particular they feel that they are not well equipped to handle conflict within the group and deal with group members or not contributing appropriately." (Hart et al., 2001: p4 cited in Murray and Lonne, 2006). These preparations include the mechanisms for students to form working relationships and trusting bonds with each other and the development of clear goals and achievement milestones. All of these conditions are within an educational setting which is probably explicitly competitive in nature. The development phases in which creative ideas and solutions emerge are necessary processes for the successful completion of tasks. The conditions under which the "cooperative work" of the group produces a better synergistic output than that by individuals will vary from group to group. The environment which is necessary to enable all of these processes is important. In some Higher Education establishments the vagaries of historical developments, resources and the timetable work against developing the ideal conditions which encourages co-operative working.

The requirement of higher order thinking and skills from both individuals and collaborations also present challenges. Assessment strategies of group working would ideally need to reflect both individual and group effort which can, under certain conditions, be difficult to distinguish. Assessment also drives motivation, sometimes to the extent that if individual contribution is not explicit, this may have a de-motivating effect on some students who are determining where to put their effort with regard to grade achievement in the competitive setting. Other problems also arise as a result of varied contribution levels from students particularly where student input is not fairly reflected in the assessment strategy. This can develop a student perception that under some circumstances, 'a significant few' provide the work for 'significant others' providing for some the inescapable view that group work is unfair, with the consequential negative attitude of such activity. More recently, with the development of much better systems of plagiarism detection, sensitivities have been heightened when an individual copies work into the group assignment without the others' knowledge. Some regulations penalise all group members with far reaching consequences for all.

With an emphasis on employability criteria, and the consequentially high levels of importance attached to effective teamwork approaches, the stakes have been raised to improve contemporary education environments in order to achieve better outcomes. This includes enhancing the physical learning and teaching environment, the online provision and the management of the students and processes. The need exists, to provide an ideal environment, education processes and clear educational goals for student groups to be able to flourish effectively. The initial assumption is that students do not possess some or all of the higher order team practices interpersonal and group skills to function at the level of outputs expected. Correspondingly, tutors need transparent more solid evidentiary base upon which to determine necessary interventions to guide groups to the successful completion of tasks within a suitable offline and online learning and teaching environment.

The 'Onion' project

The Business Pod staff use a great deal of group work to build the skills the students need. The team recognised the need for some form of evidential base for informed, well-founded interventions for students within their group work process. The staff also recognised that students needed a much better framework to help them understand group processes and build group-working skills. The difficulty that presented itself was the nature and type of information which would be appropriate and provide the necessary indicators for tutors to be able to evaluate and predict the variety of group dynamics processes which were taking place. For lessons to be successful, cooperative from a group work perspective, Krol et al (2008: p 3) identified what they considered to be five essential elements:

- Positive interdependence: the perception of group members that they must work together to accomplish a common goal;
- Individual accountability: group members are held responsible for their contribution to goal achievement;
- Face-to-face interaction: group members meet face-to-face to promote one another's work;
- The development of social or small-group skills: attention to the interpersonal skills needed to work in a group;
- Group processing: group reflection on the collaborative efforts and decisions on how to improve effectiveness.

To achieve these, a number of developments took place within the context of a radical change in the first year experience.

The Business Pods were a completely new curriculum in the widest sense of the word: new induction programme, new assessments, new teaching and learning approach, new in-class activities and new physical learning spaces. The only common feature with the previous modules was that the core learning outcomes from seven old modules were incorporated into the new integrated programme, accounting for 90 credits of the first year. Everything else changed.

The underpinning philosophy of the programme was that the experience should be as much like the real world of business as possible. Almost by definition, a real world working environment requires a high level of collaborative work. The new teaching spaces had a project space specifically designed for group work with a table and computer for each group of five. There was a creative room where groups could brainstorm ideas for their projects and a boardroom where they could work in more privacy.

The group was the social support for new students from induction onwards. It was also the learning unit and centre of mutual student support right the way through the

pod programme. The large group projects accounted for about half the grades on the programme and most of the other individual assignments were tied into the group projects in some way. For example, the preparation of a P&L and balance sheet would be done by students individually to help them learn so that they could work on the financial reports required for their group project.

Given the centrality of group work in this new curriculum, the tutors found it useful to explore the student experience of group work in more depth. Useful elements which tutors need to monitor during student team/group activities were identified as (Young & Henquinet, 2000; McGourtey & DeMeuse, 2001). The following list is adapted with indicators showing student / tutor roles and responsibilities:

- Clear instructions about group functioning (T)
- Access to appropriate learning resources (S)
- The establishment of clear goals (S-I-G)
- The effective creation of ground rules (S-I-G)
- Maintenance of records e.g. meeting notes (S-I)
- Exchange and feedback on peer evaluations (S-I)
- Students' ability to record and reflect upon their own feedback. (S)
- The establishment and documentation of appropriate processes for "non performers" (S,T)
- Assessment of group function and group output (T)
- Receipt of prompt feedback on group performance at a variety of stages in the process (T)

  S = Student role
  T = Tutor role
  S-I = Individual student responsibility
  S-G = Student group responsibility

The emphasis with regard to the tutor role activities concerns the establishment and management of clear instructions, guidelines and assessment processes. The student roles and responsibilities divide into those of an individual and group. Whilst these seem somewhat obvious, it became apparent from the initial discussions that students were not clear about their roles as an individual, a team member and with respect to that of the tutors. Any developed framework would therefore need to provide a structure within which students would operate clearly. It was anticipated by the tutors that this framework would be quite rigid with regard to the early stages, and as time progressed this formality of structure would become less since student skills, understanding and knowledge would increase.

If group functioning by students was identified as being successful, tutors anticipated that very little interventions would be needed in terms of group dynamics/team

building development. However, because of the possibility of conflict arising where team working was dysfunctional, confidentiality would be necessary with regard to students reporting and recording their views. In the first instance individual students must feel completely free to divulge information in the form of their thoughts and feelings within a trusted relationship.

Tutors used a resource which they found fulfilled two functions. Part of the assessment regime was a process of learning diaries and periodic reflective essays. Students were asked to maintain weekly learning diaries or Personal Learning Logs (Pllogs). At the end of each of the four phases of the programme, students used the Pllogs as a resource to help them write a personal essay reflecting on their learning from the phase. The Pllogs were kept on the virtual learning environment, Blackboard, and were set up so that the tutors could read and respond to the entries but they were not visible to other students.

Very early on, it became apparent that students trusted both the confidentiality of the system and the relationship with their tutors. They shared all sorts of feelings about their university experience and the joys and difficulties of group work figured prominently in the Plllogs. For the reflective essays, open questions were asked to help the students' learn about the process of reflection and to make them effective. One of the areas explored was the learning from the group experience.

The Pod team found that this process improved the process of reflection compared to the previous units, although this has not been measured or studied in depth. In addition they were pleased to find a depth and quality of insight now available to them on the student perspective on group work.

Both the Pllogs and the reflective essays were submitted electronically through Blackboard which gives a number of advantages over face to face or paper-based communication in this context, namely:

    a)   The security and access to these is controlled and confidential. This was important from both the student and tutor's perspective.

    b)   Access would be established by named individual tutors.

    c)   This was important from the student perspective to enable the learning and teaching relationships of trust to develop. It was anticipated some students might want to indicate in their reflections negative aspects of other members of their group.

    d)   The nature of online text enabled higher order reflective skills to be used by students.

    e)   The text based medium provides a rich cognitive environment for students to consider their views (Salmon 2000, 2003). Statements given would be expected to be carefully considered, and also provide a good historical base over time.

f) The nature of online text enabled staff to see not only the direct meaning of statements made, but also to determine a level of interpretation of the "nuances" given by students.

g) For the same reasons given in (c) above, the online text medium provides a good mechanism for tutors to evaluate student perceptions.

h) The System was simple to set up and use.

It was not expected that students would have a problem with using a personal blog system other than the initial difficulties of remembering which password was the correct one to use to gain access to the programme. What was also important was the ability of tutors to be able to access the Pllog and the reflective essays to undertake the normal formative assessment processes, equivalent to a face-to-face approach. Simplicity was seen as key with regard to this issue.

Dialogue online has been demonstrated to be particularly helpful for the improvement of higher order thinking skills, critical evaluation and knowledge development (Mason & Kaye 1990, Laurillard 2003, Koschmann 1996, Bonk & King 1998, Mayes 2000, McAteer et al 2002, Salmon 2000, 2003). Online text approaches provide the means by which a number of higher order thinking skills can be developed such as critical reasoning, reflective approaches to understanding as well as support.

Carpenter (1998) and McClenahen, (1997) note students may have better quality online discussions and build effective arguments because of the additional time available to reflect and synthesise comments from their peers prior to posting. Poscente and Fahy (2003) note strategic initial messages or triggers in text conferencing can lead to rich cognitive discussions. Fahy (2001) also noted 'response triggers' as messages which generated large numbers of postings. Online discussions may therefore appear to offer a richer engagement than the offline equivalent of the face-to-face dialogue. Whilst this study did not incorporate formal online discussion approaches, many students did engage in this approach for part of their group work. The effect of the online medium in the reflective essays indicates a rich level of cognitive engagement. This may not be wholly due to the additional time that appears to be devoted to online engagement. Success in this media however is also dependent upon motivation and the need for good skills in the moderator (Salmon, 2000; 2003). When online, students are able to see patterns and extract meanings developed from multiple text sources. They are able to return to previous postings, comment and further synthesise ideas. This is not easily possible in the classroom, recording either by video or audio may provide a means to re-hear a discussion, but this a time consuming and an inefficient process when compared to online discussion. Face-to-face evaluations are often significantly influenced by delivery and style, what the participants are wearing, their physical appearance or tone of voice. Within the lecture or seminar, much of what is 'said' by both faculty and students, often is not noted by students (Bligh, 1998).

Methodology

At the start of the induction week, students are allocated to a cohort of about 50 and to their first working group of five. Various activities during induction week are organised to help the students settle in and get to know each other. In Week 1, students begin projects and formative assignments. For each one they are provided with written instructions, and presentations about the group tasks required of them. Various activities are used in the early weeks to explore group roles, such as completing a Belbin analysis and icebreaker activities requiring the sharing of information. They are also informed they would receive feedback based upon their entries in their Pllogs.

At the end of the first phase in Week 7, the students write their first reflection. This marks the end of their early projects and the end of their first group. In Phase 2, they are allocated to a new group. They continue Pllogs, although it is fair to note that this, in some cases, becomes a less frequent activity, and write another reflective essay at the end of the phase. By this point, they have completed about two thirds of the programme and have experienced work in two different groups. In our analysis, we took 27 Phase 2 reflections and explored the response to group work. These focus on the experience in Phase 2 but in many cases compare and contrast that experience with their Phase 1 group.

Our sample was analysed using content analysis with the assistance of Nvivo via open, axial and thematic coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). This approach assisted the identification of developing concepts and facilitated the building of connections within these. Each of the coded elements were also considered under a positive, neutral or negative connotation from the perspective of the student. This approach enabled a comparison drawn from the skills framework listed in Appendix 1.

Results and discussion

The intention of this study was to develop an exploratory diagnostic instrument which individuals and groups could use within their collaborative process. This would provide for students an indicator or health check for reflective review and discussion to enhance awareness and learning. In addition, the online personal blogs would also give tutors insight with regard to possible interventions that could be given to groups and their members to assist outcome efficacy.

In part, the QAA skills framework as listed in Appendix 1 goes a long way to providing a student with an ability to function well within a group. The review of the student perceptions via the reflections was important when compared to these to determine whether or not there was some form of effective mapping. In combination with the skills framework, the coded elements have been used to provide a number of questions under each heading to create the 'Health Check' quantitative instrument.

The skills element which received the highest coded responses was self reflection and criticality. This was expected because students had been informed about the importance of self-reflection and were completing a reflection assignment. This was also considered an important part of the learning process when discussed with students. The next two highest were 'ability to conduct research in business and management issues', and 'effective problem solving and decision making'. These intensely cognitive areas appear to be linked, since the former would present ideas for consideration and the latter the necessary skills to solve the issues raised in the problems presented.

For each of the skills elements from the framework, interesting distributions appeared with regard to the coded responses.

A. **Cognitive skills of critical thinking, analysis and synthesis.**

+ / -	Coded Evaluation / QAA Skills Matrix	No.	A
P	Positive skills improvement	33	*
P	Positive exploration about self	18	*
	Group dynamics phase development recognition	17	*
P	Positive leadership experience	9	*
P	Effective use of feedback - group	4	*

All of these elements in the coded responses were positive in their nature. This included both individual and group perspectives which indicates a linkage between individual skills and group processes. Questions which emerge from this that could be used in the research instrument are as follows:

Q1   Through thinking about information I have learnt more about myself?

Q2   Through working with others on assignments I have learnt more about group dynamics?

Q3   I have learnt to be a better leader through developing group assignments?

B. **Effective problem solving and decision making**

+ / -	Coded Evaluation / QAA Skills Matrix	No.	B
P	Positive hindsight reflection	36	*
P	Positive skills improvement	33	*
P	Positive learning experience	18	*
P	Positive exploration about self	18	*
P	Positive group experience	16	*
P	Individual knowledge improvement	14	*
P	Real world business skills development	9	*
P	Good team working skills	5	*
	Learning outcome achieved	3	*
P	Positive result after admin error	1	*

All of these elements in the coded responses were positive incorporating both individual and group process items. A pragmatic nature of problem solving and decision making in relation to the nature of the elements under this heading indicate both knowledge and skills improvements from a positive perspective. Since elements of team/group are small in number i.e. 2 compared to the number of other elements it would appear the positive skills and knowledge base is driving the group process outcomes. The questions that emerge from this stage are therefore:

Q4   My knowledge base has been enhanced by working on group assignments?

Q5   The group assignments have made me a better decision maker?

C. **Effective communication**

+ / -	Coded Evaluation / QAA Skills Matrix	No.	C
P	Positive hindsight reflection	36	*
P	Positive skills improvement	33	*
	Group dynamics phase development recognition	17	*
P	Positive group experience	16	*
P	Real world business skills development	9	*
P	Positive leadership experience	9	*
P	Good team working skills	5	*
	Learning outcome achieved	3	*

The elements outlined under this skills heading again come under both individual and group processes. They do indicate however further demonstration that they individual skills and knowledge base perhaps underpinning the positive group processes which are being reported.

Q6   By working with others on the group assignments my communication skills are better?

D. **Numeracy and quantitative skills**

+ / -	Coded Evaluation / QAA Skills Matrix	No.	D
P	Positive hindsight reflection	36	*
P	Positive skills improvement	33	*
P	Positive learning experience	18	*
P	Real world business skills development	9	*

The result under this heading are understandably individually based perspectives. It is perhaps the nature of the nature of the curriculum being used i.e. examples from actual business which demonstrate the value of applied scenarios for use by students.

Q6   By working with others on the group assignments my communication skills are better?

Q7   My numeracy skills have been improved because they have been needed for the group assignments?

E. **Effective use of communication and information technology**

+ / -	Coded Evaluation / QAA Skills Matrix	No.	E
P	Positive hindsight reflection	36	*
P	Positive skills improvement	33	*
P	Good team working skills	5	*

The rather short list of elements under this heading indicate perhaps a greater emphasis towards individual perspectives of development. All three of these elements are positive but the balance would appear to emphasise the individual. In the learning curve of communications and information technology, this process is often about individuals are overcoming the learning barriers since the use of ICT for example is down to the individual.

Q8   I have had to improve my information technology skills because of the group assignments we have been given.

F. **Effective self-management**

+ / -	Coded Evaluation / QAA Skills Matrix	No.	F
P	Positive hindsight reflection	36	*
P	Positive skills improvement	33	*
P	Positive learning experience	18	*
P	Positive team working result	9	*
P	Positive leadership experience	9	*
P	Positively motivate others	4	*
	Learning outcome achieved	3	*

Again under this heading, the majority of the elements listed relate to the individual perspective. In terms of the title of this skill, this would be expected. Interestingly these elements incorporate individual improvement, learning, leadership, team working positive motivation and successful outcomes.

Q9   My ability to manage my time is effective enough to meet all my deadlines early?

G. **Effective performance**

+ / -	Coded Evaluation / QAA Skills Matrix	No.	G
P	Real world business skills development	9	*
P	Positive team working result	9	*
P	Positive leadership experience	9	*
	Learning outcome achieved	3	*

These elements relate very closely to the heading of effective performance in this skill category. It would appear students related to the 'real business data' scenarios positively with successful learning outcomes being achieved for some.

Q10   I am able to determine when my performance within the group has been effective for the tasks in hand?

H. **interpersonal skills**

+ / -	Coded Evaluation / QAA Skills Matrix	No.	H
P	Positive skills improvement	33	*
P	Positive learning experience	18	*
P	Positive exploration about self	18	*
P	Positive group experience	16	*
P	Positive team working result	9	*
P	Good team working skills	5	*
P	Effective use of feedback - group	4	*
	Learning outcome achieved	3	*
	Learned not to go on first impressions alone,	1	*

The elements included here are an interesting balance between the individual and group perspectives. This indicates a positive linkage between individual skills and the group or the team working experience. Interestingly they effective use of feedback comments were for the group elements, which possibly leads to a conclusion of the successful application of interpersonal skills as part of the process of improvement.

Q11   I feel I am better able to positively influence others within group work?

I. **Ability to conduct research into business and management issues**,

+ / -	Coded Evaluation / QAA Skills Matrix	No.	I
P	Positive skills improvement	33	*
P	Positive learning experience	18	*
P	Positive exploration about self	18	*
P	Positive group experience	16	*
P	Real world business skills development	9	*
P	Positive leadership experience	9	*
P	Effective use of feedback - individual	6	*
P	Good team working skills	5	*
P	Effective use of feedback - group	4	*
	Learning outcome achieved	3	*

The content of the elements of the coded responses and the balance of their nature would indicate a confidence in the students reporting the ability to deal with real world

business and management issues. A range of perspectives arise of positive indications of good team working, individual improvement, and the effective use of feedback for both group and individuals. This represents perhaps a holistic view the students have of this particular skills aspect.

Q12   I feel confident that I would be able to research effectively real business problems?

J.   **Self reflection and criticality**

+ / -	Coded Evaluation / QAA Skills Matrix	No.	J
P	Positive hindsight reflection	36	*
P	Positive skills improvement	33	*
P	Positive learning experience	18	*
P	Positive exploration about self	18	*
P	Individual knowledge improvement	14	*
P	Positive leadership experience	9	*
N	Compensation by self for others on work	6	*
P	Effective use of feedback - group	4	*
N	Negative effect on motivation	4	*
	Reflection of group leadership need	4	*
N	Individual work in question in group	3	*
P	Positive result after admin error	1	*
	Personal learning motivation drive	1	*
	Learned not to go on first impressions alone,	1	*

A usefully long list of coded response elements under this heading, and the first time some negative aspects are appearing. Whilst positive individual improvements are being reported, negative aspects appear for those elements where individuals are being reported for not contributing their fair share to the workload, or compensation is being undertaken.

Q13   My reflections enable me to change my mind when presented with different information?

Overall, students reported more positive than negative experiences, although many of the responses appeared under both headings e.g. group experience. The highest numbers of responses recorded (17) were positive personal elements including reflection, skills improvement, exploration about the self and learning experience. Of the positive responses, 14 of 17 of these were based upon individual perspectives. Although this positive shift may have been encouraged due to the nature of the relationship between tutor and student, and the latter was aware the reflective essays were being read by those who would be marking their work, none the less the detail against the positive list of skills being addressed (see Appendix 2) was substantial and likely to be more than could be attributed to the "positive shift" effect. The highest recorded number of positive coded responses provided good reflections across 6 of the

9 elements. At almost the same level of positive response, students reported improved skills improvement against all of the elements of the skills framework.

Reviewing the proportion of positive to negative elements, the following results emerge:

	A Elements	B Weighted responses	%
Number of positive elements	17	196	80
Number of negative elements	13	49	20
Total		245	100

Table 1: Proportion of Positive and Negative, 1st Dimensional coded results.

Column A represents the number of coded elements, and column B the weighted value of A when multiplied by the number of responses to each of the elements. The overall balance in favour of the positive elements can in part be attributed to the positive shift effect that students may perhaps be concerned that the tutor is reading the personal blogs may be marking their assignments. As a consequence students may be reticent to provide negative comments as this may affect how tutors may perceive their work. On the other hand, it is clear to tutors that students 'let off steam' in the Pllogs about all sorts of stresses, including groups, either not minding that the tutors read it or wanting the tutors to know about it or provide a response. It is felt that this is unlikely to change significantly when the students are producing assessed work. In addition the overall level would appear to far exceed any tendency to avoid negatives. This aspect centred mostly around group experience, poor team working sills, compensation by individuals, and motivational effects. On balance, the number of positive v negative statements was greater by approximately 4:1 respectively. Neutral perceptions included three elements of group and team skills working issues, and one of a challenging learning experience.

The consequence of this result has been to add to each of the questions in the Indicator Instrument to ask if that element was a positive or negative experience.

Use of the Indicator Questionnaire

The questionnaire is expected to be completed in two modes.

a)   Each individual member completes an Indicator Questionnaire.

b)   Each group then completes one questionnaire, the group determining an agreed response for each of the question elements.

c) Evaluations of the individual, public comments made on the questionnaire for each group.

The individual and group responses are then compared, also against the totals for the full class. Each group then evaluates the results of:

a) The summated total of the individual responses for each group

b) The results of the agreed group responses

c) The results of the full class of the individual responses

d) The qualitative results of the public comments made in the questionnaire.

Limitations and further research

This study is based upon one group of students, and at the point of completing their reflective essays had not finished their academic study for the first year. The questionnaire which has evolved from this (see Appendix 3) has also yet to be tested and calibrated to determine its applicability as an indicative health check instrument with regard to individual skills and group process development.

Conclusions

It would appear that students have a positive experience as reported in the reflections. This covers a number of individual perspectives including their learning, exploration about themselves, their knowledge development and its application on real data examples. These link very closely to the cognitive skills framework which will appear in turn also to link positively with group processes and successful learning outcomes within a collaborative learning approach. Negative elements were almost all compensated by similar positive issues. It remains to be seen whether the questionnaire which has been developed will be a useful health check instrument for the individual and/or group within a class.

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Appendix 1

QAA Skills Framework

K. **cognitive skills of critical thinking, analysis and synthesis.** This includes the capability to identify assumptions, evaluate statements in terms of evidence, to detect false logic or reasoning, to identify implicit values, to define terms adequately and to generalise appropriately

L. **effective problem solving and decision making** using appropriate quantitative and qualitative skills including identifying, formulating and solving business problems. The ability to create, evaluate and assess a range of options together with the capacity to apply ideas and knowledge to a range of situations

M. **effective communication,** oral and in writing, using a range of media which are widely used in business such as the preparation and presentation of business reports

N. **numeracy and quantitative skills** including data analysis, interpretation and extrapolation. The use of models of business problems and phenomena

O. **effective use of communication and information technology** for business applications

P. **effective self-management** in terms of time, planning and behaviour, motivation, self-starting, individual initiative and enterprise

Q. **effective performance,** within a team environment, including leadership, team building, influencing and project management skills

R. **interpersonal skills** of effective listening, negotiating, persuasion and presentation

S. **ability to conduct research into business and management issues**, either individually or as part of a team for projects/dissertations/presentations. This requires familiarity with and an evaluative approach to a range of business data, sources of information and appropriate methodologies, and for such to inform the overall learning process

T. **self reflection and criticality** including self awareness, openness and sensitivity to diversity in terms of people, cultures, business and management issues. Also, the skills of learning to learn and developing a continuing appetite for learning; reflective, adaptive and collaborative learning.

Appendix 2

+ / -	Coded Evaluation / QAA Skills Matrix	No.	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
P	Positive hindsight reflection	36		*	*	*	*	*				*
P	Positive skills improvement	33	*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*	*
P	Positive exploration about self	18	*	*						*	*	*
P	Positive learning experience	18		*		*		*		*	*	*
	Group dynamics phase development recognition	17	*		*							
P	Positive group experience	16		*	*					*	*	
P	Individual knowledge improvement	14		*								*
P	Positive leadership experience	9	*		*			*	*		*	*
P	Positive team working result	9						*	*	*		
P	Real world business skills development	9		*	*	*		*		*		
N	Poor group experience	8										
N	Negative effect team working result	7										
N	Poor team working skills	7										
N	Compensation by self for others on work	6										*
P	Effective use of feedback - individual	6									*	
	Knowledge of team working skills need	6										
P	Good team working skills	5		*	*		*			*	*	
P	Positive effect on motivation	5										
P	Positive tutor interaction	5										
P	Effective use of feedback - group	4	*							*	*	*
N	Group participant critical assignment failure	4										
P	Knowledge need identification	4										
N	Negative effect on motivation	4										*
P	Positively motivate others	4						*				
	Reflection of group leadership need	4										*
	Challenging learning experience	3										
N	Individual work in question in group	3										*
	Learning outcome achieved	3		*	*		*	*	*	*		
	Knowledge link by observation	2										
N	Left alone to do group assignment	2										
N	Non academic negative incident to learning	2										
N	Poor attendance due to non academic reasons	2										
	Learned not to go on first impressions alone,	1								*		*
N	Monitor role in group frustrating	1										
	Personal learning motivation drive	1										*
N	Poor motivation due to low marks	2										
N	Poor use of feedback - individual	1										
P	Positive result after admin error	1		*								*
	Total number of elements above		5	10	8	4	3	7	4	9	10	14

Appendix 3: The Questionnaire

(please note that the layout of the actual questionnaire differs to as it is laid out here for space reasons. Please contact John Beamont-Kerridge for the PDF version)

This questionnaire will help to find out your views about skills progress and group work. Please hand this questionnaire back to your tutor once it is completed.

Q1 Through thinking about information I have learnt more about myself?

strongly agree   agree   neither   disagree   strongly disagree
(this Likert scale is repeated on all the questions below in the actual questionnaire)
Q2 For you this has been a positive or negative experience?
very positive   positive   neither   negative   very negative
(this Likert scale is repeated on all the questions below in the actual questionnaire)

Q3 Through working with others on assignments I have learnt more about group dynamics?

Q4 For you this has been a positive or negative experience?

Q5 I have learnt to be a better leader through developing group assignments?

Q6 For you this has been a positive or negative experience?

Q7 My knowledge base has been enhanced by working on group assignments?

Q8 For you this has been a positive or negative experience?

Q9 The group assignments have made me a better decision maker?

Q10 For you this has been a positive or negative experience?

Q11 By working with others on the group assignments my communication skills are better?

Q12 For you this has been a positive or negative experience?

Q13 My numeracy skills have been improved because they have been needed for the group assignments?

Q14 For you this has been a positive or negative experience?

Q15 My ability with information technology has being appropriate for the assignments we have been given?

Q16 For you this has been a positive or negative experience?

Q17 My ability to manage my time is effective enough to meet all my deadlines early?

Q18 For you this has been a positive or negative experience?

Q19 I am able to determine when my performance within the group has been effective for the tasks in hand?
Q20 For you this has been a positive or negative experience?

Q21 I feel I am better able to positively influence others within group work?
Q22 For you this has been a positive or negative experience?

Q23 I feel confident that I would be able to effectively research real business problems?
Q24 For you this has been a positive or negative experience?

Q25 My reflections enable me to change my mind when presented with different information?
Q26 For you this has been a positive or negative experience?

Q27 ClassID (please ask your tutor for this)

Q28 GroupID (please ask your tutor for this)

Q29 StudentID (so we can return your results to you)

Q30 Your Gender (we want to analyse across a range of responses) Female, Male

Q31 Your age (again, analysis of comparisons will be really interesting)

Q32 Your home country UK, Europe, International other than Europe

Q33 THIS WILL BE CONFIDENTIAL and only shared with your tutors. Please add some comments about significant thoughts that may not have been covered by the questions above. This can be from any perspective about yourself, you group members, or your group itself.

Chapter 3

Defining reflection to enhance student attainment

Andrea Raiker

Abstract

The University of Bedfordshire's Education Strategy 2008-13 incorporates three key components; CRe8, personal development planning and blended learning. All recognise the importance of reflection in learning. Yet nowhere is 'reflection' clearly defined. The assumption appears to be that there is an agreed and shared understanding throughout the institution of what the term means and that this is implicitly assimilated and understood by all tutors and students. Analysis of the data collected for recent research into achievement on an undergraduate dissertation unit suggests that this is not the case. Various authors have suggested taxonomies of reflection involving definitions. All state that the taxonomies they have identified are not hierarchical, suggesting that a learner can be reflecting at different levels whilst engaged on one piece of work. However, although the various taxonomies are regarded as not being hierarchical, they are presented as descriptions in a linear, two-dimensional manner that suggests hierarchy. To surmount this difficulty, a three-dimensional model is proposed whereby reflection is considered as the bridge between the skills of critical analysis, critical evaluation and synthesis, and subject knowledge and understanding. A grid of descriptors, combining elements from the South East England Consortium for Credit Accumulation & Transfer descriptors and concepts identified in the model, enables a process that resonates with a perception of reflection taking place at different times and at levels within a single undergraduate assignment.

Keywords

Reflection; reflective skills; subject knowledge; insights

Introduction

The University of Bedfordshire's (UoB) Education Strategy 2008-13 (Atlay, 2008) incorporates three key components, CRe8 (UoB, 2009), personal development planning (HEA, 2009) and the Technology-Enhanced Learning Strategy (Gamble, 2008). All see reflection as being key to the learning process. For example, CRe8 proposes that being reflective is one of the five dimensions of realistic learning, determining that 'students have structured opportunities for reflection within a process of development that allows students to internalise their experiences and make connections across boundaries'. As reflection is clearly important to the Education Strategy, it is reasonable to assume that the term should appear in course and unit learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Some course and unit documentation does indeed contain the words 'reflection' and/or 'reflective'. For example, a Year 1 Education unit gives the assessment criteria 'Identify, record and reflect on issues and concerns connected with the four components in your e-portfolio' to meet the learning outcome 'analyse and evaluate the personal, social, academic and work-based components of an holistic approach to learning'. However if the term 'reflection' has not been defined, the student may be 'reflective' but in an unspecified and unfocused way. Resultant assignments may or may not fit the learning outcomes and related assessment criteria. Also, it is reasonable to expect a Year 3 assignment to demonstrate deeper and broader levels of reflection than that of a Year 1 student, and that of a doctoral student to that of a learner following a Master's course. In other words, 'reflection' should be defined at varying levels so that students can demonstrate progress and development. Yet nowhere is 'reflection' clearly defined. Neither does it appear that reflection is explicitly taught. The assumption appears to have been made that there is an agreed and shared understanding throughout the institution of what the term means and that this is implicitly assimilated and understood by all tutors and students.

Analysis of the data collected for recent research into achievement on an undergraduate dissertation unit suggests this is not the case. This research was stimulated by a perception of an increasing trend of poor performance in dissertations undertaken by Education undergraduates on a particular course. Included was a focus on reflection. The dissertation is undertaken in the final year of a four year course. It entails reflection upon, and critical analysis and evaluation of, both literature and empirical data collected from classrooms. The synthesis of the findings from the literature and classroom data results in conclusions and recommendations for future practice. It is expected that conclusions attracting high grades will demonstrate insights, that is, the construction of knowledge and understanding new to the students. A significant number of dissertations did not demonstrate insights suggesting a lack of reflection. Interviews with supervisors and students on aspects of reflection suggested that they related it in varying degrees to the three concepts of critical analysis, critical evaluation and synthesis. This prompted a consideration of whether reflection was a constituent of these three concepts, to be referred to henceforth as the reflective skills, and should be explicitly taught.

The establishment of theory-practice relationships is fundamental to academic writing in Education. My own particular interest is the development of theoretical models that aid understanding of theory-practice relationships. Therefore this chapter will begin with consideration of Mezirow's (1991) work that provides the initial theoretical framework linking the academic skills with reflection. This is followed by a brief discussion of my research as context, including a presentation of the principal findings. The theoretical framework is then developed in two ways. Firstly, Meyer and Land's threshold concept theory (TCT: 2006) is applied to a key finding of my research to investigate how the academic skills can be constrained by lack of understanding of reflection. Secondly, a model is presented to illustrate the relationship between knowledge and understanding, reflection and the reflective skills. Various authors (for example, Dewey, 1933; Smith, 1999; Wang and King, 2006; Dunne, 2008) have suggested taxonomies of reflection involving definitions. All authors state that the taxonomies they have identified are not hierarchical, suggesting that a learner can be reflecting at different levels whilst engaged on one piece of work. However, although the various taxonomies are regarded as not being hierarchical, they are presented as descriptions in a linear, two-dimensional manner that suggests hierarchy.

To surmount this difficulty, a three-dimensional model is proposed whereby reflection is considered as the bridge between the reflective skills of critical analysis, critical evaluation and synthesis, and subject knowledge and understanding. A grid of descriptors, combining elements from the South East England Consortium for Credit Accumulation & Transfer (SEEC, 2010) descriptors and concepts identified in the model proposes a process that resonates with a perception of reflection taking place at different times and at different levels within a single undergraduate assignment.

Theoretical framework

Moon (2004:82) defines reflection as '…a form of mental processing - like thinking - that we may use to fulfil a purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome or we may simply 'be reflective' and then an outcome can be unexpected .…'. I found this definition a useful starting point for considering purposeful and non-purposeful reflection in my research. Participating students considered all reflection to be purposeful; however they thought that the status of 'purposeful' could vary. Though they recognised that they were engaged in reflection whenever they thought, 'reflection' was a term that they related to their academic work, particularly when required to complete reflective journals for assignments. Their perceptions of reflection demonstrated development from Moon's definition towards that of Jackson (2006:2), who proposed that reflective methods in higher education were the: '…analytical and critical ways of thinking that dominate the academic intellectual territory.'

It is useful to consider at this juncture Mezirow's (1991) perceptions on reflection. He argues that reflection is prompted by the perplexities and ambiguities resulting from challenges to beliefs, perceptions and assumptions. Such challenges are at the heart of the undergraduate dissertation in education where each student is required to design a

research project to address a personally identified perplexity and/or ambiguity in an area of teaching and learning. According to Mezirow, a learner's first response to a problem arising from such a challenge will be to examine its content. This suggests that the learner considers his/her knowledge base in which the problem sits. Mezirow terms this 'content reflection'. This will be followed by 'process reflection' where the learner will critically consider the problem-solving strategies available and choose the most appropriate. Successful choice and application of suitable strategies will lead to the final stage of 'premise reflection' where an intended outcome is achieved. Furthermore the learner's perspective will change as a result of engaging with the reflective process. This is indicative of perception of insights new to the learner on which attainment of higher grades in the dissertation depend, and suggests insights are predicated upon reflection.

I found Mezirow's categorisation persuasive but in need of development for use in a consideration of the role of reflection in developing insights in undergraduate dissertations. Critical analysis resonates with 'process reflection', as does 'premise reflection' with synthesis. However, critical evaluation is not explicitly addressed. More importantly, reflection is not defined in its own right, only as a constituent as something else. Consideration of a finding from my research suggests that it is necessary to consider reflection independently to understand 'content reflection' fully. The dissertations attracting lower grades analysed for my research, demonstrated higher proportions of description than those awarded higher grades. Description was of content, but colleagues interviewed as part of the research believed that description did not indicate reflection. However, it can be argued that description does involve reflection, as Moon's (2004:82) '…form of mental processing-like thinking…' is applied to '…fulfil a purpose…' of selecting content to form the description. It is apparent that definition is important when discussing reflection. Therefore some definitions are presented for use in this chapter. .

It is suggested that content reflection is reflection on knowledge and that these two components should be defined separately:

- Knowledge- cognitive structures of fact and belief leading to understanding;
- Reflection- to think about knowledge with or without purpose.

Description can then be defined as purposeful reflection resulting in an uncritical account or explanation of knowledge. It is proposed that some description is necessary in any undergraduate assignment to give valuable context but is unlikely to result in the unique restructuring of an individual's mental connections resulting in new insights. Neither will description indicate that students are engaging in problem-solving to meet learning outcomes. Problem-solving and the gaining of insights involve critical analysis, critical evaluation and synthesis, and are defined as follows:

- Critical analysis- the application of rational, logical and purposeful reflection to deconstructed knowledge
- Critical evaluation- the making of judgments on the outcomes of rational, logical and purposeful reflection on deconstructed knowledge
- Synthesis- the fusion of outcomes of critical evaluation into new knowledge, broadening and/or deepening the knowledge base.

My research suggests that insights can occur in any or all of these three manifestations of reflection. The result is broadened and/or deepened knowledge, that is, extended cognitive structures of fact and belief. Although this extended knowledge can be presented as an assignment it is in fact merely a point in a reflective process, though for the undergraduate dissertation an important one as a major contribution to graduation classification. Arguably, the importance of process increases if breakdowns occur, resulting in insights and achievement being constrained.

It is important that the theoretical framework should be developed to consider points or processes of breakdowns. However, I established in my introduction that theory-practice relationships were fundamental to academic writing in my discipline of Education. Before developing the theoretical framework, to maintain balance I will discuss the practice to which it is related, the undergraduate dissertation in Education and the development of reflection. This will involve a discussion of the principal findings from my research on this practice in relation to reflection.

The practice

The dissertation is a 'capstone' assignment, the last of a four year course in Education. It is introduced by the unit leader to the students at Easter in Year 3 to submit in the May of Year 4. The nature of the dissertation has changed over recent years. The consensus from supervisors' interviews is that the change has been for the better as this extract from one supervisor (Supervisor 5 Interview: S5I) indicates:

> "It's now a much greater emphasis on the research and the analysis of the research rather than, not copying things out of books, but reviewing the literature. There is much greater emphasis on engagement with the theory and the practice and synthesis. The analysis section has become much more of a focal point to the thesis…to the dissertation rather than the analysis, rather the reporting of the literature as it was in the past."

The students are introduced to the overall structure of the dissertation, what the expectations are, and where to find examples of previous year's dissertations to inform their understanding of what is required. They are asked to choose a focus that interests them and that can be researched in whatever school they find themselves for their final

practical experience. It is emphasised that they are expected to read around their particular area of interest in the six months leading to the beginning of Year 4. Before the students return to university in the October of this final year, they will be expected to have identified the general field in which they want to carry out their research, and also a very broad title. This is used by the unit leader to identify tutors with the appropriate specialist knowledge so that tutor and student can be matched.

The primary means of student support throughout the course of the dissertation is the tutorial. The tutorial is a time and place that enables personal development planning, this being: '…a structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning, performance and or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and career development' (HEA, 2009:1). Students are asked to contact their supervisors as soon as possible on their return in October to arrange first tutorials. The unit handbook stipulates that the supervisor writes a record of this meeting, using a prescribed format. The format records work done for the tutorial, supervisor's comments, and a brief plan of work to be done for the next tutorial. The supervisor and student both sign and retain copies of the completed and dated document. The document includes spaces for date and time of the next meeting. All subsequent meetings are recorded in a similar manner. The focus of the first tutorial is the ethics proposal form. This is a summary of the student's research context and design, giving triangulated methods and including draft schedules (of observation and/or interview and/or questionnaire). References to key literature are provided, specifying how any ethical issue arising from that research will be addressed.

My research took the approach of a case study involving mixed methods. Collected by proportional sampling were records of 56 students submitted with their dissertations during 2009. These 174 documents, providing data on the number of tutorials per student, when they occurred and what was discussed, were submitted to content analysis (Brenner et al., 1985). Further rich data was collected through structured interviews of six dissertation students in a focus group and six supervisors during the summer term 2009 and subjected to discourse analysis according to Parker (1992) and Sfard (2001). This method uses no particular procedure of detailed analysis, but look for patterns of language use that can be related to broader themes of social structure and ideological critical evaluation. The findings from content and discourse analysis were triangulated with quantitative data gathered from student grades, tutorial attendance and tutorial records.

Principal findings on reflection

Both supervisors and students showed confidence and understanding of 'reflection'. Supervisors but not students indicated that they understood that there were different levels of reflection and associated them with ability. The terms 'synthesis', 'critical analysis', critical thinking' and 'reflection' appeared in supervisors' transcripts but the depth of understanding of these terms was unclear. For example S3I said: "So they can synthesise these things through the dissertation but whether it's meaningful really does

depend on their ability to reflect on that. Does that make sense?" S4I understood that critical analysis and insights were connected, but her understanding did not appear to be systematic: "…they can review things and tie things up in their concluding chapter or their critical analysis, it can give them new insights." None of the supervisors' interviews contained explicit links between insights and reflection and the reflective skills.

There were indications that supervisors believed that an invitation to students to reflect would result in reflection. However there was no suggestion from the data that supervisors believed that reflection, or critical analysis or critical evaluation or synthesis, should be taught. Reflection would result inevitably from adequate reading. Reflection on extensive reading would provide the necessary subject knowledge for critical analysis and evaluation and the emergence of synthesis and insights. Conversely, if sufficient reading was not undertaken the result would be an unsatisfactory knowledge base for the critical analysis phase making it unlikely that insights or 'premises' would emerge from reflection.

The incidence of lack of reading in the records of the first tutorial was high. This related to students attending their first tutorials with little idea of focus. "X has very broad ideas about what she wants to do" (Tutorial Record 5: TR 5) and "Brainstormed ideas" (TR 15) are representative of this. Data from the supervisor interviews confirmed issues with students' knowledge base, the essential pre-requisite for reflection and creativity: "… they don't appreciate how much reading they have to do, particularly through the background." (TR1) is representative of all supervisors' perceptions on an overall lack of preparatory reading. Interestingly, there is little difference in the incidence of students not reading, or not reading sufficiently at the time of the first tutorial, across all grade bands. All supervisors stated the view that the higher achieving students were able to catch up with the necessary reading during the course of their research but not the under performing group. A finding of this research, reflecting and extending Harrison and Whalley's (2006) identification of time management as an issue affecting the quality of students' dissertations, is that some form of focused teaching on *project* management could have been beneficial to support students in planning their reading during the Easter Year 3/October Year 4 period. It is also evident that engagement with the differences between the various forms of reflection and their relationship with the production of insights would be beneficial for both students and supervisors. As Jackson writes (2006:2): 'We need to raise awareness of what creativity means…and encourage educators to support forms of learning that will enable students to develop the forms of creativity that are most appropriate for their field(s) of study and future careers'. To achieve this, Jackson proposes that reflection should be developed alongside creativity in tertiary education (*ibid.*).

Amongst my findings, a number of constraints on reflection in the dissertation process had been identified. Constraints on the acquisition of appropriate and sufficient subject knowledge was clearly important. Ineffective project management, an aspect that would not seem at first glance to constrain reflection, had been identified as doing just that. Lack of understanding by both supervisors and students of reflection and the reflective

skills were also constraints. The discussion will now consider how these constraints can be understood theoretically with the aim of identifying ways of addressing them. It will focus on a constraint of crucial importance to the dissertation but not yet discussed, the transfer of research methods to the dissertation.

Understanding processes constraining reflection

In the dissertation, critical analysis, critical evaluation and synthesis are expected in two areas. These are the literature review of texts and the analysis of empirical data from the classroom. Students approaching their dissertations are comfortable with literature reviews. The traditional essay is a literature review and students have written many essays over the first three years of their course. However my research revealed that students were anxious about the research methods needed to conduct their empirical research. Research methods are defined in terms of ability to identify valid research techniques (usually triangulation between interview, observation, questionnaire and school documentation), carry out reliable data collection and apply appropriate methods of analysis. Despite all students successfully convincing their supervisors through their ethics proposal forms that they were confident with the research techniques, data collection arrangements and methods of analysis presented, tutorial record and focus group content analysis revealed that most students felt that they *had not* been taught appropriate research methods earlier in the course. Conversely, supervisors maintained that methods *had* been taught. The issue appeared to be that students were not able to transfer their learning of research methods into the dissertation, reflecting a finding of Stephani *et al.'s* (2007:271) work. S1I provides insights into the reasons why:

> "…getting them to focus on an appropriate methodology. Because I think that is the weakest area. They have no idea. Probably not enough experience over the four years that they are here with the research methodology because we give them the research methodology in observation tasks, this, that and the other, we tell them what it is, that they have been given to do. So they can't draw on that experience when it comes to picking up their own. Not because they're not capable of transferable, transferring knowledge. They just don't know what they did whenever it was that they did it, of actually applying the research methodology".

So a contributing issue, confirmed in other supervisor and focus group transcripts, appear to be lack of autonomy of choice earlier in the course. Autonomy of choice requires a high order of reflection and application of reflective skills.

The fundamental aspect of insights in attaining high grades has been discussed above. It is therefore proposed that transfer and integration of one area of knowledge into a new area is necessary for insights to occur. Furthermore, the inference from the findings is that students are unable to develop from *being given* research methods appropriate for earlier tasks by their tutors by reflecting on past experiences in order to identify for

themselves which methods were suitable for their dissertation research. As Robertson points out when discussing positive and negative transfer:

> …if you have a rule (or closely related rules) that worked on similar problems before, then use it…On the other hand, if you don't see any similarity between the problem you are working on and one you did in the past, then you are hardly likely to use the earlier one as the basis for solving the current one for the simple reason that it does not occur to you to do so (Roberson, 2001:68).

Robertson goes on to argue that skills, in this case research skills, should be decontextualised so that they can be used where appropriate. With these dissertation students, it appears that they relate skills to specific tasks and therefore transfer is not an option, resulting in failure or partial failure in positive transfer . This clearly affects some students' ability to critically analyse primary data, synthesise within this area and with the outcomes of their literature reviews and thus maximize the potential of identifying insights. To develop understanding of this relationship, it is useful to consider Meyer and Land's (2006) threshold concept theory.

Meyer and Land see a distinction between 'core concepts' and threshold concepts. A core concept is '…a conceptual 'building block' that progresses understanding of a subject; it has to be understood but it does not necessarily lead to a qualitatively different view of the subject' (2006:6). The '*qualitatively different view of the subject*' is indicative of a threshold concept and resonates with Mezirow's changing perspective discussed above and therefore with identifying insights. However threshold concepts provide more than changing perspectives. Meyer and Land argue that there are some aspects of learning that form portals, the passage through which provides access to landscapes of understanding critical for students' progress. The effect of these aspects is so profound that they can transform students' perceptions of their courses, their disciplines or even their world views. Threshold concepts clearly indicate a greater degree of reflection on existing knowledge and understanding than that indicated by Mezirow's premise reflection.

However, my reflections on the language used by supervisors and students indicated that concepts were more complex than suggested by Meyer and Land. I found it difficult to discern separate 'building blocks' when analysing my data. What I perceived were cognitive structures of culturally accepted knowledge, incorporating understanding and meaning commonly communicated through language though not exclusively so. This knowledge consisted of understanding in various stages of assimilation and accommodation (Piaget, 1956), that is, being learnt and learnt. The 'dissertation' was such a structure. So was 'research methods'. These were terms used frequently by supervisors and students. Component terms, like 'introduction' for the dissertation and 'questionnaire' for research methods were rarely used. For illustrative purposes I have simplified these two conceptual structures used by supervisor and students to circles in Figure 1.
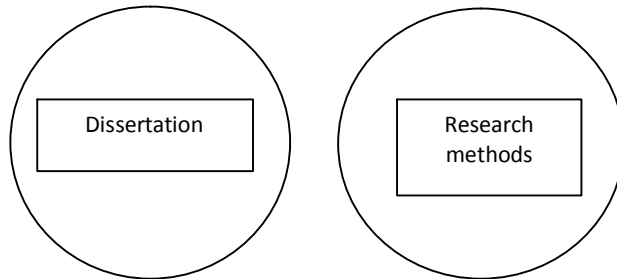
Figure 1: Two cognitive structures

The problem experienced by many students lay in their inability to transfer and integrate their knowledge and understanding of research methods, gained during the former three years of their course, to their dissertations. In other words synthesis between what they understood by dissertation and research methods had not taken place and their ability to perceive insight was impaired. Applying Meyer and Land's terminology, some students would pass through the threshold separating the two conceptual areas of dissertation and research methods to access a new vista of learning. Others would find the new vista 'troublesome' and counter-intuitive and could not apply the knowledge of one area to another because the relationship was meaningless to them (Lather, 1998; Perkins, 1999). Students finding knowledge troublesome would be 'stuck' in liminal space, their ability to identify insights impaired or even prevented. In liminal space learners' reflections oscillate between the tacit knowledge they have of the new conceptual space and attempted understandings and even misunderstandings of the subject specific language, the subject matter, subject landscape and even world view afforded by the new perspective. They can never go back to the old understanding; they cannot progress to the new. In interview their supervisors used the term 'mental blocks' to describe why not (Figure 2).
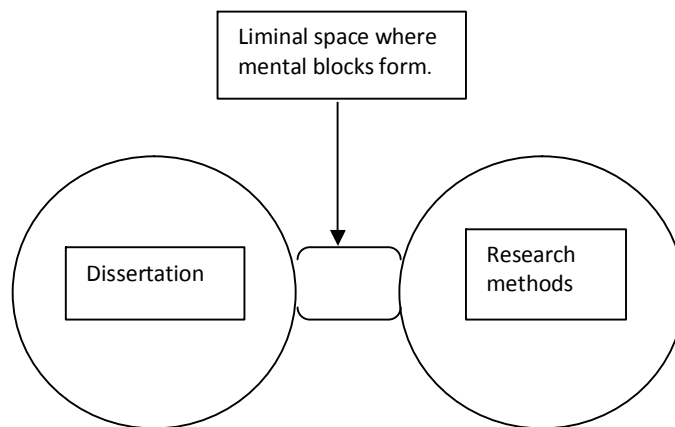

Figure 2: Liminal space

It would appear that the dissertation students who could not transfer their knowledge and understanding of research methods to be assimilated within their knowledge and understanding of the dissertation. They were stuck in liminal space.

It was evident that they had reflected on their mental blocks but critical analysis and evaluation of their knowledge on both 'dissertation' and 'research methods' had been unsuccessful. However, through the use of a simple audit to a Year 4 dissertation unit that remained unchanged, the current cohort of students demonstrated they were capable of synthesising new understandings of 'dissertation' and 'research methods', in other words, of gaining new insights. In the second of a four seminar introduction to the dissertation, students were each given a paper copy of Table 1.

Where did you gain and use research methods?				
Note down your experiences under the headings				
Interview	Observation	Questionnaire	Documentation	Reading on research methods

Table 1: scaffold to identify experiences and knowledge of research methods

Students were also introduced to the definitions of reflection and the reflective skills given above. In groups they were asked to reflect upon assignments in previous years, identify which research methods they had used to collect data, analyse and evaluate their effectiveness as valid data collection tools and complete the audit accordingly. The groups were encouraged to talk about the task and share their reflections and judgments. An evaluation of the introductory seminars revealed that students felt that, unlike the previous year's cohort that was the sample researched, they had been given sufficient tutor input in research methods, though some felt they needed supervisor support to choose methods relevant to their focus of research. In other words, students had synthesized their understandings of 'research methods' and 'dissertation'. They had accessed new vistas of learning in the process and had gained insights to varying degrees. This finding is encouraging and is leading to a larger investigation into aspects of the dissertation that students find troublesome.

It can be seen that this group activity for reflection enabled students to cross their Zones of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD is defined by Vygotsky as being '…the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers' (1986:78). The audit was not a scaffold as defined by Vygotsky but it was produced by a

supervisor. Supervisor intervention was the trigger to reflection and therefore to synthesis and insight. Recent interviews with supervisors revealed other strategies to stimulate and guide reflection. As one supervisor commented: "I find that, overall, we chat about it on the phone, sometimes even an e-mail, and I give a suggestion, 'Have you thought about…'. It's usually something quite straightforward, it's not complicated, it helps them get over them, over the mental blocks". It appears that triggers to effective reflection are specific to individuals. I would also suggest that as the audit supported the removal of individual mental blocks, theoretically the audit was positioned in liminal space. Therefore there is some congruency of liminal space with the ZPD.

A model of knowledge and understanding and reflection

Another aspect revealed by this discussion is the complexity of the process of integrating knowledge and understanding of 'research methods' into knowledge and understanding of the 'dissertation'. Supervisors and students used the terms frequently in interviews and tutorial records as entities. However, each consists of inter-related component concepts. For example, 'research methods' has been defined in terms of ability to identify valid research methods (usually triangulation between interview, observation, questionnaire and school documentation), carry out reliable data collection and apply appropriate methods of analysis. A student's knowledge and understanding of all these aspects of research methods will be in various stages of assimilation and accommodation (Piaget, 1956), that is, *being learnt* and *learnt*.

Students and supervisors also used the terms 'critical analysis', 'synthesis' and 'insight' as entities. They exhibited neither explicit understanding of the relation of reflection to these concepts nor of these concepts to each other. Supervisors' and students' knowledge and understanding of all or any of these can be at various stages of assimilation and accommodation also.

All or any of these concepts and reflection can be present in the assignments of a Year 1 student. For example in the discipline of Education at my institution, the 'reflective diary' commonly appears in Year 1 assignments. In succeeding years, an Education student will have modified, extended cognitive structures of fact and belief on and with which to reflect, critically analyse, evaluate and synthesise, providing insights. So reflection, critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis in succeeding years can demonstrate greater substance with more profound insight to the point where successful PhD students extend the universal cognitive structures of knowledge in their theses.

This discussion began with a critical evaluation of Mezirow's perceptions on reflection. Its three-fold categorization suggests hierarchy. Mezirow's content, process and premise reflection has been expanded and redefined to demonstrate how reflection is a fundamental aspect of critical processes acting on a bank of knowledge and understanding that broadens and deepens over time. The definitions of critical analysis,

critical evaluation and synthesis all contain reflection. Reflection is the bridge that links critical processes with knowledge and understanding. This suggests that a linear categorization of creativity and reflection suggesting hierarchy would be too simplistic.

To surmount this difficulty, it is suggested that a three-dimensional model that moves away from hierarchy could be achieved through the application of Bruner's theory of the spiral curriculum (Bruner, 1960) to Mezirow's expanded taxonomy of development of reflection. According to Bruner, ideas should be visited repeatedly, '…building upon them until the student has grasped the formal apparatus that goes with them…' (1960:13). This forcefully conveys a sense of growth over time.

However, a spiral is a two-dimensional shape. It does not take account of the fact that the learner is assimilating and accommodating a number of concepts at various stages of development concurrently, enabling creative processes of increasing complexity. In order to suggest this complexity, it is proposed that the concept of a spiral curriculum be transformed to a helix. In the resulting model, reflection is the bridge between an individual's developing methods of critical analysis, critical evaluation and synthesis, and the growing bank of knowledge, understanding (Figure 3).
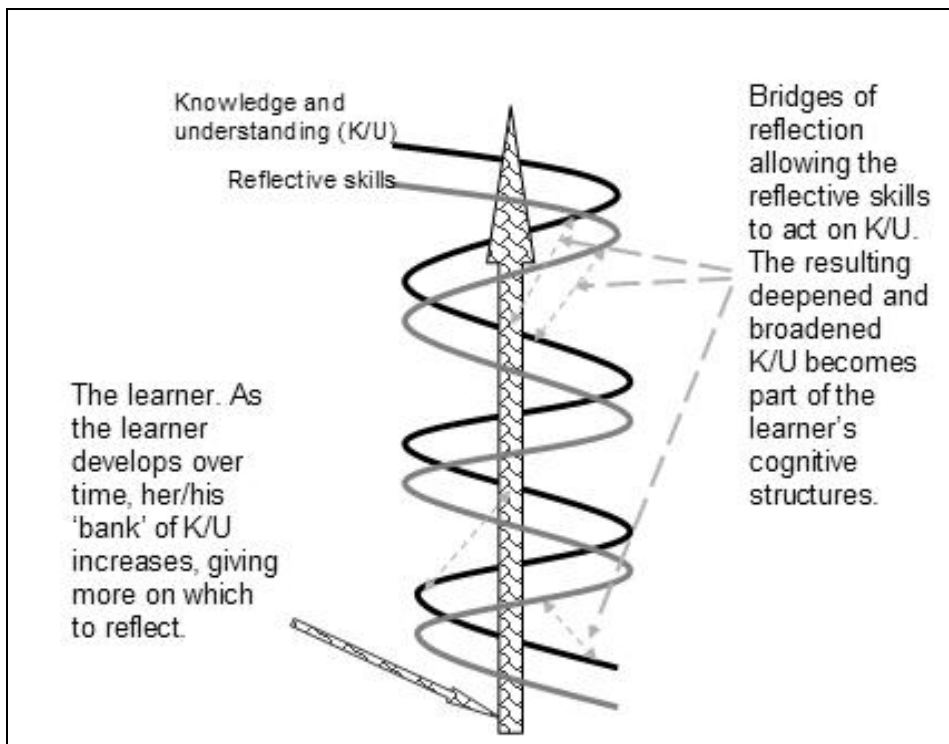

Figure 3: a model illustrating the relationship between the learner, knowledge and understanding, the reflective skills and reflection

Using the model with existing descriptors

Figure 3 can be regarded as modelling the individual's lifelong learning journey. Undergraduate life is represented by a small segment. To demonstrate development during the three years of an undergraduate course, descriptions of reflection, analysis, evaluation and synthesis at three levels would be useful.

In Table 2 the SEEC descriptors (2010) identified by * in Table 2 for 'analysis and evaluation' and 'synthesis and creativity' have been used. The link between synthesis and creativity is acceptable because Jackson's (2005) proposal that insights can be regarded as the outcomes of creativity and creative practices is persuasive (Raiker, 2010 in print). The descriptors for reflection arise out of the argument above, namely, that reflection should be regarded as a discrete concept through which reflective skills are applied to knowledge and understanding.

Cognitive skills	Undergraduate Year 1	Undergraduate Year 2	Undergraduate Year 3
Reflection	Presents subject knowledge appropriate to task and year. Shows ability to think about knowledge purposefully and with understanding. Shows extension of knowledge base through thinking on reading related to evaluated experience.	Presents depth of subject knowledge appropriate to task. Shows critical ability to think about knowledge purposefully and with some understanding of complexity. Shows extension of knowledge base through critical thought on simple primary research and secondary research.	Presents depth and breadth of subject knowledge appropriate to task. Shows increased critical ability to think about knowledge resulting in changes in perspective. Shows extension of knowledge base through critical thought leading to insights on primary and secondary research.
Analysis and evaluation*	Analyses a range of information using predefined principles, frameworks or criteria	Judges the reliability of data and information using pre-defined techniques and/or criteria	Analyses a range of information comparing alternative methods and techniques. Selects appropriate techniques/criteria for evaluation and discriminates between the relative relevance and significance of data/evidence collected.
Synthesis and creativity*	Collects information to inform a choice of solutions to standard problems in familiar contexts.	Collects information from a variety of authoritative sources in inform a choice of solutions to standard problems in familiar contexts.	Collects and synthesis information to inform a choice of solutions to problems in unfamiliar contexts.

Table 2: descriptors of reflection and academic skills

It has already been noted above that writers such as Wang and King (2006) and Dunne (2008) have suggested taxonomies of reflection involving definitions and that although the various taxonomies are regarded as not being hierarchical, they are presented as descriptions in a linear, two-dimensional manner that suggests hierarchy. This was the stimulus for my creation of the three-dimensional model which I have termed the learner dynamic. Therefore any presentation of 'tick-box' descriptors would be inappropriate. However level descriptors are useful. It is suggested a 'best-fit' approach over the range of descriptors presented in Table 2 rather than sequential tick-boxes would resonate with the perception of reflection taking place at different times and at the different stages within a single assignment.

Conclusions

My purposes in this chapter were twofold; firstly to consider whether reflection was a constituent of critical analysis, critical evaluation and synthesis; and secondly to explore the assumption that reflection was assumed to be implicitly embedded in practice to be learnt automatically by students. On both theoretical and empirical grounds, it appears that reflection is a constituent of critical analysis, critical evaluation and synthesis. It is also a concept definable in its own right. Critical analysis, critical evaluation and synthesis interact with knowledge and understanding through reflection. The resultant insights become subsumed within and expand that knowledge and understanding.

The findings of my small-scale research confirm my initial perception of an assumption in UoB's *Education Strategy* that reflection is embedded in practice and therefore will be either implicitly or explicitly taught as a matter of course. There was no evidence from my research that either reflection or reflective skills enabling insights were explicitly taught. It appears that reflection exhibited in the dissertation was regarded by supervisors as an indicator of ability. My research indicated that supervisors believed that reflection was necessary for insights to occur, that there were different levels of reflection but these were not made explicit. Supervisors' recognition of the necessity of an appropriate and sufficient knowledge base in the production of insights was demonstrated by the importance placed on reading. Many students did not appear to understand this importance.

As a scaffold to understanding a model illustrating reflection as a bridge between knowledge and understanding and reflective skills has been presented. As theory-practice relationships are seen as being fundamental to my discipline, it is suggested that the model would only be useful if related directly to supervisor-student interaction. There are taxonomies, for example those developed by SEEC, that describe progressive depths of critical analysis, critical evaluation and synthesis related to creativity at undergraduate level. It is strongly suggested that the wording of these taxonomies should be explicitly integrated into unit learning outcomes and assessment criteria, and discussed with students. Through development of shared understandings of reflection and reflective skills, students would not only be taught their meanings. They would be given greater access to critical processes, including transfer, that could trigger insights.

Meyer and Land's threshold concept theory is seen as being important in its perception of liminal space as a bar to effective reflection. It appears that 'troublesome knowledge' causing 'mental blocks' constrains reflection. The importance of the supervisory role of facilitator in promoting reflection in its various guises to remove these blocks, thus enabling insights, has been demonstrated.

In conclusion, it would appear that critical processes can be taught through explicitly developing understanding of reflection, critical analysis, critical evaluation, and synthesis. The dissertation lends itself to the teaching of critical processes as the supervisor's role is one of facilitation, usually working one-to-one in tutorials with students. The creation of insights can also be facilitated in the dissertation, as all dissertations are conceived as products original to the student. However it has also been demonstrated that critical processes can be developed through group work focused on resource. It is intended to establish a resource bank to offer structured support for the further development of critical processes and hence attainment.

About the author

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Chapter 4

Beyond competency: spirituality and failing mental health

Susan Sapsed

Abstract

This chapter explores the journey alongside a student nurse in the middle part of her third year whilst she was working with mentally frail people in various settings over a period of six months, when she was trying to demonstrate her ability to meet Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) Competences (2006) in relation to spirituality.

As a person increases in age they can, through circumstance, find their self worth diminishes. However frequently as this stage spiritualism 'kicks in' and becomes more important as they cope with the possibility of impending life struggles such as loss of status, health decline, chronic illness, hospitalisation or moving away from their home. Most people require comfort not only in the physical sense but also in the spiritual sense too. It is difficult to qualify the value of spirituality but it would appear to play a major part in the mental well being of this life stage, as it provides the ability to cope with mental and physical alterations and this connectedness leads to harmony. Consequently, there is a need to ensure spirituality becomes part of professional education and practice from the onset of student education indicating it is a fundamental part of holistic care, which did not appear to be the case for this student. As we worked through her practice placements her understanding slowly developed until she was finally able to see this as an essential element within holistic care. This awareness she will take into her final practice period. The chapter has been written with the student's knowledge and consent.

Keywords

Spirituality; connectedness; mental health

Introduction

As we travel through these months together we are able to explore my student nurse's understanding of spirituality and how it is an integral part of professional care and why it was part of the required NMC Competences (2006). To set the scene we need to explore where we are as a society. Today, in the second decade of this century, it is increasingly obvious that we live in a secular society where spiritual pursuits are kept separate from worldly pursuits. One of the areas where this divide can be seen is in the clear separation between spirituality and business/work. Therefore it is all the more remarkable that within all caring professions over the last three decades the teaching of spirituality has entered our curricula. Spirituality is now being taught to a much broader student population and studied in institutions where there has not been traditional teaching in this field as within our own profession. During our conversations it was clear that the degree to which my student understood the concept was tenuous. My student at the beginning of our journey had just begun her third year. She is a mature student, married with two small children, professionally she is very capable and competent.

Even the linking to her practice area was vague. Her placement illustrated effectively that as a person increases in age they can, through circumstance, find their self-worth diminishes. It is particularly potent at these times of alteration that people reflect on life events such as suffering, death, personal relationships and the meaning of life. They begin to consider coping strategies, for instance help from friends and family and sometimes support from higher orders (spiritual beliefs). To enhance her understanding other placements were reviewed as these reflect other times of crisis and change such as accidents, complex surgery or wars where the attendance of all types of religious observance and cultural traditions becomes far more meaningful. Frequently at these stages spiritualism '*kicks in*' and becomes more important as they cope with the possibility of impending life struggles such as health decline, chronic illness, hospitalisation or moving away from their home. It was easy to see that after these discussions my student was '*stuck*' in religion not spirituality. Together we explored these two concepts to try and separate them.

Stepping aside from this problem we explored why Nurse Education had recognised recently the need to enable students and trained staff to understand the importance of spirituality. She transferred to the adult branch of the programme having been accredited with the understanding that the competence 'Care Delivery" which stated the ability to: *'Contribute to the development and documentation of nursing assessments by participating in comprehensive and systematic nursing assessment of the physical, psychological, social and spiritual needs of patients and clients'*

She said it only meant ticking off boxes! She was now trying to complete, the 'Consultation on a framework for the Standard for Post-Registration Nursing' (NMC, 2005) which requires knowledge in the following domains:

1. Respects the inherent worth and dignity of each person and the right to express spiritual beliefs.

2. Assists patients and families to meet their spiritual needs in the context of health and illness experiences, including referral for pastoral services.

3. Assesses the influence of patients' spirituality on their health care behaviours and practices.

4. Incorporates patients' spiritual beliefs in the care plan.

5. Provides appropriate information and opportunity for patients, carers and families to discuss their wishes for end-of-life decision-making and care.

6. Respects wishes of patients and families regarding expression of spiritual beliefs.

Also an understanding of spirituality is one of many skills that is required by the NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework (NHS. KSF, 2004) and as a result the NMC (2006) has mapped out spiritual competencies:

1. Respects the inherent worth and dignity of each person and the right to express spiritual beliefs

2. Assists patients and families to meet their spiritual needs in the context of health and illness experiences, including referral for pastoral services

3. Assesses the influence of patients' spirituality on their health care behaviours and practices

4. Incorporates patients' spiritual beliefs in the care plan

Have we as educators both in the classroom and in practice overlooked the challenges, in so much as how can spirituality be addressed in the nursing curricula, who is qualified to teach spirituality, or even can spirituality be taught or assessed, or could we say it is a characteristic inherent in some students and faculties (Persut, 2003)? Surely this last comment has been used as 'our let out' clause. Our students are caring so there is no need to explore these issues as it is too hard or too complex. So professionally we are left to grapple with these challenges without possibly understanding the concept. In accepting that spirituality is an integral part of our professional role together we will explore the meaning of spirituality and opportunities available when caring for the mentally frail.

Frameworks are a useful starting point to look at meaning and aid understanding so we explored the 'Global Fitness Framework' (Rayment and Smith 2007). This framework is comprised of three aspects of humanity firstly the organic level, secondly the holistic depth and finally the fitness plan. Rayment and Smith (2007) describe the relationships

of the three levels as follows, the organic level relates to whether an individual, group, or society is being considered, holistic depth considers physical, mental and spiritual aspects, and the fitness plan examines strength, stamina and suppleness. Consequently, each of the 3 aspects has 3 elements, giving a total of 27 individual cells (see figure 1). They argue that modern leaders and educators need to consider all of the 27 cells and their interaction, in order to work in the holistic manner. The leaders and educators are staff who provide health care. Within Holistic Depth is the concept of 'Spirituality'. Here spirituality is seen as a very broad concept mirroring Young and Koopsen's (2005:7) definition *"Spirituality can be considered a basic human quality that transcends gender, race, color, and national origin. At the same time, spirituality has many intangible aspects and is an intense personal issue"*. Although spirituality appears to be on the periphery of the framework it is of equal importance. As professionals we need to be cognisant with the whole framework if we are going to be both leaders and educators in the profession. Spirituality is one of the three interlinked human attributes, the others being mental health and physical health. As each person travels life's pathway these features vary in how prominent they appear. In using this framework to guide our thoughts my student was able to consider that spirituality was part of our holistic care approach although at this stage she continued to see it as religion.
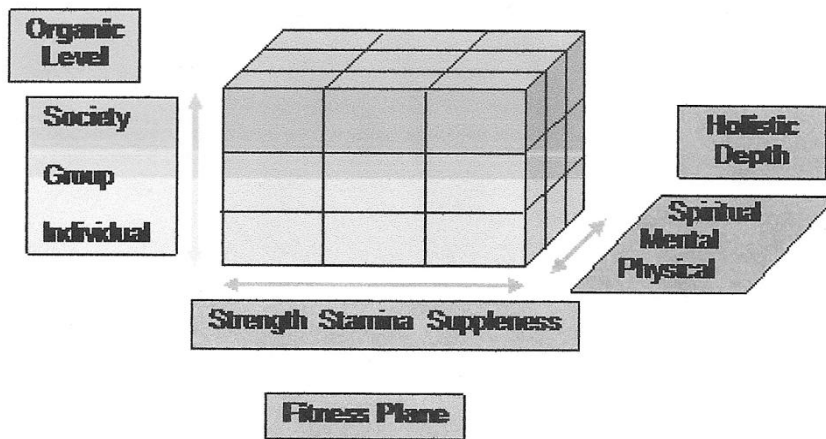
Figure 1:'Global Fitness Framework' (Rayment and Smith 2007)

In taking spirituality as the dominant feature that links the other two together the opportunities to meet the spiritual needs of people with failing mental health will be considered later when looking at practice. Although we now know where it might fit my student still was very mixed in her understanding of this concept. She could not get away from the fact that spirituality was not religion, which she loudly protested she was *'not into'*. This in itself caused me some consternation as to how she had met her patients' needs in this area up to now but that is for another occasion. Before the

various issues in relation to meeting these needs can be explored, a definition of spirituality must be established, so we begin our journey.

What is spirituality, can it be defined?

As a concept it is not an easy one to understand and my student found it very hard when we tried to find out how it could be defined. Whilst the terms spirituality and religion do not mean the same thing they are often used interchangeably for the sake of either convenience or shorthand, as they both have the possibility of enriching life. It could be argued that spirituality is different from religion despite the fact that the concept can be seen as equally complex. Therefore it is recognised that it is a very difficult area to study, especially as the concept appears to have many operational definitions which relate to how researchers have interpreted it. However there is general agreement that spirituality can be seen as the essential part of the humanity of all people.

Over recent years many definitions have been formulated which differ from the original meanings that were usually associated with Christian piety, mysticism, religious rituals such as prayer, symbolic practices. Today it has taken on much broader meanings possibly related to the increased secularisation of the UK. The definition of 'Spirituality' can be as broad as *"the essentially human, personal and interpersonal dimension, which integrates and transcends the cultural, religious, psychological, social and emotional aspects of the person"* (The Royal College of Psychiatrist's, 2008). However this is a very difficult definition to comprehend and work with, so what is the alternative? According to Paley (2008:157) 'spirituality is universal something which (unlike religion) all human beings share'. Young and Koopsen's (2005:7) definition is that 'spirituality can be considered a basic human quality that transcends gender, race, color, and national origin. At the same time, spirituality has many intangible aspects and is an intense personal issue'. Again most people would suggest that this definition incorporates all aspect of the concepts, but it is still not easy to use as a working definition. Further in their book Young and Koopsen (2005:11) have a definition which for most people is acceptable, *"Spirituality is intertwined with every aspect of life and provides purpose, meaning, strength, and guidance in shaping the journey of life"*. The idea that spirituality can be characterised by the nature of intertwined features of life helps us understand the way in which most people would express their lives as being connected by experiences which cover all aspects of living, where and how you live, taking in both the personal aspects as well as the environment. Barker and Buchanan-Barker (2004) state that spirituality can be seen as 'the essentially human, personal and interpersonal dimension, which integrates and transcends the cultural, religious, psychological, social and emotional aspects of the person' or more specifically 'concerned with soul or spirit' (Cook, 2009).

Timms (2006) clarifies what the benefits are of paying attention to the spiritual dimension for patients. He states 'that patients have identified the following benefits of good quality spiritual care:

- improved self-control, self-esteem and confidence;
- faster and easier recovery, achieved through both promoting the healthy grieving of loss and maximising personal potential;
- improved relationships – with self, others and with God/creation/nature;
- a new sense of meaning, resulting in reawakening of hope and peace of mind, enabling people to accept and live with problems not yet resolved".

Having explored the above we finally settled on a simple summary that she could work with which was *spiritual values have a universality which brings together all aspects of personhood and is facilitate in holistic care.* So the next question was how would this enable me to help my student make the connection?

Connectivity is the bridging mechanism

Spirituality grows out of life experiences not doctrines, and it is an activity of being connected. In exploring connectedness it can be seen that this concept underpins spirituality. Jorden et al (2004) spoke of the work initially carried out by Miller and Surrey in the 1980s and 1990s as defining crucial components in psychological growth that occurs within relationships: (a) an increased sense of well-being that comes from feeling connected to others, (b) motivation and the ability to act positively both within and beyond the boundaries of the relationship, (c) increased self-knowledge and knowledge of the 'other' in the relationship, (d) an increased sense of self-worth, and (e) the desire for additional connections. Later Bellingham et al in 1989 describe connectedness as connectedness of oneself, to others, social networks of family/friends, colleague/social groups and the larger meaning and purpose of life. However, Spaniol (2002:322) in his editorial describes: *"to be connected is a natural way of being. It is how we begin our life and represents the underlying nature of how we are in this world. Disconnectedness is something that we learn – often as a way of surviving or coping with internal or external experiences. Because connected is a natural way of being, it is one of our deepest yearnings and most satisfying experiences. Connectedness therefore, is not simple technique, or a way of manipulating others or ourselves. Connectedness is what is authentic for us – what is natural and spontaneous. To be connected is to be an integral mutual, contributing partner in this world we live."*

So it can be seen that these definitions imply that connectedness is a joining together of elements and it is not a synthesis. This understanding enables us to see that it is not permanent and at any one time the association of ideas can change. Therefore spirituality can be considered as a means of connectivity which encompasses the physical, social and psychological entities of life.

At this point my student was beginning to make links and this was enhanced when we explored further rational resilience, emotional intelligence and self-esteem. Under

emotional intelligence we explored its link with resonance in leadership and in teaching by looking at some of the aspects of emotional intelligence:

- Ability to redirect and prioritise thinking on the basis of associated feelings
- Ability to generate emotions to facilitate judgement and memory
- Ability to capitalise on mood changes to appreciate multiple viewpoints
- Ability to use emotional states to facilitate problem-solving and creativity.

Was it beginning to come together could she now see where it fits into practice? The next stage was to review mental health and why does it change?

Mental Health an area of constant change

Hopefully my student would now agree that spirituality helps give meaning to birth, illness, near-death and death, mystical and trance states and varieties of experience. In examining these she could see that they could be described as resulting from both pathological and normal human experiences and in order to give understanding the overlap and difference between the two are to be found when exploring failing mental health. The exploration of such fundamental questions as the purpose and meaning of life are so important for those who are suffering from failing mental health, which can manifest itself in many guises. This area is very complex and ranges from simple ageing, through illness, stress or depression and more major conditions such as Alzheimer's. Hayes (2008:49) says that *"the illness may become a spiritual encounter, when the person is forced to deal with his or her vulnerability and mortality"*. There is a fear amongst this group that with the increase of technology they may not be allowed to die with dignity so the broader issues of life become too much and the thought of death as a relief becomes accepted. Richard's work back in the 1990s states very clearly that spiritual needs are not altered when dementia affects the person, therefore spiritual needs do not disappear as many people believe. Young and Koopsen (2005:233) write *"the attitude that spiritual needs no longer matter in a person who is confused, suffers from memory loss, or is unable to communicate effectively is inappropriate. Interventions for the confused person can include touch, pictures, faith symbols and music. These interventions can reach an emotional level that may not be immediately apparent in the traditional sense."*

As the continuum is vast, some people will make a cut off point in relation to spiritual help as only being available to those who can communicate normally. However this is not true, since the mid 1960s we have recognized that those people undergoing surgery lose their hearing last and it is the first sense to return. Now as professionals we are taught to communicate with all assumed unconscious people as we cannot know the extent to which they are able to understand this point my student was aware of. At the

same time we recognise that being spoken to may relieve fears and anxieties. This aspect of care was brought home to me as I explained to my student when, as a new staff nurse whilst working in I.C.U. (in the 1960s), a young man had come in with 'lock-jaw'. In order to care for him he was placed in a paralyzed state for seven days. On recovery he wrote about these seven days in vivid detail to our embarrassment and shame. We learned that he had understood every word said during his care. It was a salutary lesson and an experience to be remembered, in that we need to find ways to communicate and support those who cannot communicate in the normal way. How spirituality enables calmness and peacefulness in the mentally frail in enabling them to make sense of their life has recently been explored, (Milner-Williams, 2006; Krues, 2006; Moss, 2007; Thompson, 2007; van Leeuwen, 2007) and this needs to be remembered as we teach our students.

How spirituality can be experienced: where were the role models?

During her practice placement there were many opportunities for my student to witness the spiritual needs of her patients being met by the staff, but she failed to recognise these as she was too busy being a professional not a carer. As health care professionals during our practice life we will witness and be part of providing spiritual care mostly through the spoken word. However this will not always be successful and different approaches are often needed with the mentally frail. Golberg (1998) talks about touching, holding hands, massage and the use of oils as part of a meaningful relationship the nurse has with her patient that brings about a spiritual connectedness. Using one's hands offers more than the immediate warmth. It is a transmission that is encountered which goes beyond just the mechanism of touch, it provokes empathy/compassion, love/friendship and offers hope. Therefore if we were to analyse how we use our hands it would become apparent that they have a profound effect on people. Massage is used to transmit comfort with the mentally frail where normal communication is not possible. The use of touch did resonate with my student.

Touch may not always be successful so another very familiar dimension in care is working with music. Campbell, (2001) said that it is difficult to know exactly how music links to spirituality although we know a great deal about the therapeutic effects of music, for example it:

- Masks unpleasant sounds and feelings
- Slows down and equalises brainwaves
- Affects body temperature
- Affects respiration
- Increases endorphin levels

If we explore the effect of music on a person it is possibly easier to see how it would have a spiritual effect in enabling tranquillity and an inner calmness. Music creates wave

levels, so specific music is linked to feelings. If we were to look at the Theta and Delta waves where they dominate it brings times of creativity and meditation, whereas Alpha waves produce a heightened awareness and calm. It can be seen therefore that music induces different states in different people. When working with the elderly (post 80) who may not show a deep awareness of their present day situation they do become responsive and animated when we take time and trouble to discover which type of music they like. This is particularly noticeable in 'Care Homes' where staff made an effort to engage with their clients. Music exerts natural responses such as breathing at a deeper level which contributes to calmness. This can be observed when working with people who suffer severe stress and anxiety disorders. It is known that if a person suffers from tinnitus that to listen to Strauss can be soothing and removes the excruciating barrier the sound makes. Music as a therapy is used to address the physical, psychological, spiritual, cognitive and social needs of individuals with disabilities and chronic illnesses. As Updike (1989:64) writes, *"Music as a spiritual dimension is far more substantive than a mere whimsical statement. Intentional use of music to engage a sacred dimension does not guarantee the experience, but renders it more accessible."*

As professionals we can successfully engage people in singing, moving to music, or just actively listening (Achterberg et al., 1992). It is known that singing helps individuals with speech impairments to improve their articulation, rhythm, and breathing control. So we can help those who have had a stroke to reconnect with their world. In the same way, songs help elderly adults remember significant events in their lives which relate to happier times. Sadly the use of music went over the top of my student who just considered it as making a nice atmosphere. She had missed the effort the staff had made to create the right environment and she had equally missed the reactions that were clear to perceive.

During the last century, in particular, we have worked using art with people who appear to be trapped in their own world enabling them to express their feelings by liberating their creative process. As an onlooker it seems to release an inner valve that sets them free from the constraints that are imposed by stereotyping. Therefore it is clear to the bystander that art can be a bridge to reconciling conflicts and increasing awareness and enabling a state of connectedness (Tate and Longo, 2002). It may not be art in the literal form but more commonly it is photographs.   Those of us that are privileged to work among the elderly and mentally frail see how possessions, such as a photograph, give the person an inner calm and tranquillity and a reawakening of spirituality, that unfortunately my student only saw as keeping them busy rather than letting them sit about. One person had an old and tatty photo of her daughter (8) who had been killed. Sadly my student did not elicit the importance of this item and suggested it be thrown away. She had forgotten that these people were once her age, she saw then as *'old'* not having had a life. It made an interesting area for us to discuss.

The staff in several areas went to great lengths to use pets as they are part of our national heritage in the UK. Pets evoke many emotions which are similar to the ones found between person and person. Therefore they are a large part of our spiritual connectedness. It is well know that waiting areas frequently have aquariums as it

reduces tension especially where the wait becomes prolonged. The ability to touch and care for pets enable people to relate to experiences such as childhood, and this evokes memories. Pets have a profound effect and this correlation has been effectively applied when helping people with stress. Possibly it offers a distraction from their black thoughts. In Care home where they have a pet, the wandering of the pet amongst the residents brings animation to many of those elderly who have become mentally frail (Graham 2000). They look forward to these visits and react in a natural way which in itself brings an engagement that brings a smile (Taylor 2006). Small as this may appear to an outsider, it is a major moment of happiness. If you spare the time to communicate with them it brings back remembrances. The impact can be more as people need a social connectedness therefore they feel empowered, these small initiatives bring back a linking to the normal world for them. Mitchell (2006) in her column says *"spirituality can be nourished in a number of places and by relationships of all kinds, including of the human, divine and – in this case – canine"*. However it was lost on my student who said *'it is one more chore'* or just felt it was something that showed affection without any recognition of the link.

Over the last fifty years it can be seen that social networks have changed. No longer can the family or the extended family be relied upon for support. Travel, work and other priorities mean that frequently living near families is no longer an option. So the social networking that was there has now all but disappeared. However it has come far too quickly for society to make the required life adjustments. Equally society has not engaged with this changing dimension, it has gone relatively unnoticed. So as frailty has crept up, so has isolation. Social exclusion is now part of many people's lives. Bellingham *et al.* (1989:19) in their article consider loneliness by saying *"losing connectedness with others causes loneliness. People who experience loneliness normally desire to be connected to others, but lack the ability to fulfill this desire"*. Townsend and McWhirter (2005:192) in their article emphasize this point when they say "*the consequence of disconnectedness may include self-alienation, loneliness, and a lack of meaning or purpose"*. So how do we reconnect with people? We know that in times of disaster or war the sense of community is rekindled. Can we now do it this in the 21st century? As a society we desire human interaction. Few people wish to live in social isolation. Simple things such as coffee mornings, luncheon clubs, and over 60's clubs enable people to connect, but the populous does not seem to have the time to run these organisations any longer as most people are working to retirement and beyond. However it can be seen that this need is met in day hospitals and luncheon clubs. My student had considered this aspect to a small extent but not its full implication.

Puchaliski (2007:33) in his investigation of spirituality says *"it is at its root, relational and thus forms the basis of the altruistic care healthcare professionals are committed to"*. Therefore it would appear that spiritual values have a universality that brings together all involved in health care. Particularly when considering protective factors, spiritually is able to sustain the person in crisis and therefore contributes to their mental health well-being. How will our leaders and educators support spiritual engagement, when this student appeared to be going thought these placements without seeing or having the ability to acknowledge or engage in what was needed: holistic care? Role models were lacking.

Implications for education

If we are going to enable the next generation of leaders and educators to conceptualise spirituality it has to be encompassed in their personal development starting from their first student days. The key factors then would be explored from initially knowing ourselves which could be benchmarked against for example emotional intelligence and resilience. Then exploring how and what is meant by spiritual care, recognising that it can be time consuming and it cannot be planned for, and finally the challenges it brings. It is time consuming and difficult to plan for because the moment is crucial when a person chooses the time to talk or seek help. It is not a situation where we can say we are too busy and will be back in ten minutes, as the moment is lost and nobody can stimulate it to reoccur. So immediacy is vital but very difficult to manage in a busy schedule.

It is challenging, consequently it is easy to avoid, as we often find being alongside someone struggling to help them find meaning and being asked difficult questions can be demanding and uncomfortable. We want to feel we give comfort so to find we do not have the resources is embarrassing, which is why we need support as well. Chaplin and Mitchell (2001:10) say *"spiritual care is challenging and demands giving of oneself in terms of energy and emotions. Health professionals need to recognize their need to care for themselves and each other. Staff support is essential".* As a profession we need to go back and work with our present leaders as some appear to have missed out on this concept and how it impinges on holistic care. Once these leaders and educators are involved they will then enable their staff to engage in this aspect of care thus going full circle and it will become an integral part of mentorship (role modelling). So the next student will recognise that spirituality is integral to holistic care, unlike my student who found it a challenge to gain this insight. However, six months later she has now gained this awareness.

Conclusion

Spaniol (2002:322) concludes; *"recovery, as a spiritual path, can be seen as a journey by which people with psychiatric disabilities rebuild and further develop their connectedness to themselves to others, to their living, learning and working environments, and to larger meaning and purpose. And this journey is also a means of personal empowerment – enabling the person to confront the devastating effects of discrimination, negative attitudes and low expectations. It is never too late to begin the journey of recovery. Understanding the recovery journey and one's recovery experience are important first steps to rebuilding a life that is fulfilling and that also contributes to others. "*

Hayes (2008) in her article expresses that health care workers who develop an understanding of spirituality as a medium to empower the person adds to the quality of their life. Having examined the many ways in which spirituality enhances the quality of life of the mentally frail, as a profession we will be able to answer the following question 'is the understanding of spirituality important to modern health care leaders?' Yes, as nobody should be outside our endeavours to meet their spiritual care needs as it enables, empowers and provides hope and becomes a focus for life.

However we must not overlook the challenges that remain. Should it be an assessed competency and who should be the assessor? How should it be explored and what value do we place on role models and mentors? Will it be found in our pedagogy under social transformation: care and respect? For this student, spirituality was a challenge but one which she has now understood and which she will now take into her last six months - her only question was 'why did I not recognise it earlier?'

About the author

Susan Sapsed's Registered Nursing status was gained at Addenbrookes, Cambridge; her Registered Midwife status at St Mary's Portsmouth, her Associate degree in Nursing and Midwifery Teaching Diploma/PGCE with Royal College of Midwives and the University of Surrey. She started teaching in 1976 and a degree with the OU, and from 1994 with the University of Bedfordshire. She finished MPhil in October 2003 'Exploring how nurses and midwives gain their research skills'. As a Graduate member of the British Psychology Society, this qualification has been used with distance learning students at London South Bank University. In 1982 she was appointed an external examiner completing with Plymouth University 2005. Her teaching is on the Public Health Masters and practice areas are in Midwifery and Gynaecology.

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Chapter 5

Eastern Europeans fit in easily – a reflection on factors influencing adaptability and achievement

Maja Jankowska

Abstract

This chapter is an attempt to provide a reflection and discussion on Central and East European (CEE) learners in the British education system. In the course of working at the University of Bedfordshire I have been confronted with members' of staff observations on CEE students' reflexivity and relative ease of adaptation to a new system. These subjective perceptions, combined with objective statistical data showing a high level of attainment of CEE students and personal interest contributed to the search for answers to a question what makes CEE learners successful. The exploration of this subject is important for a few reasons. Firstly the literature on CEE learners is very limited as they are not a 'problematical group'. Secondly there is a move in a delivery of curricula towards more personalised learning, which underlines that effective teaching and learning starts with understanding the students (e.g. Kumar, 2007, Atlay, 2008, Atlay et al., 2008, Ausubel et al, 1978). Therefore, it is important that diverse universities with a high proportion of EU students attempt to understand where CEE students come from and what their aspirations might be. Finally, the exploration of the factors contributing to good adaptation and attainment may inform teaching other groups of students as well.

Keywords

Central and East European (CEE) students; reflection; adaptation; attainment; socio-historical and cultural background

About the author

Maja Jankowska is a CETL research fellow who works with other CETL fellows researching and supporting staff in developing a pedagogic research culture across the University of Bedfordshire. She has worked as a psychologist, a counsellor and a teacher for some years before embarking on a new learning journey towards a PhD. She is interested in Personal Development Planning, cultural aspects of teaching and learning, internalization of education, creativity, meaningful learning and social learning spaces, All the professional and personal interests have one thing in common - a challenge of making a difference to the learners.

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Section 2

Employability

Introduction by Arti Kumar

It is a privilege to introduce this wide-ranging set of chapters grouped under the umbrella term 'employability' – an increasingly important term to critically appreciate and implement in CRe8 curricula, against the background of changing relationships between education and a global economy. As the employability agenda has progressively drawn in staff from all academic and central learning support areas in our university, multiple perspectives and practices need to be shared and explored in order to find those that are most productive and effective. The chapters in this section make an important contribution in this respect.

A generally accepted definition across the sector – and one that was adopted for our purposes – came from ESECT in 2000: "A set of skills and achievements, understandings and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupation." This definition gives us some useful concepts against which to explore the chapters, but I also pose the question here as to whether these concepts need to be modified in the light of our current approaches at the University of Bedfordshire.

In two practice-based courses – Social Work and Nursing – the authors identify and focus on developing students' specific skills that should enable them to enter and thrive in their chosen occupations. While Louise Grant and Gail Kinman in Chapter 6, describe Wellbeing Days introduced to build resilience in student social workers, Melsina Makaza in Chapter 7, describes creative teaching and learning methods used to enhance the capability of nurse mentors. However in both these descriptions it is clear that a range of personal attributes are seen as key drivers for skills, including an appreciation of individual differences in learning styles, the need for motivation, self-knowledge and self-belief.

It is interesting to note that the wider generic student and mentor attributes are not in effect narrowly occupation-specific but broadly transferable to professional practice as they also enhance individual effectiveness in life-long and life-wide learning. They are akin to the behavioural competencies that graduate recruiters seek and that all students need to develop incrementally. With this in mind, the Bridges-CETL's Assessment Centres project has addressed the need for active, interactive, personalised and realistic

learning – to make skills visible and comprehensible as behaviours and actions in the way that employers observe and assess them during selection events. 'SOARing for Employability' and Assessment Centre approaches were used to recruit and coach a group of 34 students – and eventually to select a team of six to compete at the national Flux Enterprise Challenge 2010. Alin Dobrea in Chapter 8, was part of the student group and writes as one of the team that went on to win the Flux competition, while Paul Harrison in Chapter 9, makes interesting comparisons and observations from the dual perspective of a Flux staff champion and a careers adviser who has used Assessment Centre approaches within subject curricula.

In the final chapter - perhaps most important in terms of pointing the way ahead – Suzanne I'ons and Eileen Scott in Chapter 10, discuss the development of an Employability Award which will link to CRe8 and SOAR, verify and validate the skills, attributes and experiences of each student. Here too it is evident that skills cannot be verified unless they turn into some form of behaviour or action that can be assessed. Bearing in mind then that employability is more than *a set of occupation-specific skills and achievements*, we might re-frame employability in line with the SOAR process as "a set of beliefs and dispositions that drive performance and behaviour conducive to finding and engaging with developmental opportunities, testing and implementing aspirations, and demonstrating relevant results."

Figure 1 on the next page shows the revised SOAR summary which is often referred to in papers throughout this volume. It, as well as the CRe8 Summary (page 251 this volume) can also be found online:
www.beds.ac.uk/learning/curriculum/structures/cre8

University of Bedfordshire

SOAR — a dynamic, reflective process for personalised learning and development

	Self-awareness	Opportunity-awareness	Aspirations	Results
Definition	An awareness of the characteristics that define the person one is and wants to become.	An awareness of the possibilities that exist, the demands they make and the rewards and satisfactions they offer.	The ability to make realistic choices and plans based on sound information and on self– opportunity alignment.	The ability to review outcomes, plan and take action to implement decisions and aspirations, especially at points of transition.
Learning outcomes	Students understand themselves more holistically and realistically: - assess their behaviours and actions in learning, work and life; - identify, articulate and evidence their strengths; - address their learning needs more intentionally and developmentally in relation to the results they want and need to achieve.	Students clarify ideas about options and curriculum choices, leisure activities, occupations and employer-organisations relevant and realistically available to them. Students recognise and access learning opportunities inside and outside the curriculum – the knowledge, skills and attributes these develop. They also identify their relationship to the demands of an ever-changing world.	Students generate, clarify and test aspirations, decide and plan how to implement them for the present and for their short, medium and long-term future. Students make decisions about curriculum choices and career options informed by – and based on – the extent to which they fit self with opportunity.	Students need to start with the end in mind, and set personal goals in full awareness of the results expected by tutors, employers or other selectors. Students articulate, evaluate and demonstrate the results they achieve, and become more objective in using feedback constructively.
Curriculum content / assessment	Realistic self-awareness is helped by providing self-audits, appropriate external reference points, tools, resources and constructive feedback from others – thus enabling students to build Self-**MAPs** for their journey through HE and beyond.	A job-study or project can require students to research and analyse the extent to which their composite Self-MAP fits with the demands of their chosen occupation / option. A transparent, open curriculum aids an understanding of context.	Activity focuses on both the content and process of effective decision-making and action-planning. Students' aspirations are informed by what they might gain from their course, from each unit and from every learning activity.	Students own their goals and see relevance in curricula if their development is prompted by end-results, clear criteria, explicit rationale and constructive feedback (from peers, tutors, employers).
Abilities and attributes deployed & developed	**MAP** stands for three important dimensions: - **Motivation** (interests, values) - **Ability** (behavioural competencies) - **Personality** (interactions with others, innate preferences).	Social learning, team/group working, and the ability to build effective relationships with others (students, tutors and employers) develops essential transferable employability attributes.	Hence students need to know explicitly about these outcomes, and be helped to interpret and personalise how these outcomes transfer into further study, work and life in general.	Activity, assignments and feedback enable students to evidence and demonstrate the results of SOARing, through self-promotion on paper (in assessments, CVs, applications), and in person (at interviews and assessment centres).
	o Self-assessment o Self-esteem / confidence o Self-development o Self-efficacy o Self-management o Self-promotion	o Information literacy o Research and evaluation o Networking o Critical analysis o Group-working o Interpersonal skills	o Self-opportunity matching o Decision-making o Problem-solving o Goal-setting o Action-planning o Self-motivation	o Results-orientation o Self-promotion skills o Communication o Team effectiveness o Interpersonal skills o Evaluative skills

For further details see **www.beds.ac.uk/learning/curriculum/structure/cre8**

Figure 1: The SOAR summary

Chapter 6

The challenge of equipping social work students with resilience to ensure employability

Louise Grant and Gail Kinman

Abstract

Although social work is a rewarding profession it can also be stressful. Working with people who need support and/or protection can be emotionally demanding. Often situations are highly complex and social workers are confronted with ethical dilemmas which are often finely balanced: should a child be removed, or could additional support provide the answer? When and how should this decision be made?

When preparing social workers for the profession and continuing employability, social work educators are charged with the responsibility of not only delivering social workers with the key competencies required for the job, but also ensuring that they are resilient enough to be able to thrive in the profession, not merely survive. This chapter reports the findings of a programme of research conducted to diagnose the factors that underlie resilience in social work students and seeks to explore how we might prepare social workers for their future careers more effectively, so that they gain employment and then have long and successful careers; ensuring durable employability, in the widest sense of the word.

Keywords

Introduction

Universities are tasked with developing a curriculum that will equip social workers with the skills required to cope with a complex and stressful, yet rewarding working environment.

Following the recent deaths of children known to social services, social work has come under a great deal of internal and external scrutiny. This has led to demands for the social work curriculum to be revised (Laming 2009, DOH 2009). In recognition of the emotionally demanding work undertaken by social workers, one of the objectives of initial social work training is now seen as enabling social workers to 'develop the emotional resilience to manage the challenges they will face in dealing with potentially difficult families' (Laming 2009: 52). In particular social workers are required to have 'a particular mix of analytical skills, insight, common sense, confidence, resilience, empathy and use of authority' (DOH 2009: 16).

There is general concern that social work students lack resilience, they are not prepared to handle the emotional demands of the job and without this they lack employability. Social work academics have therefore been tasked with strengthening the criteria governing entry requirements to courses and build resilience in students through the curriculum in order to ensure students do not merely become competent, but enduringly employable. This chapter reports the findings of a programme of research conducted to diagnose the factors that underlie resilience in social work students. It will explore how employability can be enhanced in social work students by better equipping them for the emotional demands of the profession; more specifically, by examining how student resilience can be enhanced through the curriculum. It also critically examines the term 'employability' and emphasizes the importance of adopting a broad conceptualisation - not just getting a job but being able to maintain and sustain a career if given the appropriate support and training.

Given the wide acceptance of the importance of resilience for social workers this chapter will define resilience and examine ways by which it can be developed. However it should be emphasised that resilience has become a 'buzz word' within the caring professions. It is frequently bandied about with little attention as to how this key personal competence can be enhanced in order to better prepare students for the world of work. It is therefore proposed that a clearer understanding of the individual differences factors that underlie resilience is required in order to inform curriculum development. It is argued that emotional intelligence, reflection, empathy and other social competencies are key qualities that can be enhanced in social work students in order to develop resilience, maximize wellbeing and protect against professional burnout. Enhancing resilience through the curriculum should also improve practice and enhance retention of social work practitioners - thus maximising employability

As well as focusing on enhancing employability in social work students, this chapter also has applicability to other graduates, particularly within the helping and teaching professions.

Context

The University of Bedfordshire's CRe8 curriculum (Atlay, 2010 and also page 251 this volume) stresses the importance of employability and of ensuring this for all our graduates. The term employability is an elusive one which has a wide range of meanings. Employability demands that Universities prepare their graduates for the world of work and ensure that the curriculum not only equips them with the knowledge and theory required, but also teaches them the skills to be able to manage and even thrive in employment. Particularly emphasis is placed in linking the skills and theories taught in the classroom to the practical working context.

This paper will adopt the definition of employability set out by Yorke (2004 cited in Atlay, 2009:19)

> Employability is a set of achievements, skills, understandings and personal attributes that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefit both themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.

Employability is therefore about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work; this is important for social work students at qualifying level and those that we teach post qualification as part of their continuing professional development. To ensure this employability, CRe8 requires a curriculum which involves:

- Systematic subject knowledge and understanding
- Vocational relevance and applicability
- A career orientation
- Personal skills, attributes and independence
- Contextualization – an understanding of the wider world
- A sound value base

The social work curriculum has been developed using CRe8; however the development of *personal skills, attributes and independence* have focused primarily upon those required to work directly with service users, rather than those required for graduates to thrive in a complex and stressful work environment. It is these very skills that need to be more explicitly developed if we are to produce social workers who are confident, capable and resilient as required by employers and The Social Work Task Force (DOH 2009).

The importance of enhancing resilience in pre and post qualification social work students is further highlighted in a recent report published by The Observer (2008). In the five year period before the report was published, one in five of the country's 76,000 social workers had been signed off work for more than twenty consecutive days due to conditions such as stress or anxiety. Research has also found that social workers are expected to stay in their careers for just eight years, which is considerably shorter than similar professions (Curtis et al 2009). Other research has found that the emotional demands and stressful nature of social work has had a negative impact on the recruitment and retention of social workers (Eborall & Garmeston 2001).

In the social work literature, it is widely documented that work-related stress has a serious impact on both the individual and the organisation. Most of the focus, however, has been placed on organisational issues, rather than individual factors. Ways in which the wellbeing of individual social workers can be enhanced has been somewhat neglected (Preston-Shoot, 1988.)

As social work is emotionally demanding, in order to ensure employability it is important that educators pay particular attention to enhancing the resilience of their students in order to help them manage the emotional rollercoaster they will experience throughout their career. The development of appropriate personal skills and coping strategies is thought to be of fundamental importance. This is supported by research amongst health professionals which found that individual differences play a key part in affecting workers' vulnerability to stress related illness and burnout (Gustaffason et al 2010). By gaining insight into the personal attributes and individual differences that underlie resilience, students can be taught ways to enhance and improve these skills.

Skills which enhance employability in social work

Research into ways of protecting social workers from the stressors of the job has highlighted the importance of resilience, reflective ability, and emotional intelligence. Work by Collins (2008), Morrison (2007), Ruch (2007) suggests that a social work curriculum that aims to enhance these competencies may make a real difference to the ability of social workers to cope with a stressful occupation. However, although the role played by these competencies has been debated, little research has yet been conducted that examines the role played by them in predicting resilience in social work students. The recent research carried out by the authors of this chapter (Grant and Kinman, 2010) found evidence to support this assertion in that specific inter and inter personal competencies, such as emotional intelligence, reflective ability, social competence and coping style, predicted resilience to stress that in turn predicted psychological wellbeing. . The findings also suggested that a more explicit focus on the management of emotions and the development of social skills and coping mechanisms was required in social work training. The need for training in ways to enhance stress resilience was further underlined by the finding that a high proportion of students were experiencing significant levels of psychological distress.

To be able to meet the CRe8 employability challenge and the requirements of the Social Work Task Force (DOH 2009), it is vital to ensure that our graduates are resilient and leave with the personal skills, attributes and independence required for the world of work. Clearly, it is necessary for the curriculum to explicitly include activities which develop those key attributes. To do so, however, requires an understanding of resilience and the associated competencies of emotional intelligence, reflective ability and empathy.

Resilience

Resilience is a term which has become widely used in recent years. Resilience is seen as the ability to overcome stressors or world events, to be able to cope, recover and find meaning despite experiencing stressful events (Youseff & Luthans 2007). Klohen, usefully defines resilience as 'The general capacity for flexible and resourceful adaptation to external and internal stressors' (Klohen 1996 :1068). Resilience is however not a one-dimensional concept, it is complex and multi-faceted. No one individual could be described as resilient in all situations, but it is something which can be encouraged and developed and is crucial for sustaining a long and fulfilling career in a stressful occupation.

To date, most studies that have investigated resilience have focused on its meaning and development as a protective mechanism for children (Daniel et al 1999, McMurray et al 2008, Wolin and Wolin 1999). The belief that resilience is a protective mechanism that encompasses problem-solving skills in particular, has been widely debated; it is argued that it is possible to enhance resilience in children who have experienced a trauma (Benard 1997, Daniel et al 1999). If this is the case, it may also be possible to enhance resilience in adults. Little has yet been written about enhancing adult resilience, and even less about professionals facing complex and challenging situations (Collins (2008). Recent research (Grant & Kinman, in press) indicates that trainee social workers whose emotional and social competencies are well established are more resilient to stress.

According to Seligman (2003 & 2008), enhancing wellbeing in people may be one of the best defences against mental health problems. The positive psychology approach, which focuses on promoting wellbeing rather than treating unhappiness and ill health, has an important message for educators in preparing social work students (and other caring professionals) for their careers. Positive psychologists set out to understand what makes us happy, enjoy life and thrive rather than just survive (Csikszentmihalyi 1998), and has resonances with the work discussed in Elkington Chapter 19. By improving resilience through the curriculum rather than teaching students to manage distress, then we could well be better preparing social workers for a long and successful future in the profession, ensuring true employability.

The following sections of this chapter will look at some of the key factors which research suggests are likely to enhance personal resilience and wellbeing. The first of these factors is emotional intelligence conducted by (Kinman & Grant, in press).

Emotional Intelligence

Goleman (1996) considers emotional intelligence to be an essential life skill and a key factor in resilience which enhances problem-solving, risk taking and the ability to cope with change. Evidence has been found that those social workers with better levels of emotional awareness and emotional intelligence find it easier to cope (Kinman & Grant 2010, Morrison 2007). Furthermore, Howe (2008) argues that by helping social workers to develop and improve their emotional intelligence, their ability to manage the emotions of themselves and others, become more self aware and better able to contain their emotions and those of others will also be enhanced. Its importance should also be recognised to social work students as they experience high levels of emotional distress in their training which needs to be addressed. This emotional distress may indicate that they will also find work after qualification stressful and therefore threaten their sustained employability (Grant & Kinman 2010; Collins 2008 ; Coffey& Dudgill et al 2010).

Better understanding of the notion of emotional intelligence, and how social work educators might develop the competencies associated with this key competency is a priority for the social work curriculum, in both the short and long term. Key mechanisms for improved emotional intelligences are self-awareness and self-regulation through the ability to reflect on practice. Reflection is also considered important in the CRe8 curriculum (Atlay 2010) as a personal competency that supports employability by making sense of learning.

Reflective practice

The ability to understand emotions and regulate them effectively is a key feature of reflective practice and a key tool for social workers. Goleman (1996) also argues that reflective ability is an effective tool in enhancing self-awareness and is linked to emotional intelligence. Within the social work context, Ruch (2009) has suggested that social workers need to be able to develop a reflective stance in order to be able to cope with the complexities of social work practice and become more self aware of how their practice can be enhanced.

Anxiety generated by complex social work practice is often managed by problem-focused coping, i.e. focusing purely on the task and the targets to be met (Ruch 2009), rather than recognising and managing the emotions engendered. As Thompson & Thompson (2008) argue, without paying due regard to emotions and developing self-awareness, social work students may fail in their duty of self-care. It is important that

social work students are aware of the importance of reflection, and have the confidence to ensure they take a critically reflective stance to their work for the sake of themselves and the vulnerable people they will be supporting.

The development of reflective practice is an important skill for professional development; it also has the potential to improve emotional intelligence provided workers understand the conditions that should be in place for reflection to be encouraged (Ruch 2007). It is necessary for the curriculum to focus on the protective functions of reflection via reflective supervision. The ability to be in tune with your own and others emotions often in complex care environments requires empathy, a key component of reflective practice.

Empathy

Empathy is a term widely used in social work practice and education. It is often simply understood as the ability to be sensitive to what people are going through, to walk in their shoes and have an appreciation of an individual's experience. Empathy is often seen as an entirely positive phenomenon that will enhance practice in health and social care professionals. However, recent research suggests that empathy is more complex than this, and it is possible to over empathise i.e. to over identify or become over involved with service users. This has the potential to lead to empathetic distress, characterized by feelings of anxiety and discomfort that result from observing another's negative experience. In recent research, Grant & Kinman (2010) found that those experiencing empathetic distress tended to be more generally psychologically distressed and less resilient to stress.

It is therefore important for social workers to develop clear emotional boundaries between themselves and service users and avoid empathetic distress. The ability to be empathetic and contain personal emotions demands self-awareness and the ability to be emotionally attuned to one's own emotions and those of others. A certain degree of empathy is a pre-requisite for social work students, but the dangers of over empathizing and over involvement, and the likely impact on wellbeing, should be emphasised. Students can learn ways of managing distress more effectively in training through reflection and discussion.

Other social competencies

Additional social competencies required by social work students encompass a range of individual skills and traits. The possession of social skills, self-compassion and self-motivation, for example, are highlighted as important in enhancing emotional intelligence (Goleman 1998). The ability to develop and maintain social relationships is also important, as social support is an important resource in managing stress and

enhancing wellbeing. Morrison (2005) argues that it is often assumed that those entering the helping professions already have these social competencies, but this is a misconception. Professional training should, therefore, focus on developing and enhancing these competencies.

Ying (2008) argues that self-compassion is an important aspect of self-regulation. Knowing and understanding the importance of one's own feelings may also sustain empathy in a social worker and help them avoid empathetic distress. This is aligned with comments above that those who can self regulate are more likely to be resilient to stress and to stay the course in their career. Social workers also require self-confidence, sound communication skills and the ability to be assertive when necessary. These competencies support their ability to confidently and competently challenge issues in a non-destructive way.

In addition, a range of practical skills and techniques can also assist in managing stress. Thompson & Thompson (2008) argue that the development of time management skills, in particular, are not given sufficient attention in the social work curriculum, leaving social workers to sink or swim. Thompson & Thompson maintain that 'It is as if it is being assumed that, by throwing people in at the deep end of workload pressures, they will learn to swim' (Thompson & Thompson 2008:57). This lack of attention to developing the skills needed to manage complex workload pressures can lead to many drowning, and others barely keeping afloat.

Curriculum developments to enhance resilience and emotional intelligence

This chapter has argued that an understanding of resilience and emotional intelligence should inform the development of a revised social work curriculum in order to enhance wellbeing and ensure employability. Research findings have been presented above that have the potential to inform curriculum development. In order to address this gap in training and inform curriculum development, a series of Wellbeing Days has been piloted with social work students. The Wellbeing Days are designed to highlight the importance of resilience and expose students to a wide range of techniques which aim to strengthen emotional intelligence, reflective abilities, social competencies and stress coping strategies.

Students are exposed to a range of carefully selected workshops specifically designed to build resilience. These workshops are facilitated by specialists in their respective fields and have been carefully selected to ensure that students are introduced to some of the key skills that our initial diagnostic research suggests aid resilience to stress. A holistic approach is adopted encompassing a wide range of psychological, physical, cognitive, social and more spiritual techniques. Table 1 outlines the content of the individual workshops, together with their focus and rationale. It should be noted that these workshop sessions are only designed to introduce students to these techniques and

further signposting will be provided through the use of self-help books (bibliotherapy) and additional information. Guidance is also given as to how to access specialist services if necessary.

Workshop title	Focus	Rationale
Meditation and mindfulness	Mindfulness meditation is the ability to be able to focus on the present moment without distraction.	Mindfulness is a useful tool in regulating one's emotions (Kabat Zinn 2005). Research suggests it may enhance student social workers wellbeing (Ying 2009) and can reduce over identification (Bishop 2004) and empathetic distress
Cognitive Behavioural Therapy	CBT focuses on the way people think in order to help them develop strategies to manage emotional or behavioural problems.	By challenging unhelpful thinking and perceptions students can be enabled to better manage anxiety and problem solve more effectively- key skills in self-regulation (Goleman 2004).
Supervision for Reflective Practice	Supervision in social work often focuses merely on accountability and the importance of it as a protective mechanism is often underestimated.	Anxiety, confusion and fear of complexity are often experienced which can be reduced through reflection (Banks 2006). The role of reflective supervision in creating space for reflective and emotional thinking is also a crucial way of containing anxiety and creating conditions for workers to flourish (Ruch 2009).
Peer Coaching	Understanding the role of a buddy or coach in reducing stress can assist in stress management.	Peer coaching has been found to be particularly beneficial in sharing experiences and practices, managing personal problems and promoting wellbeing during stressful periods in students in other disciplines. (Short, Kinman, & Baker in press), and in assisting reflective practice in other professionals (Zwart et al 2007).
Time Management	This session focuses on how to create effective and realistic work-plans by prioritising workload and managing multiple priorities	Learning how to manage time effectively is a key factor in minimising stress, building resilience and improving quality of life.
Self Knowledge and Action Planning	Self-knowledge is a key factor in stress management. Gaining insight into what we do (or don't do) that make things better or worse during stressful times is often the first step in enhancing wellbeing.	By understanding and identifying the antecedents, behaviours and consequences relating to the stress experienced, action plans can be put in place to change beliefs and behaviours which cause stress.

Table 1: Workshops on the Wellbeing day

Ensuring resilience and employability- the story so far

It is early days for a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of the Wellbeing Days, however preliminary evaluation from the 2009 events suggests that students found them to be helpful and that a greater emphasis on developing these skills in earlier stages of their training may have been beneficial. Further evaluation and research is needed to ascertain whether skills developed during the Wellbeing Days are assisting in enhancing emotional intelligence and resilience and employability.

We also plan to profile the resilience and emotional intelligence of students prior to their attendance at the Wellbeing Days so that training can be more precisely targeted and their competencies evaluated over time. In this way, the effectiveness of any curriculum change or intervention can be established. How the ELLI tool discussed by Thompson in Chapter 1 might be adapted for this purpose will be examined. It is envisaged that students could be guided towards particular stress management strategies that focus on enhancing skills and competencies that are under developed and require nurturing rather than choosing sessions that focus on competencies that are already well developed.

Conclusion

Employability means that students do not merely possess the resources and skills to obtain a job, but also the capacity to be able to retain that job, enjoy their work and seek new opportunities for professional development and growth. Social work and other helping professionals require particular skills and attributes to cope in potentially stressful working contexts.

The introduction of specific training to nurture skills in students and enhance resilience is critical for the future of the profession. One way of achieving this is through the introduction of Wellbeing Days, or other approaches that aim to embed these competencies within the formal curriculum. The effectiveness of the different approaches discussed in this chapter and the success in developing resilience in the longer term can then be more validly assessed. Whilst working in a safe supportive environment is a key factor in workers ability to cope with stress, giving potential employees some proven tools and coping mechanisms may enable them to not only gain employment but sustain it – so they thrive not just survive.

About the authors

Louise Grant is a Senior Lecturer in Social Work at the University of Bedfordshire. Her teaching and research interests are in working with children and families, managing the emotional demands of complex social work and reflective practice. Her background is in Children's Services and she has worked as both as a social worker and manager in a

number of Local Authorities and in the voluntary sector. During this time she has become increasingly aware that social work demands personal qualities, skills and resilience as well as supportive organisational structures, to ensure that workers are able to cope with the emotional demands of the job. As a consequence she is committed to ensuring that social workers in training are give the skills to prepare them for the complexity and realities of social work practice and able to be resilient when faced with challenging situations.

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Chapter 7

Inspiring Registered Nurse Mentors through creative Teaching and Learning

Melsina Makaza

Abstract

The assessment of students in practice by registered nurse mentors contributes significantly to the development of nurses who are 'fit for purpose, fit for practice and fit for award', which is the ultimate goal of pre-registration nurse education. Not only do mentors in clinical practice need to keep up-to-date with key curriculum developments, they need to be supported in their roles and be valued for their continuous input into the practice education of pre-registration student nurses. Continuing professional development of mentors can be facilitated by partnership working between higher education institutions and placement providers. One effective method of creating such learning time is to get mentors away from their extremely busy clinical practice areas, and bring them into a creative teaching and learning environment where they can meet in groups and network with other mentors. Since time is a precious commodity, the individuals facilitating such a creative teaching and learning environment, need to ensure that the time spent networking and discussing with other mentors is engaging, interactive, motivational and meaningful. This chapter explores a variety of creative teaching and learning methods that were used at a Mental Health Partnership Day (MHPD). The purpose of this one-day event was to support registered nurse mentors in the development of their ability to engage in effective mentorship and competency based assessment of student nurse performance in practice.

Keywords

Mentorship; pre-registration nurse education; creative teaching and learning.

Introduction

> "I am a registered mental health nurse working on a very busy acute admissions ward for adults experiencing severe and enduring mental health problems. I am also a registered mentor and I am currently mentoring a 2nd year student. I am due to attend my annual mentor update, I have been nominated as a 'Sign-Off' mentor. The ward is so busy at the moment, we are short staffed, I am wondering where I am going to get the time to attend a mentor update? Even if I do attend, will it really be worth my time?" (Example scenario)

In my role as a Practice Educator (PE) in mental health nursing, I hear various versions of the statement cited above as I engage in regular follow-up visits to registered nurse mentors in clinical practice. This is in relation to the pre-registration nurse education and mentorship in practice. The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) defines a mentor as a registrant, in nursing or midwifery, who has successfully completed an NMC-approved mentor preparation programme, and has successfully achieved the knowledge, skills and competence required to mentor pre-registration students (NMC, 2004). Mentors play a key role in providing high quality clinical practice placements for student nurses in order to produce skilled nurses (Driscoll et al, 2010). The current pre-registration nursing curriculum is divided into fifty percent theory and fifty percent practice. This gives students the opportunity to spend half of the programme engaging in classroom learning within the University of Bedfordshire and the other half engaging in experiential learning in clinical practice areas as facilitated by placement providers. It is within this context that student nurses can learn to deliver care to real people with real problems in real clinical settings whilst under the supervision of a registered nurse mentor (NMC, 2006).

In the current healthcare climate, with so many demands being made on the registered nurses' time, there is a high expectation that registered nurses must effectively engage in the mentorship of student nurses (Wilkes, 2006). The NMC Standards to support learning and assessment in practice (2008) introduced the additional notion of the 'Sign-Off' mentor status which highlights the accountability of nurses who mentor students during their last placement, immediately prior to registration (Middleton and Duffy, 2009). The Sign-Off mentor is responsible for making judgements about whether a student has achieved the required standards of proficiency for safe and effective practice, so they can be entered onto the NMC register at the end of their three year pre-registration nursing programme. Sign-off mentors have been a requirement for all students commencing NMC approved programmes from September 2007 and who are due to complete the programme in September 2010 (NMC, 2008). According to a qualitative study conducted with community nurse mentors by Middleton and Duffy (2009), some mentors felt anxious about undertaking the role of the Sign Off-mentor. This being the case, mentors need to be supported, developed and valued in their roles and indeed, this takes time.

The NMC Standards (2008) strongly recommend allocated learning time for mentor activity. Since time is a precious commodity, the individuals facilitating such a creative

teaching and learning environment, need to ensure that the time spent networking and discussing with other mentors is inspiring, engaging, interactive, motivational and meaningful. It should give mentors support and encouragement to continue developing their mentorship practice. Effective mentorship enables nursing students to strengthen their personal and professional qualities in order to develop their knowledge and skills required of a competent practitioner (Dadge and Casey, 2009). Inspired mentors breed inspired students. Not only will this benefit the student nurse when they become a registered nurse, it also benefits the profession and ultimately the patients, service users, families and their carers. This chapter discusses the significance of annual Mental Health Partnership Days (MHPD) and explores various creative teaching and learning activities that were employed at such an event in November 2009.

Background

According to the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), Higher Education Institutions have the key responsibility to work in partnership with placement providers, in order to ensure support for the students, mentors and the clinical learning environment through allocated roles such as link lecturers, personal lecturers, practice teachers and practice educators (RCN, 2007). The placement provider in this instance was the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Mental Health Foundation NHS Trust (OBMH). OBMH have appointed a Learning Environment Lead (LEL) role for this very purpose.   The LEL works in partnership with the University's Buckinghamshire based Practice Educators (PE) whose role is to facilitate teaching and learning in practice as well as in the classroom (Jowett and McMullan, 2007). A 'Mentor Knowledge and Skills Survey' that was conducted by the LEL in June 2008 highlighted key priority areas that mentors in practice needed support with: student assessment (including failing a student who is not performing); developing professionalism; time for mentorship and the need to feel valued as a mentor by both the University and OBMH (Ireson, 2008). Yearly partnership days, which are developed using a similar framework as one-day conferences, are effective methods of setting aside a significant amount of time devoted solely to engaging mentors in a creative teaching and learning environment. The purpose of this one-day event is to support registered nurse mentors in the development of their ability to engage in effective mentorship and competency based assessment of student nurse performance in practice (Fordham, 2005).

Mental Health Partnership Day planning

Having been involved in the planning and preparation of Mental Health Partnership Days since January 2005, the LEL and PE team wanted the 2008/2009 MHPDs to be different and creative. This developmental thinking was in line with the newly developed University of Bedfordshire Curriculum review for 2008 – or CRe8 for short. CRe8, which was developed in September 2008, had three aims: the provision of a curriculum that excites, motivates and engages; the development of students who are independent self-regulatory learners and who are prepared for the real world beyond

the university (Atlay, 2010). We sought to create an environment where mentors would want to leave behind their busy practice, to attend and focus on mentorship, and to leave the partnership day feeling valued and encouraged to continue mentoring students. The LEL and PE team considered the practicalities for mentors to be able to attend such an event. To make it as easy as possible for them to attend two venues were used (Aylesbury and High Wycombe) that were geographically central to where most of the mental health placement areas were located.

In the current educational literature, there is much emphasis on what is required of mentors and how they can best meet the needs of the students (Middleton & Duffy, 2009; Cassidy, 2009; Woodcock, 2009). As the role of the mentor continues to develop, with additional requirements such as the Sign-off role being added, more attention needs to be focused on the needs of mentors, who in many cases are anxious about their roles, and how best they can have those needs met in a supportive and developmental way. In theory, the responsibility for students learning in practice should be shared and spread across several roles, for example ward managers, specialist nurses, nurse practitioners, lead nurses, modern matrons, practice educators, practice development nurses and lecturers. However, the reality is that mentors primarily lead learning on a day-to-day basis, although they may not always have the necessary support, training and capacity to do so (O'Driscoll et al, 2010). As the LEL and PE team, we were in essence, echoing one of the many questions raised by Atlay et al (2008):

> How do you support staff in a move from didactic teaching to being a facilitator of learning when this is a much more challenging role and when there is an increasing pressure on their time? (p. 232)

The programme for the 2008/2009 MHPDs was developed in order to begin to address the issue of supporting mentors by engaging them in creative teaching and learning in a manner that made it a meaningful use of their time.

Gaining and sustaining mentor interest

Nurse mentors are very busy in their practice and it is a compulsory NMC requirement that mentors attend an annual update (NMC, 2008). Compulsory attendance may mean that for some mentors, their motivation to attend may be quite poor. One of the most important elements of the teaching and learning process is the gaining of learner interest and sustaining it (Clow and Dawn, 2007). The challenge for the LEL and PE team was to design a programme that gained mentor interest and sustained it for a whole day. For this reason, the team developed creative teaching and learning activities that reinforced how people naturally learn (Muijs and Reynolds, 2005). The LEL and PE team recognised that registered nurses give up valuable clinical practice time in order to attend the MHPD. If the event is predictable, dull and uninspiring, then it is unlikely that the mentors who do attend will engage and benefit from attending.

Mental Health Partnership Day preparation.

In the planning and preparation phase, the team also recognised that not everyone, student nurses and mentors alike, learn in the same way. There are key individual differences. People perceive and gain knowledge differently, they form ideas and think differently and they act differently (Duff and Duffy, 2002). For learning to be beneficial, it is not simply about remembering things. Learning is an active process where the learner makes sense of what they are learning in preparation for use in real life settings, which in essence is what mentorship in practice is all about (Petty, 1998). Such thinking is reflected in the SOAR process as illustrated in Table 1 below. It was proposed and developed by Kumar (2007) and aspects of this process were used to help mentors to think about any activity on terms of Self, Opportunity, Aspirations and Results (SOAR) (see Atlay, 2010).

The SOAR Process	
Self	What attitude, skills, knowledge and experience do I bring to this activity?
Opportunity	What does this activity give me the opportunity to develop, experience?
Aspirations	What do I, personally, want to get out of this activity?
Results	What did I learn? What will I carry forward? What would I do differently if I was to do this again?

Table 1: The SOAR Process (Kumar, 2007 and see page 82 this volume)

Learning by doing

From a historical perspective, there has been great interest in the various ways that individuals learn dating as far back as 551 BCE. For instance, the Chinese Philosopher Confucius is credited as stating:

> I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand (Petty, 1998:153).

Chickering & Gamson, (1987) echo the same sentiments with regards to how students learn in higher education:

> Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just sitting in classes listening to teachers, memorizing pre-packaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write reflectively about it and relate it to past experiences and apply it in their daily lives. They must take what

they learn as part of themselves. (Chickering & Gamson, 1987:3 cited by Atlay et al, 2008:244)

If the need for realistic, engaging and meaningful learning is true of university students in a classroom setting, how much more so is it needed for registered nurses engaging in mentorship in clinical practice? The move towards inclusive teaching has resulted in student centred learning, where students engage in active and motivational learning (Clow and Dawn, 2006). The same principles should be applied to mentors. According to Sotto (2003) most people do not like to sit and listen for hours at a time when they are trying to learn something new. Using a motivational, humanistic teaching approach with plenty of interaction, group activity and participation (Petty, 2006), mentors are able to learn more about how to mentor and assess students in practice in a reliable and valid way.

Helping mentors to understand student motivation

In the delivery of the MHPDs, the LEL and PE team helped mentors to understand student motivation by engaging them in creative teaching and learning. It is understood that the process of learning may be influenced by a multitude of factors including the individual learner's ability, motivation, life experiences, attitude, age, home life, previous learning experience and learning style (Armitage et al, 2003). From a student nurse perspective, if the student experiences fear, boredom, loss of hope or has had a negative previous learning experience, they may feel demotivated. Thus, our motivators may be dictated primarily by the circumstances in which we find ourselves (Wallace, 2007). If this is true of the student, then it is highly likely to be true for the mentor. The expectancy-value theory of motivation helps educators to understand that if anyone is to engage in a learning activity, they need to both value the outcome and to expect success in achieving that outcome (Murphy, 2006). The LEL and PE team felt that if mentors valued the outcome of the MHPDs and experienced success in further developing and improving their skills to engage in competency based assessment, then they could use their positive experience to improve their own mentorship practice.

In addition to this, the motivational theory proposed by Dweck (2000)(cited by Petty, 2006) argues that educators need to give students a belief that they can be successful and they can make it in their studies in order for them to be motivated. Similarly, the LEL and PE team gave mentors the belief that they can be successful at mentoring, that they would be supported in their assessment of student performance in practice (Cassidy, 2009), even at times when they may have the challenge of failing a student in their practice (Woodcock, 2009). Nursing students do require regular motivational input throughout their journey, because the initial motivation and enthusiasm that student nurses may have had at the start of the programme may weaken. They may also be at risk of failing. It is at these times, that the skill of re-motivating students becomes really crucial (Murphy, 2006). Similar ideas are currently being considered for social work students who are mentored in practice by PE's. Grant (2010) argues for the need

to enhance well being in social work students, preparing the next generation by building their resilience and she explores this concept in her chapter in this book. Perhaps this is an area that could be further developed for pre-registration nursing students, in partnership with mentors in practice.

Understanding how students learn in practice

In addition to a consideration of how motivation is essential to student learning, the LEL and PE team engaged in a dialogue about how students learn in practice. Some students can be active learners – they believe that they are to take responsibility and ownership of their own learning (Petty, 1998). This has often been an assumption that is made about the adult learner, (Gravells, 2007) hence the androgogy approach to teaching is often applied to adults who are seen as a rich resource for learning, adaptive and self believing (Knowles, 1980). In busy placement environments, mentors often value such a student, as it makes it much easier to facilitate that particular student's teaching and learning experience.

Conversely, some students can be passive learners who hold the belief that learning is something to be done to them by expert mentors, lecturers and practice educators (Petty, 1998). This type of student may not be so well received in busy practice areas. The LEL and PE team reminded mentors that the adult learner may fluctuate between passive learning and active learning, which means it is important for the mentor to encourage students to realise that they can and at times, need to teach themselves *with* the help of the mentor (Knowles, 1990). Although pre-registration student nurses are adult learners, at times they become passive learners when out in clinical practice because they expect their practice mentor to tell them exactly what they need to do and to know, without really taking an initiative in their own learning (Tiwari et al, 2005).

Creative teaching and learning strategies

The National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCE) offer this definition of creativity:

> First [the characteristics of creativity] always involve thinking and behaving imaginatively. Second, overall this imaginative activity is purposeful: that is, it is directed to achieving an objective. Third, these processes must generate something original. Fourth, the outcome must be of value in relation to the objective. (NACCE, 1994:4 cited by Eastwood, et al, 2009:119).

Creative teaching and learning aims to provide learners with the opportunity to explore, to 'think outside the box' and to take responsibility for their own learning. This can be exciting and liberating, but at the same time, it can involve a degree of risk taking as it might take both educators and learners down unexpected routes. Nevertheless, it

enables the learner to value their own ideas sufficiently in partnership with the educator, with a view to generating meaningful ideas and insights that can applied in the lives of the learners (Eastwood et al, 2009). The creative teaching and learning strategies used at the MHPDs are highlighted in Table 2 below. Some of the activities were short, easy to prepare and quite simple to implement. Their simplicity, however, did not disguise the potential that they offered as important ways of enhancing teaching or supporting learning (Blanchard, 2009).

Café Style learning

The Café Style method of creative teaching and learning is designed to arouse mentor curiosity, imagination and motivation as it enabled mentors to engage in a meaningful conversation whilst exploring issues that really matter with regards to mentoring in pre-registration nurse education (The World Café Community, 2002). Using a Learning Café theme for the MHPDs brought fun into the learning activities, bringing mentors together in order to get them networking and sharing ideas in an informal but structured way. This encouraged collaboration between the mentors and the development of new approaches to problems, which everyone could work through (Eastwood et al, 2009). The underlying principles of this creative method of teaching and learning are to create a hospitable space; to encourage everyone's contributions; to connect diverse perspectives; to listen to insights and share discoveries (The World Café Community, 2002).

The themes that were explored and the strategies that were used during the MHPDs are illustrated in Table 2. The physical layout of the rooms used for the MHPDs resembled a Café. This created a relaxed atmosphere, which offered mentors refreshment from the very busy and often stressful clinical environment. Lunch and refreshments were provided. Café hosts around the world emphasize the power and importance of creating a hospitable space – one that feels safe and inviting. When people are comfortable to be themselves, they do their most creative thinking, speaking and listening (World Café Community, 2002). At the end of the day, mentors gave feedback which stated that they felt welcomed and valued in their roles by both the UoB and OBMH.

With regard to exploration of questions that really matter, the World Café Community (2002) suggest that finding and framing questions that matter to those who are participating in the Learning Café is an area where thought and attention can produce profound results. Several questions may be developed to support a logical progression of discovery throughout several rounds of dialogue. As part of a ten minute warm up activity, the LEL and PE team developed seven key questions that were printed on different coloured cards. The cards were displayed on seven tables which were covered with paper table cloths. Each table had a generous supply of multi-coloured pens, markers, crayons and highlighter pens for the delegates to use.

Mentorship Themes Explored During The Mental Health Partnership Days 2009	Creative Teaching And Learning Strategies Used.
The challenges and rewards of mentoring student nurses	The Learning Café: Writing on table cloths – exploring 6 Key Questions
Understanding Criterion Referencing in Student practice assessment	Tower Building Exercise
Enhancing Student Assessment Skills in Practice	Role Play and simulation
Failing to Challenge Student Nurse Performance	Reflective Group Discussion
Preparing to Be a "Sign-Off" Mentor 2010	Story telling
Implementing Inter-Professional Learning in Practice with student nurses	Twitter Board
Valuing Mentors in Practice	

Table 2: Mental Health Partnership Day Themes and Strategies Used

Mentors were encouraged to move from table to table and to write their answers on the table cloths (Eastwood et al, 2009). This approach encouraged everyone's contribution and gave delegates the opportunity to move between tables. They were able to meet new mentors and link their discoveries to widening circles of thoughts and perspectives, which created the possibility of developing surprising new insights (World Café Community, 2002). This was a colourful and enjoyable way of gathering interesting qualitative data about the joys and the challenges of mentoring students. This encouraged mentors to explore their ideas about the emotive subject of challenging and managing the failing student (Duffy, 2003; Woodcock, 2009).

The use of story telling as an activity enabled mentors to discuss embarrassing and challenging aspects of mentorship in a safe and relaxed environment. Mentors were encouraged to continue their story telling to each other during the course of the day. This resulted in a great deal of discussion. In order to capture some of the themes, mentors were encouraged to use post-it notes to write down any significant ideas for further exploration at the end of the day. The post it notes would be placed on a notice board which we named a 'Twitter Board', an idea adopted from the Twitter.com website.

Table 3 shows some of the key themes that emerged as mentors responded to the questions.

Introductions and Expectations of The Day	
Seven Key Questions	**Mentor Responses**
What do you do well as a practitioner in your clinical practice?	> "Engaging in the delivery of evidence based patient centred care" > "Providing a quality learning environment"
What do you find most challenging about mentoring students?	> "Having enough time to mentor students" > "Working with an unmotivated and disinterested student" > "Failing students"
What do you find most rewarding about mentoring students?	> "Seeing students develop personally and professionally" > "When they become registered nurses" > "They keep us updated and challenge our practice"
What is the most embarrassing moment that you have ever had whilst mentoring students?	> "Students falling asleep in practice" > "Students with poor personal hygiene" > "Students reacting badly to feedback given during practice assessment"
What "one word" would you use to describe an outstanding placement?	"Welcoming"; "Organised"; "Supportive"
What "one word" would you use to describe an outstanding mentor?	"Understanding"; "Knowledgeable"; "Skilled"

Table 3: The Challenges and Rewards of Mentoring Student Nurses – Key Themes

Teaching and learning about the principles of assessment

Tower building exercise

This was designed by Trevor Austin (Senior Lecturer – Post Graduate Medical School UoB) to underscore the way in which the validity and reliability of assessment activity works in practice. The mentors who attended the MHPD enjoyed the session as it was a group bonding and fun exercise, the important messages were about what mentors and assessors are looking for in practice assessment tasks and design (validity) and how well mentors make judgements using practice assessment criteria (reliability). (Austin, 2009). Table 4 shows details of the tower building exercise and an accompanying marking grid.

Tower Building Exercise – Instructions Given to MHPD Delegates

Aim: To explore the practical application of team-work and the development of an assessment tool.

Objectives: To build the tallest tower.

To develop an assessment strategy to mark your own and another team's tower.

Divide in to teams of 6 (Give your team a name).

Using the blank grid, develop your marking strategy.

Build a tower from the resources provided (paper & sellotape).

Make the tower as tall as possible (highest tower wins a prize)

Using your marking grid, assess and grade your tower.

Move to the tower built by the group to the right of you, assess and grade it using your marking grid.

Feedback the results to the group.

Assessment: What were the problems in developing your own assessment strategy?

How does this relate to you when you are in practice?

Sample Marking Grid

Master Craftsman Grade	G (0) F (1,2) E(3,4)	D- (5) D(6) D+ (7)	C- (8) C (9) C+ (10)	B- (11)B(12)B+(13)	A- (14)A(15)A+(16)
Aspect of Work	Fail	Borderline/Low Pass	Pass	Good Pass	Excellent Pass
Stability	If it does not stand up	You can blow it over	Only falls over when Knocked	Only wobbles when knocked	Stays upright
Verticality	Horizontal 0%	Between 1% - 15%	Between 16% - 25%	Between 26%-35%	Upright 45%
Aesthetics	No Design / scruffy taping	Neat taping / some attempt at design	Decorated / some design features present	Thoughtfully decorated / recognisable design features	Tastefully decorated / well designed
Effective use of resources	Poor and ineffective use of resources	A lot of tape and paper used Indiscriminately	An attempt to use resources to their maximum potential	Resources used well but evidence of over use in certain areas	Minimal resources used effectively to achieve goal

Table 4: Tower Building Exercise – Instructions and Marking Grid Given to MHPD Delegates

Assessment skills workshop

The Tower Building Activity led on into the Assessment Skills Workshop. The aim of this workshop was to engage mentors in a role-play, where they demonstrated how they actually assess their students and give them valid and reliable feedback on their performance in clinical practice. It was also an opportunity to introduce new practice assessment documentation to the mentors as well as to share and disseminate good practice. Mentors worked in groups and were encouraged to take on any one of the following roles: student nurse, named mentor, associate mentor, scribe, timekeeper, team spokesperson. Group members were given clear pre-written instructions of what and how they were to re-enact their scenarios. Table heads, who were University and OBMH staff were at each table and they facilitated the group discussion that took place during the role play. This was well received. Mentors gave feedback on how much they learned from seeing and handling new documentation in a simulated situation.

Feedback from mentors about the Partnership Days

Overall, the MHPDs were positively evaluated as can be see in Table 5. A total of 65 evaluation forms were received and each mentor was given an information pack with details of all the issues that were discussed at the MHPD.

How would you rate the day overall?				
Very Poor	Poor	Satisfactory	Very Satisfactory	Excellent
0	0	3	35	28

Table 5: Overall rating of the mental health partnership days

Table 6 gives details of some of the comments extracted from the written feedback

> "What I liked best about the day is the presentation, the content, the approach and involvement" > "All sessions relevant to mentor needs and role." > "Good involvement of mentors and explaining what they need to do for the students." > "It was worth attending and it was motivating for my future experience with students." > "It was a worthwhile day, it made me feel valued and highlighted the contribution we make as mentors."	> "Creative workshops" > "Table layout was well thought out." > "I liked the Student assessment workshop." > "Interactive and educative sessions" (9 mentors) > "I liked the free floating discussion." > "I liked the pack activities." > "Boosted my confidence, and gave me lots of resources." > "I liked the Building the tower exercise." > "Fun but a very effective learning forum." > "I liked networking and sharing experiences and methods." (4 mentors)

Table 6: Mentor comments about the creative teaching and learning methods

Conclusions

The concept of creative teaching and learning in nurse mentor education was explored in this chapter. It was recognised that it is important to engage and sustain mentor interest in developing their mentorship skills. The notion of getting them away from busy practice areas into creative learning environments was explored under the framework of the MHPDs. Strategies such as the Café Style of Learning, Tower Building Exercises and Story Telling were used to engage mentors in a dialogue about the challenges and the joys of mentoring students. Feedback from mentors who attended the MHPDs suggest that creative teaching and learning did engage and sustain mentor interest, it made mentors feel valued and that it is worth developing. Inspired mentors breed inspired students, who are the future nursing workforce and will ultimately benefit patients, service users, relatives and carers.

About the author

Melsina Makasa is a registered Mental Health Nurse and has been a Practice Educator since January 2005. Her role is to facilitate teaching and learning in clinical practice as well as in the classroom. She teaches mainly on the mental health pre-registration nursing programme but also has input in the teaching of students from other fields of practice such as midwifery, paediatric, learning disabilities and adult nursing. Melsina actively facilitates teaching and learning with registered nurses who have the responsibility of mentoring and assessing student nurses in practice. She is interested in the development of mentors who are capable of conducting reliable and valid competency based student nurse assessments in practice.

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Chapter 8

In a state of FLUX

Alin Dobrea

Abstract

FLUX 2010 was a hugely successful event that brought together students from 33 British universities to compete in a dynamic business challenge. The national inter-university competition saw over 200 top student entrepreneurs taking part in the Grand Final, hosted by the Nottingham Trent University's Enterprise Development Unit - The Hive. The University of Bedfordshire triumphed, despite stiff competition from 32 other universities across the UK, to be crowned winners of FLUX 2010 and to scoop the first prize award. I was part of this winning team and in this chapter, I attempt to analyse my experience of participating in this competition with the application of experiential learning theory.

Keywords

Reflection; experiential learning; simulations; employability.

Introduction

Over 30,000 students from 100 universities have competed in the FLUX competition since its inception 5 years ago. It is described as 'the largest student enterprise and employability competition in the UK' that 'bridges the gap between education and the world of work' (www.flux500.com).

FLUX 500 is a competition which runs over the course of three days, culminating with a head to head pitch in front of a packed auditorium. Teams of six, accompanied by a university champion compete for the coveted title of FLUX National Champions and a £500 cash prize for each member of the team. In addition, the participating students get the chance to boost their employability skills, meet recruiters and enhance their CV, whilst meeting new people and having fun.

I will be reflecting on my experience of participating in FLUX in this chapter.

FLUX, CRe8 and Experiential Learning

The team that represented the University of Bedfordshire in the 2010 competition was sponsored by the Bridges Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL). One of the main outcomes of the work from the Bridges CETL has been The Curriculum Review 2008 (CRe8). CRe8 articulates the University's approach to creating an environment which supports effective teaching and learning. It identifies five inter-related strands; Personalised learning; Curriculum; Realistic learning; Employability and Assessment. These strands are designed to engage, motivate and prepare students for further study and life beyond university. These strands fit congruently with the structure and philosophy behind the FLUX competition, in particular the Employability and Realistic Learning strands.

The CRe8 structure states that a Realistic Learning experience involves activities that are – meaningful; active; challenging; reflective and collaborative. A curriculum which supports Employability involves; vocational relevance and applicability; developing a career orientation; personal skills; attributes and independence.

In the pre-event preparation the trainers used Assessment Centre approaches and activities to develop a range of employability attributes as previously used with success at the University of Bedfordshire (Kumar, 2010). I feel that these activities were invaluable in this context and helped the students understand what they are being assessed on when participating in assessment centres.

Underpinning competitions in learning environments is the theory of experiential learning. Kolb sees experiential learning as, 'the process that links education, work and personal development' (Weil et al 1989). He 'stresses the need for learning

environments to foster opportunities for learning, that enable students to work with, and build upon, learning experiences in a variety of ways' (ibid).

Kolb suggests that all learning begins with:

1. Concrete experiences, this leads us to make;
2. Observations and reflections, from these we develop;
3. Understanding and skills
4. Which we then apply in new situations (The Learning from Experience Trust, 1987)

I would agree with Moizer et al (2006a, 2006b) who argue that business strategy simulation games give rise to a high level of learning and will now show what I have learnt from participating in the FLUX competition which is a type of simulation activity.

FLUX preparation and internal selection process

The Bridges Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) and Centre for Personal and Career Development (CPCD) advertised the FLUX 500 competition throughout all the faculties in the university and encouraged students to register their interest by sending in a 250 word application letter. The selection process saw 36 students progress from open invitation and applications to a series of assessment workshops culminating with a final challenge where the students had to develop an elaborate business plan similar to the national FLUX 500 event.

The internal FLUX launch event took place on 30th November 2009 and the 36 selected students were invited to this. The event gave me the chance to see FLUX videos from the previous year, read the feedback written by students who participated in 2009, but also, more importantly, provided me with the opportunity to meet the other applicants.

As part of the event we divided into smaller groups and were asked to present ourselves in an 'elevator pitch' exercise. The main idea behind this event was to get to know each other in terms of personality, achievements and past experiences and see what skills, knowledge and attributes we can bring to the table. We had just one minute to present and naturally some of the students emerged as being more confident and experienced in public speaking. I thoroughly enjoyed this challenge and, even though we were put on the spot, I thought that the standard of most of the candidates was really high.

A series of assessment workshops[1] were put in place in January and February 2010 to further train and prepare the students who applied for FLUX.

The series of assessment workshops was focused on building students' capabilities through a process which replicated aspects of the national FLUX 500 competition and was supported by staff from Bridges CETL, CPCD, and lecturers. The students developed skills including business awareness, decision-making, team working, communication and presentation skills.

Out of the original 36 students who were selected for the assessment workshops, 21 progressed to the internal competition business challenge event. The 21 students left were divided into four teams. The allocation of the students in teams was determined by the way they responded to the tasks and activities in the previous workshops, having been assessed throughout these.

The four teams were given the challenge to develop a comprehensive business plan and pitch their ideas in 10 minutes to a set of business experts invited by the University. This replicated the format of the FLUX competition and it was definitely invaluable as a learning experience. The standard of the final presentations delivered by each team was very high and after careful consideration our assessors selected the team of six to represent the university at the national FLUX competition, comprising of individuals who have different strengths, backgrounds and experiences.

After the final six students were selected they had to go through a final test before competing in the national finals of FLUX. They were assigned as the new board of directors for a business that was facing serious economic problems and negative press. They had to identify the issues that caused this and propose a new strategy to turn the company around in a press conference-style grilling from a senior business person invited by the university. The exercise required both business acumen and creativity, and each of the team members took a different role which they had to support during the press conference. All in all, it was a great team building exercise and gave the six students the chance to see how they functioned as a team and which roles suited each of them.

Looking back, I can now see the real value of all of the activities organised before the FLUX competition in Nottingham and they certainly had a positive impact on the team and contributed to the overall confidence and development of the team members.

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[1] 'What makes a good team?' – 18th of January 2010; 'Assessment Centres' – 9th of February 2010, 'Business Challenge Activity' – 18th of February 2010; 'Introducing the Business Challenge' – 25th of February 2010; 'Business Challenge Final' – 9th of March 2010; 'Special Coaching Session for Finalists' - 17th of March 2010

FLUX 2010 – the activities of the winning team

FLUX 2010 ran over the course of three days, culminating with a head to head pitch in front of a packed auditorium. The six students competing for University of Bedfordshire were Alin Dobrea, Alexia Grech and Simona Stasiulyte, all second year BA Advertising and Marketing Communications students; Greg Dorban, second year BA Marketing; Manjunath Basapoor, Masters of Business Administration student; and Batjargal Sugarjav, MSc in International Business and Management. The team was organised, accompanied and championed by Paul Harrison (see Chapter 9), Arti Kumar and Ina Maslejova, who had all been involved in the recruitment and coaching sessions.

On day one the teams were fully briefed and started developing their business plan using the business strategy game 'Xing'. The students had to act as a group of newly recruited graduates working at Remploy, a large UK-based organisation that provides employment services and employment to people with barriers to work. The challenge was to develop a framework for a new business division of the company that will be able to generate significant income and profits over time. The two proposed entry markets were identified as food and travel & tourism although other sectors would have been considered if supported by well-reasoned arguments.

We initially conducted a market research and analysis on the two proposed sectors by using online Key Note reports. We discussed our findings and after careful consideration we discarded the travel & tourism industry because we thought the options are limited within this industry in correlation to the requirements of the brief but also because we observed that a big part of the competing teams were doing something around this sector (e.g. hotels, leisure). Our research on the food & catering industry yielded some interesting facts. The food and drinks market was still growing even during the recession. We looked at some of the sub-markets and found that organic food and drink account for 2% of the total grocery market. Moreover, organic baby and toddler foods have achieved a leading 45% share of the total branded baby foods market.

We undertook further research and found out that the value of the organic baby food market is around £100m and thus, we would only need to attain 10% of this market to have the capability of generating £10m revenue within 5 years. This was one of the most important requirements of the brief and we came to the conclusion that it is quite plausible to have 10% of the market in 5 years because there is plenty of space for competition in this market.

We decided to create a new 100% organic baby food product called 'Yummy'. The challenge was how to meet the other requirements of the brief with this idea. Remploy provides employment opportunities to those who have barriers to work so we thought we should work in partnerships with dedicated farms and rent a factory for processing the baby food where all the hired employees will be trained and subsequently gain National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in different areas of our business (e.g. NVQ Food Manufacture, NVQ Warehouse & Storage etc). This way we could skill our

workers, help them leave our job with a qualification and more employment opportunities whilst creating a new premium product for the market.

We knew we were on the right track but had to leave the Nottingham Trent University to get ready for the dinner after only three hours of thinking. We still had some gaps and inconsistencies in our idea but we felt the foundation was there.

Looking back, I think an important aspect to designing our idea was the fact that we understood that it was in our best interest as a team to consider and analyse everyone's ideas and question these until we found innovative solutions that worked effectively. Even though at times we were forced to make snap decisions due to time constraints, working under pressure helped us form a strongly knitted group. Hertel and Millis (2002) argue that simulations promote student motivation and participation because events can unfold and decisions can be made at an accelerated pace. Burns and Gentry (1998) also support the use of simulations. Their "tension-to-learn" theory for experiential learning holds that "the learner passes through the following phases: (a) current state, (b) motivation, (c) experience, (d) legitimization and (e) new state" (p.141). It has been found that most students actually cycle through these phases several times during the course of a simulation (Hertel and Millis, 2002).

The group decision-making process worked really well and everybody contributed to the task, but also the way we divided the workload made a difference. I think this was partly due to the coaching workshops organised during the internal university events. Looking back, the workshops played an important role in helping us hone our team working skills by giving us the chance to exercise different roles with different people. At FLUX, we divided the business into different areas (marketing, management, operations, logistics, HR, and finance), where each of us was responsible for one of these but kept collaborating on the big idea together.

We stayed up until 2am that night to further develop our business plan. Our idea was taking shape, but we still had several things to work on. We all agreed not to stay up really late and to sort out all the glitches in our plan after we would have the expert meetings and receive feedback from them the following day. The meetings with the experts would only last 10 minutes each so we prepared the specific questions and issues we wanted to ask them beforehand.

On day two the teams spent time with experts from different fields, refining their business plan and assessing where they need to make improvements. We thought the business meetings were really helpful to refine our plan. We took on board most of the suggestions from the business experts and adapted our business plan accordingly. We had around one hour to refine our idea after the business meetings and we were confident. We thought we had a strong idea that met the brief and this was probably the most important thing. It helped us sell the product, because if we hadn't believed in our product it would have been almost impossible to sell it to anyone.

We boiled down our strategy into one simple promise –'to up-skill and train disadvantaged people by providing them with NVQ certifications whilst involving them in the full production process of premium organic baby food'. After the meetings, the teams were divided into four strands and got five minutes to pitch their business idea to a panel of business 'dragons'. At the end of the presentations, each team faced rigorous questioning and received feedback.

I thought all the other teams in our strand had impressive well-thought through ideas and really good overall presentations, but at the same time we did quite well with three members speaking during the presentation and all the others engaging the 'dragons' during the intense questioning round. I think we impressed everybody by managing to respond to literally every single question and successfully defend our business plan from serious cross-questioning by the panel of judges.

After the preliminary heats, all the 33 teams were recalled into the main theatre where four teams, winners of their strands, were chosen to compete in a final head-to-head challenge. We were elated to find out that we were one of the final four teams after a closely fought heat. We went to the final challenge alongside teams from University College Plymouth St. Mark and St. John, Nottingham Trent University and the University of Bristol.

All the finalists were then escorted outside the lecture theatre and given a new challenge. The challenge was to select a strategic partner that would invest 50% of the funds that we had and justify the decision we made. After careful consideration, we realised that Waitrose matched our business ethos perfectly and could work as a partner for implementing our idea. With only 15 minutes to prepare, the teams had to pitch head to head in front of a packed auditorium comprising more than 250 people and face a tense press conference-style grilling from four of the toughest business experts. Our presentation went great, and once again we were put on the spot during the questioning session but managed to defend our idea and decisions. After all the votes were counted we came out as FLUX 2010 champions.

Winning was an extraordinary feeling. To come number one out of over 30 leading universities was just unbelievable. Often, it is not the winning that creates the highest level of learning in business simulation games, but taking part in the whole experience (Wolfe, 1990).

In our situation, we had surpassed all expectations and in retrospect, it is true that the journey was the most important part of the process – how we evolved during the challenge. Bearing that in mind, I also believe that winning augmented the overall experience because it gave us as a team a sense of achievement and all our hard work and efforts were recognised. I think that we learnt a lot about ourselves and how to work efficiently in a team, under intense pressure. After the awards ceremony and more than 24 hours of hard work, all the teams celebrated at the big closing party in the evening of day two.

Day three was the final day of the event and it included the 'Expo' - a careers fair for students to meet with the organisations behind the experts, many of whom had spent the previous days spotting talent for specific roles. Networking with the business experts was an invaluable experience and a great opportunity to learn more about some of the most successful businesses in the UK. One of our team members even got offered a 12 month work placement as a direct result of our performance in the competition.

FLUXing and Flowing

Being immersed in an experiential learning activity like FLUX complements flow theory developed by Csikszentmihalyi (1975). The term is actually a metaphor for a process:

> In which action follows upon action according to an internal logic which seems to need no conscious intervention on our part. We experience it as a unified experience flowing from one moment to the next, in which there is little distinction between self and environment, between stimulus and response, or between past, present and future. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975:36 cited in Elkington, 2010:105)

FLUX 500 includes the known conditions of flow, providing a basis for involvement and intrinsic motivation for the participants. FLUX 500 should be considered an activity that requires the commitment and investment of personal effort and which provides opportunities to maintain and further develop the sense of competence that would allow students to experience enjoyment and positive feelings about themselves and their learning. FLUX 500 provided a challenge that was neither too simple (low = boredom) or well beyond the capabilities of the students participating (high = anxiety). Maintaining an appropriate balance between skills and challenges is an ongoing process that ultimately determines whether enjoyment is achieved or not.

Thus, far from being in a state of FLUX during the event, I was in a state of flow.

Conclusion

Experiential learning enables the discovery of possibilities that may not be evident from direct experience alone (McGill and Warner Weil, 1989b: 248). This was the case with my participation in FLUX and upon reflection, after the event, I can strongly affirm that by taking part in this competition I have acquired some of the most sought-after transferable skills in the business world. For me, FLUX was a genuine opportunity to challenge myself and improve the knowledge that I've gained in the past years at university. Having the chance to meet and compete in teams with students from across the country, who have similar interests to mine, was both a very exciting and challenging prospect at the same time. I am highly competitive and, of course, I really wanted to grab the opportunity with both hands and qualify for the final where I

competed with the best teams from the event because I knew this was a lifetime opportunity that would make me stand out in any professional and academic environment in the future.

In my opinion it is extremely beneficial for students to be offered the possibility to participate in events such as FLUX during their studies. First of all it gives them the chance to develop their entrepreneurial and business skills and, more importantly, the chance to network with business owners, managers and consultants provides a plethora of future opportunities.

In conclusion, I think it is important to see the value of learning by doing and I would recommend that the university continues to embrace initiatives like FLUX in the future and implement similar exercises as part of the curriculum.

About the author

Alin is an Advertising and Marketing Communications student at the University of Bedfordshire, currently on his work placement year with Bridges CETL. In March 2010, he was selected to be part of the six student team which represented the university at FLUX 500. The University of Bedfordshire team competed against 32 teams from universities across the UK and came out first place in this intense three day business challenge.

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Chapter 9

Going beyond the Elevator Pitch; identifying and developing student talent using Assessment Centre approaches.

Paul Harrison

Abstract

This paper explores the role of Assessment Centre (AC) approaches within the unfolding employability agenda at the University of Bedfordshire. Assessment Centres incorporate the processes used by employers in order to observe, assess and select suitable candidates for job roles, usually after they have been pre-screened through applications and interviews. Comparison will be made between this recruitment focused function and AC approaches as a developmental tool initiated in this university.

Consideration is given to how AC approaches might play a related but additional role in identifying and developing latent employability talent within the student body and enable individuals and the institution to benefit. The chapter concludes with discussion around whether an AC approach alone can benefit career development in an inclusive learning environment.

Keywords

Assessment centres; simulation; inheritance; talent; diversity

Assessment Centre approaches, spring 2010

AC approaches were adapted by Applied Social Studies (ASS) and Psychology during the academic year 2009/10 as part of ongoing projects within the employability agenda and action research. As Careers Adviser linked to these areas I have been actively involved in the practice of these activities. All students involved have been required to deliver Elevator Pitches as a 'warm up exercise' and this expression also serves here as a metaphor for the whole AC process.

The Elevator Pitch was first initiated in Hollywood in the 1970s as an innovative way in which frustrated individuals sold their ideas to film producers. Scriptwriters waited for a suitable producer to enter an elevator in a tall building and joined them in the knowledge that they had a captive audience for a brief period of time, normally less than two minutes, in which they needed to make a favourable impression. Several films were apparently commissioned in this manner and the film 'Working Girl' (1988) includes a fictional representation of the process.

Assessment Centres normally measure competences in the context of specific employment vacancies. In the absence of advertised positions, AC approaches at the University have measured performance using vocationally specific material chosen to reflect course orientation. Activities used with Psychology and ASS students involved unprepared elevator pitches, team discussions based around vocationally specific problem solving followed by student, group presentations. An example of another common activity would be an in-tray exercise where students are instructed to read and prioritise work demands emerging from assorted reports, letters and messages.

In ASS, Level 3 students received an initial two hour briefing, before the day, on how to give and receive feedback, with the intention that they would play the role of both participant and observer within an AC approach. Students were also incentivised to attend with the lure of a £25 gift voucher. The first two Level 3 AC mornings saw disappointingly low levels of attendance but did enable those attendees to receive feedback from academic staff and careers advisers instead of students. Attendance at the third Level 3 AC morning was substantially better, perhaps because the event was held after the end of term when there were fewer demands on student time. Students are scheduled to receive their vouchers in September 2010 after degree completion, on the basis they might also provide some feedback to tutors on their experience of employers' assessment centre processes gained during the pursuit of graduate employment. We await the conclusion of these activities.

Level Two attendance in ASS was considerably higher, perhaps because the AC events were held in place of scheduled lectures. Groups of thirty (or so) students gave feedback to one another during a series of fast moving activities. Because of the lack of preparation time for students, academic staff and careers advisers provided general feedback on the groups' overall performances. The objective was for Level 2 students

to gain some understanding of the process, rather than benefit from close observation and individual feedback from staff.

In psychology, three third year students were trained to undertake the role of observers and worked alongside careers advisers, assessing the Level 2 students who elected to take part. Careers Advisers also undertook in-depth follow up interviews with participants. Despite considerable pre-planning and publicity, including showing the AGCAS DVD on Assessment Centres to students well in advance, attendance was considerably lower than anticipated. One positive result was the extra attention and feedback this enabled the attendees to receive.

I have also represented the Centre for Personal and Career Development as a member of the FLUX organisational team (See Alin Dobrea, Chapter 8). We initiated a series of in-house challenges and assessed students against similar criteria used in the national FLUX business competition. From this process we selected and prepared a team of six students to represent the University at the 2010 final competition held in Nottingham. Many of the behavioural competences measured in the 'FLUX process' were similar to the indicators used in AC type activities. The appropriateness of the coaching, assessment and preparation processes can be judged against the fact that the Bedfordshire team was successful in winning FLUX 2010 against thirty two other HE institutions.

'Simulation' or 'reality'?

Saunders and Severn (1999) speculate around the meaning of the word 'simulation' in the context of interactive learning in Higher Education. They recount meanings as diverse as *pretend* and *masquerade* to *portray* and *represent*. In the context of preparing students for the future world of work, we can describe with accuracy what happens at a 'simulated' or 'mock' assessment centre, ensure the physical procedures are told to students in advance, manage them to happen and see that learning outcomes are clarified. Subjective participant experiences are more difficult to gauge. How students feel about AC processes and whether they understand the experience as 'real' or 'simulated' will ultimately reflect the nature of the activities undertaken, individual differences of perception and inheritance (Inkson 2007) which I will explore later.

What would also be revealing are the views of those who chose to opt out of the AC approach despite receiving advanced notice of the predicted benefits. Without more empirical evidence we are left to speculate on the causes of poor attendance. There may be conflicting obligations or issues outside of the University schedule that account for students' failure to participate. It could be that for others, the prospect may be too real, even threatening, or for some, not real or immediately instrumental enough.

My anecdotal experience from debriefing students undertaking elevator pitches and being observed in group work environments is that these activities are seen as a challenging and essentially 'real' experience. What determines the depth of that 'reality'

are probably the consequences associated with the activity. The competitive nature of assessment in the FLUX selection process was quite explicit; all twenty one individuals who lasted until the final round could gain from the benefit of experiential learning, but only six students could represent the University in Nottingham with the allure of a cash prize (£500 per individual) for winning team members. There was less to gain in terms of 'winning' for those undertaking AC approaches linked to curriculum areas but much to be learnt in terms of self-awareness from the process.

Even if the consequences were quite different, once a visible element of competition was introduced, participants in both styles of AC approach may have felt they were undertaking 'real' rather than 'simulated', experiences. Competition between students is a feature of all university courses in that formative and summative results may become known to all concerned on a particular study programme. AC approaches differ in that they initiate competition between students, based on criteria found outside of the 'normal' curriculum, drawing on characteristics and competencies that have been formed as part of students' wider socialisation and inheritance.

Increased self-awareness across different indicators is frequently cited as a positive outcome. How this is articulated and interpreted will be a product of the context in which AC approaches are initially presented by tutors and others involved. The synergies identified by Kumar (2010) between AC approaches and improving personal efficacy in education are clear and logical to educators but might not be obvious to students, unless specifically identified in preparation and debriefing sessions.

From a conventional perspective, AC approaches belong to a world happening beyond the university experience, one that is about job selection and careers rather than study skills. Students with a mature approach might grasp the synthesis between being a successful student and a successful employee; others will need assistance of a more explicit nature in drawing these learning strands together.

The help of informed others (e.g. careers advisers) and a designated time and space, enable the subtlety of this approach to be revealed effectively to students. In the context of the work carried out at the University it was not apparent that the synergies mentioned above found space for expression in already crowded course itineraries. The value of identifying concepts like multiple intelligences (Gardner 1999) can only be achieved through reflection on experiential role-play and elaborated with suitable theoretical detail, if follow-up is ensured within the curriculum.

The possibility for tutors to enhance the impact of any deep learning (Marton & Saljo 1976) that is occurring here, is also dependent on opportunities for further reflection around AC approaches after the initial exercises are completed. Students might be left thinking, "I enjoyed presenting-how do I get more experience?" Or, "I am not very good at group work but I see the value of improving; how can I learn more?" Or, "I would have performed more strongly in the group if others made better contributions". Or, "I am shy in group settings; where do I find opportunities to increase my confidence?"

If the rest of the student experience does not facilitate consolidation or enhancement with respect to developing these types of behavioural competencies, we risk offering tantalising glimpses of how success is achieved, raising hopes and then deflating them. For those students who did not turn up or engaged only physically in the process, the lack of follow up can be reassuring in that they do not need to think about assessment centres again until some unspecified date in the future.

The impact of Inheritances on the AC process

Inkson (2007) suggests that the concept of inheritance is one of the key metaphors in understanding career development. He writes:

> Some career inheritances, such as our parentage, genetic makeup, sex and race we are born with. Others, such as our values, education and motivation, are developed in childhood largely as a result of family influences and become part of what we bring to a career. We have little if any control of such inheritances. (p.28)

Students attend university for a wide range of reasons, of which employability may be the most prevalent but is often integrated into a whole set of expectations around experience and personal development. Although contemporary university students are often cited as being market driven learners, the role of inheritance should not be underestimated in the formation of personal aspirations. The desire for knowledge and to achieve academic excellence often overrides the more instrumental motivation linked to progression in future labour markets. In particular, for some students attending a widening participation institution, obtaining a degree is sometimes an end in itself.

My recent experience of interviewing 'non traditional' unemployed graduates from the Faculty of Health and Social Studies (HSS) from last year's leaving cohort, revealed a general satisfaction with the university experience but a lack of linkage with future labour markets. These were mature people who took a variety of vocational paths following completion of compulsory education and were often the first in their family to enter Higher Education. Some were EU or international students relatively new to the UK. In the most notable cases, non traditional graduates demonstrated some knowledge of well known professional roles e.g. Chartered Psychologist and very little of the intermediate ones they might need to start with, in order to obtain the jobs they aspired towards. Their world view veered between the counselling couch and stacking shelves in a supermarket; the middle ground of reasonably well paid, intermediate level employment was seemingly invisible to them.

Progression into relatively, low level employment roles outside of ideally stated vocational paths is sometimes the consequence of this lack of knowledge about how to construct a career.   The Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey, newspaper league tables and meeting national skills shortages or gaps are rarely part of such students' worldview. In this sense, the academic community and students

do not share a common understanding of how university links to the labour market and enables long term career success.

The University of Bedfordshire population is comprised of over a hundred different nationalities presenting a plethora of inheritances, abilities, expectations and possibilities for the future beyond study. AC approaches raise broader sociological questions about individual, generational and cultural perceptions of privacy, public disclosure and the regulation of power in society that influence progression and are beyond the scope of this paper, but could be revealing in terms of the student experience. Usher and Edwards (1995) explore concepts of confession and surveillance as developed by Foucault (1981) in interpreting the functionality of adult guidance and counselling. Applying these concepts to AC approaches could be revealing. Interpreting the 'elevator pitch' as a form of 'self-regulating confession', rather than just self-promotion could explain some cases of student discomfort. Likewise, poor student attendance during AC approaches could be explored in terms of resistance to unwanted personal surveillance rather than apathy or misplaced instrumentalism e.g. choosing to work on an assignment instead.

Community interaction

My observation of students working together at AC sessions revealed noticeable collegiality and mutual support. While personal differences and inheritances relating to issues such as prior work experience and English language capacity ultimately determine performance, these interactive experiences suggests the role a university may play in raising career aspirations and engendering motivation. Law's (1981) work on Community Interaction Theory is particularly pertinent here. Law states that a great deal of the process of identifying motivation for career development occurs in mid range transactions involving the participation of parents, family, neighbourhood, peer groups and ethnic groups (Gothard et al 200l). He defines mid range as between sociologically and psychologically influenced. I will outline below how AC approaches within the university community create the type of interactions that lead to the recognition of diverse talents, often lying dormant in students, under cover of academic learning, which can be recognised, built upon and celebrated in the institution. Kumar's (2010) focus on the learning outcomes from AC approaches could prove influential in assisting with the identification process.

The term 'community' is ambiguous and a not always complete descriptor for the university experience. Students may have a closer allegiance to their 'courses' or 'departments' than the university 'community' per se. In terms of life roles (Super 1957), the 21st century learner may be performing the role of student amongst competing others (parent, carer, worker), to the extent that the university community is less influential when students only visit the campus two or three days a week. However, the physical buildings and student services remain a focus for many EU, international and non-local students and a university community, albeit fragmented, is clearly visible in the social sphere (student union, chaplaincy and recreational areas).

AC approaches involve a greater ontological experience than normally found in the lecture hall or tutorial. The interactions occurring informally around the university in friendship groups provide a rich medium for students to reflect on the personal meaning of AC approaches. The recognition of individual abilities and pools of experience discovered during these 'community interactions' provides inspiration for all to improve and progress. I have observed the daughter of a bricklayer from Luton give encouragement to the daughter of a foreign ambassador from Africa and saw the process reciprocated. The synergies emerging from these interactions will never be controllable or predictable but can facilitate progress in quite positive ways, if opportunities are found in the curriculum to capture informal learning and build upon the results.

One consequence of 'community interaction' would be on the role AC approaches might have in determining the meaning of higher education in terms of future employability. There may be a 'reality' emerging here from 'simulated activities' that encourages students to work together, learn from one another and aspire towards greater ends than if left alone to undertake career planning. Research into different routes towards career decision making suggest that students from some non-westernised cultures already adopt collective rather than individualistic approaches (Bimrose et al 2008). Again, the issue of follow up is crucial. Isolated AC approaches will not help create synergies of progress without consolidation.

The protracted nature of the FLUX coaching and assessment process created new links between students from different subject areas over the period of an academic term and can be interpreted as an example of successful 'community interaction'. One psychology student recorded feedback about how interesting he had found elements of business, previously discounted as 'dull' and 'boring'. It would be interesting to evaluate more formally, the 'experiential gene pool' and learning community (see Sadie Hunt, Chapter 14) the cosmopolitan FLUX participants created in their endeavours and how it may have contributed to ultimate success in the national competition.

FLUX was a self-selecting process in terms of participation and the role of inheritance should not be underestimated here. The twenty one students who competed to win a place in the team going to the Nottingham final can be interpreted as a highly aspirant sub group in the University; who have been socialised, however diversely, towards competing and winning at a national level. There were only two home participants amongst this cohort with a predominance of EU students. We can speculate why this was the case. It would not be unreasonable to consider that the socio-economic backgrounds of many home students at this university, does not lead towards automatic engagement in such competitive activities whereas it is more natural for EU students (see Maja Jankowska, Chapter 5).

Some home students have failed too many times before in competitive school and work environments to believe they can compete with the best. Some international students have a heritage where economic underdevelopment creates limited understanding of a modern, post-industrial society. Some EU students have a heritage where the capitalist

market has yet to deliver levels of Gross Domestic Product, democracy or aspiration found in Western Europe. Thus, there are complex inheritances that may explain why students do not participate in a competitive business simulation.

However the exigent nature of a recruiting university also means our understanding of a diverse student body is limited. Views of overseas qualifications are frequently framed through the prism of The National Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom (NARIC). Because of the difficulty of making accurate comparisons between different national education systems, excellence achieved elsewhere may go unrecorded. Additionally, some well-qualified home students choose to study at their local university for cultural or financial reasons. Their abilities will probably only be recorded in terms of UCAS points. Mature students may bring substantial work experience and other knowledge to the university but become hidden within subject silos. Pockets of excellence and potential for excellence exist amongst low grades, underachievement or disadvantage and become concealed amongst statistical averages. The recent FLUX success story provides evidence for this perspective.

The cultural melting pot that makes up this University generates a rich learning environment; where students can learn from one another as well as from their teachers. AC approaches that are of a structured and competitive nature with suitable opportunities for 'community interaction' may help individuals discover strengths about themselves that emerged over time but remain latent or unrecognised in the usual process of undergraduate or postgraduate assessment. Success breeds success and with the right promotion, students will come forward to engage in activities such as FLUX and discover potentialities for career development, that often remain unrecognised within the process of self-led academic study.

Because each university could only send one team to the final, most Bedfordshire participants were disappointed in their pursuit of ultimate FLUX success. However, all students were offered the opportunity to receive feedback on their performance in the qualifying rounds. Most took the opportunity to reflect on what they had learnt about themselves when faced with the real challenge of presenting a business case to local employers and university staff. There was a high level of honesty from students when analysing strengths and weaknesses and many commented on what they had learnt from playing an active part in diverse teams under challenging conditions. In terms of the internally set exercises, we raised the ability bar and this group of students were happy to try and jump over it. Many succeeded and it was difficult for the team selectors to make a final decision from such a pool of cosmopolitan talent.

FLUX was also instrumental in generating conditions under which issues of fortune and risk were surfaced without intent (Bright 2009). Despite some initial engineering of the FLUX teams during the University assessment process and later seeding according to observed competencies, there was an uncertainty around interpersonal relationships formed within these groups. Students were asked to cooperate across friendship and academic backgrounds and there was always the chance that individuals might not perform at an optimal level before greater team familiarity was established. There were

also risks involved in that individual progress depended to a certain extent on trusting others to perform well in specific team roles. Again we can see the importance of how different inheritances are shared in community interactions within an active and competitive medium and create the conditions under which talent is surfaced and rewarded. Yet for those not selected for the final team, elements of luck may have been present that suggest FLUX was a real experience in the way that life chances are allocated.

Going beyond the Elevator Pitch

Going beyond the elevator pitch may require strengthening the AC process to make it more competitive than the current practices within the employability agenda. Kumar (2010) proposes a dedicated AC week for final year students to 'value, capture and verify a rich picture of students' achievements'. This appears a highly constructive suggestion. For those who are ready to compete in activities like FLUX, the success of the University team this year, suggests there could be merit in creating opportunities earlier in the curriculum, ideally from Level 1.

A self nominating, cross university AC event at each level of learning, would enable those students who are of an ambitious nature to measure personal performance; also, to learn from their own experiences and those outside of their faculty areas and to accredit their personal development. Building opportunities across all three levels of undergraduate learning and bringing postgraduate and part-time students into the mix, these experiences would hopefully act as a magnet and draw students into the process, who may initially lack the confidence to compete at a high level. Creating AC approaches across subject areas also breaks the artificiality caused by specialised learning.

Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education destinations data (2008) reveal, for example, that many students from the Business School enter public sector administration as their first role after graduation. Labour market reality requires students to look at opportunities outside of their graduate subject areas. AC approaches can start to widen student awareness and dissolve the silo thinking inevitably created by faculty-led study. A base of excellence could be created that would benefit the individuals concerned and also develop the University's reputation in terms of future success stories.

The seemingly exclusive nature of this approach may not register positively throughout a university with a widening participation agenda. It is not the suggestion here that an AC approach should be used exclusively within careers and personal development programmes. Rather, that alongside forming the synergies identified by Kumar (2010) they could become developmental tools for those who will ultimately compete for high paying graduate jobs, a group that may be considerably expanded if given sufficient support from the University.

Research carried out at Liverpool University (Redmond 2009) suggested there were approximately 19,960 'real graduate vacancies' available to the 400, 000+ UK graduates who left University in the summer of 2009. These are considered as positions where the immediate financial remuneration on offer is commensurate with the corresponding level of graduate study and deferred gratification experienced, both financial and personal. The use of Assessment Centres can be interpreted as the desire of employers to find those graduates (and others) who are best fitted to the roles they offer. At present, they represent a cost effective means by which employers can pre-select from an oversupply of graduates. In this sense they perform an important regulatory function in the labour market.

An over emphasis on AC approaches within curriculum areas may represent the opportunity cost of delivering effective careers education that will enable graduates to obtain employment that is actually available to them within specific labour markets. The Sociologist Ken Robert's early work (1977) is instrumental here, in terms of understanding opportunity structures. He believed that job preferences are not mere matters of individual taste but are determined by a system of stratification (Gothard et al 2001). His early work on school leavers suggests the most important factors in determining life chances are educational attainment and an individual's proximity to different types of occupation (Roberts 1977). His later work emphasises the prolonged transitions young people undertake on their way towards the labour market, largely as a response to an increased appetite for qualifications found across all social backgrounds (Roberts 1994). This appetite is influenced by the demands of a changing occupational structure (Gothard et al 2001).

The increasingly globalised, fragmented and insecure UK labour market suggests Robert's view that careers guidance must respond with customised assistance is a sound one. An initial conclusion would be that we must work within the opportunity structures our students have access to, ones that reflect the differentiation within the University. With such varying levels of achievement and potential, we cannot use a 'one size fits all' approach for students. For example, entry into many intermediate level roles requires performing well in terms of producing high quality CVs, completing competency based application forms and attending panel interviews, without the complexity of processes found at Assessment Centres.

The Eastern region of the UK contains the highest proportion of small and medium sized employers amongst the regional government areas in the UK (EEDA 2007). Generally this group contains a substantial number of employers who are less likely to be able to afford the use of Assessment Centres. Recent analysis of 2009 leavers from the University of Bedfordshire through DLHE (2010), suggest the majority of home students tend to find employment within or on the fringes of the Eastern Region. Employability approaches need to reflect these realities.

Even if many Bedfordshire graduates commence employment in roles of a traditionally speaking, non graduate nature, they will ultimately use their qualifications to aspire upwards in the labour market. Opportunities to apply for promotion and access roles

associated with the higher earnings traditionally found in graduate employment will often emerge. In this sense, educating all students about Assessment Centres is important because they are likely to face them as their careers develop. The level and extent to which students choose to compete should not be determined by the University but all students should be enabled to make realistic approaches towards work and inspired to stretch beyond the inheritances generated before undertaking study in higher education.

AC approaches that develop ambitions can create synergies between learning and employment and be recorded within the Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) and any University achievement award that emerge from the current employability agenda (see Scott & I'ons, Chapter 10). With the Universities greater emphasis and improved record in research, one AC approach could involve recruiting a team to take part in the television programme 'University Challenge'. This could be one route forward amongst others. Improved identification of the talent that lies hidden in this immense and diverse institution would enable students to make elevator pitches of sufficient strength and clarity to shatter the most robust of glass ceilings.

About the author

Paul Harrison is a University of Bedfordshire Careers Adviser who has worked in the Centre for Personal and Career Development (to be the Careers and Education Service from September 2010) for eighteen months – linking with the Faculty of Health and Social Science and the Business School. Previous guidance experience includes self employed work with a community project and public sector employee development, management roles for a private sector adult guidance organisation plus earlier experience of working in the further education and schools sectors. He holds a BA (Hons) in Social Science from the University of East Anglia, a Postgraduate Diploma in Vocational Guidance from the University of Reading and the Diploma in Careers Guidance (parts 1 & 2). Two years ago he undertook a Postgraduate Certificate in Narrative Research from the University of East London. Paul's recent focus has been working directly with students in the employability agenda, including simulated assessment centre activities and FLUX. He is interested in innovative approaches within careers and employability work

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Chapter 10

CRe8-ing a University of Bedfordshire Employability Award

Suzanne I'ons and Eileen Scott

Abstract

This chapter discusses the implications and challenges of introducing a University of Bedfordshire Employability Award and its relationship with teaching and learning within the CRe8 curriculum. Emphasis will be placed on identifying and discussing the pros and cons of possible models for an Award drawing on information gained from a survey of other Higher Education Institutions who are currently offering some kind of employability or skills award. Also, it explores how an award might provide a stimulus to student learning and development and offer concrete recognition of the value of their extra-curricular activities. This chapter also describes how an Award can help realise the University's values and strategic objectives as they pertain to employability and how it might complement and contribute to the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR).

Keywords

Introduction

Where are we now?

The University of Bedfordshire is currently in a position where CRe8 (Atlay, 2008) and a collection of articles relating to it (Atlay, 2010) are increasingly raising awareness of effective curriculum design and making an impact on curriculum development. For example, a number of departments have audited their curricular for employability activity and made changes to Unit (UIFs) and Course (CIFs) Information Forms to inform curriculum delivery and assess 'soft skills' previous and current Employability Fellows have developed discrete, time-bound, outcome-related projects to further embed employability into their curriculum; careers advisers have worked closely with the Bridges Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) and academic departments to deliver innovative business simulations and competitions, the latest of which was the achievement of first place in the National, inter-university, FLUX competition (see Alin Dobrea, Chapter 8). CETL members, employability fellows and Career's staff have presented a range of employability papers at national conferences. In addition, the University of Bedfordshire's vision and mission statement, and Employability and Education Strategies, provide a clear sense of direction for the immediate future.

> Vision: "The University of Bedfordshire's vision is of a world where all are able to benefit from transformational educational experiences"

> Mission: "We create a vibrant, multicultural learning community, enabling people to transform their lives by participating in excellent, innovative education, Scholarship and research" (New Futures, Strategic Plan 2007-2012).

In June 2009 a three year Employability Strategy was approved with five key aims:

- to ensure the University of Bedfordshire's reputation as an employability focused institution;
- to increase the visibility of Employability as a core strategic objective within the academic and student culture of the University
- to raise students' awareness of the need to experience and learn from a wide range of opportunities to develop and practise high level employability skills;
- to support students in taking responsibility for their personal, professional and academic development; and

- to increase the range and availability of student real-world, work experience opportunities, develop an enterprise and entrepreneurship culture and increase the quality, depth and range of work with employers.

The University also has a key aspiration to develop students who will graduate from their studies with the skills and attributes to manage their future lives as described in its Education Strategy (2008-2013):

> Our vision is of a University of Bedfordshire graduate who is knowledgeable, critical and creative; who understands who they are and what they want to achieve; who can communicate effectively; evidence attainments and functions in context; and who has the skills, self-confidence and self-regulatory abilities to manage their own development. Such a graduate is eminently employable, capable of working with and learning from others, of adding significantly to their local community and prepared for life in an ever changing environment.

In February 2010 the University of Bedfordshire's Teaching Quality and Standards Committee approved a proposal to establish a student Employability Award which would provide a structured and supported process to recognise students' extra and co-curricular employability activities with the aim of contributing to the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR).

The aforementioned key critical drivers now provide an opportunity for the University of Bedfordshire to fully explore the introduction of a 'Skills' Award which would enable students who engage in a wide range of internal and external extra-curricular activity – to have their experience recognised.

This chapter outlines the challenges in setting up a distinctive University of Bedfordshire award, drawing on information gained from a survey of other Higher Education Institutions who are currently delivering their individualised skills awards. It also explores how an award can help realise the University's vision and mission as they pertain to employability.

Why do we need an Award?

Despite good intentions to deliver an employability focussed curriculum as described by CRe8 (Atlay, 2008), the current reality seems to be somewhat ad hoc. For example, there are perceived deficiencies within academic departments in achieving this, as has been evidenced by departmental employability audits (CETL/CPCD Employability Project, 2009/10) and through analysis of UIFs and CIFs each of which reveal that employability is, in some departments, still not being fully addressed.

Furthermore, Careers Advisers' annual departmental reviews with Faculty Deans show a lack of comprehensive coverage across all subject disciplines in relation to the delivery

of career management skills – a core component of the employability strand within the CRe8 curriculum (Atlay, 2008). Consequently, concern has been expressed by Careers staff that many students are not receiving their full entitlement to career development learning.

A University of Bedfordshire Award could provide an opportunity to explore and address some of these deficiencies and complement existing good practice within and outside of the curriculum. Results from a recent survey of the nature and impact of universities' Skills Awards (Scott, 2010), provides clear and current evidence of the positive impact of skills/employability awards in a number of important areas:

Work with Employers: Respondents cited early and positive employer engagement and partnership working with employers as benefits of an Award.

Student learning and achievement: Benefits to students learning and achievement were identified by respondents and included: that an award offers a distinct qualification which denotes additional achievement by students; provides a supportive framework for those who need it and an assessment process which encourages reflection and prepares students for the recruitment process; recognition of value attached to learning from extra – curricular activities; a greater take-up of skills sessions engaging students that would not otherwise have engaged; incentivises students and encourages them to get involved and plan ahead; is additional to their degree and helps with applications and C.V. writing; and thus maximises the breadth and depth of experience and skills gained by students whilst at university.

The University: Of particular note in relation to university-wide benefits is the fact that in a number of universities, an award seems to have served to: embed employability in the student experience; provide evidence that 'the university values and appreciates what students do with their spare time'; confirm that 'students are driven by the fact that the university endorses the Award through a certificate'.

The HEAR: Several respondents noted that the Award provides, 'a good way of validating information to go into the HEAR' and that, 'Information on the transcript (HEAR) provides a way of recording those who undertake activities outside their programme or engage in employability related that have been embedded in the curriculum'.

Partnerships and collaboration: Of particular significance are the responses which identified opportunities for partnership working: increased promotion of extra-curricular activity and use of services such as Careers; a way of packaging such offerings in a way to add value; working in partnership with the Student Union; and tangible curriculum interventions as opposed to workshops in the curriculum where Careers' role gets blurred.

Many of the identified benefits outlined above resonate with perspectives on good practice in student teaching and learning e.g. employer engagement; assessment of work related learning; and the concepts of reflection, articulation and personalised learning

featured in SOARing to Success (Kumar, 2007), as well as reflecting some of the key strands and elements of CRe8 (Atlay, 2008). In this respect an Award might not only be a key driver in the development of good practice in verification or recognition of work related activity but, through effective monitoring and evaluation, further inform curriculum design and development. Further, in conjunction with a more explicit approach to the implementation of the CRe8 curriculum, a well structured assessment-led Award could move us away from the view of employability skills as 'objects' that can be acquired, towards a process where employability skills are underpinned by theory, and successful students learn how to understand themselves and the value of their work-related experiences. From the employer perspective, when asked what three things universities should prioritise in relation to undergraduates, over three quarters of employers chose 'improving their employability skills' (Future Fit, CBI 2009). A University of Bedfordshire Award could answer this employer concern.

What are Skills Awards?

The overarching purpose of a University Skills Award is to enable students to translate a wide range of curricular and extra-curricular learning experiences into the language of employability and receive recognition against set criteria.

There has been considerable growth in University Awards over the past decade. The current provisional list of such awards (University of Surrey, 2009) shows 48 HEIs either delivering or planning to deliver a skills/employability award. These, in the main, are concerned with enhancing students' employability by recognising a range of activities – some of which may be formal learning based within the curriculum or external, co-curricular activities – such as volunteering, part-time paid work etc.

The recent survey of universities (Scott, 2010) to gain further insight into the structure and content of current University Employability Awards revealed the following in relation to what awards might entail. Data about how to sustain Awards are outlined later in this chapter.

There were 25 responses to the survey which revealed that:

- 88% of respondents said their awards were not credit bearing – of those that are credit bearing (22% (3 awards)) one offers a 20 credit Unit at Level 2 (FHEQ level 5), another involves undertaking three modules of 15 credits at level 1 (FHEQ level 4) and the other one did not disclose.
- 100% indicated that their award was optional
- Numbers accessing awards varied widely between a lowest of 15 and highest of 1,000 – but many commented that their intention was to increase numbers.

- 60% of awards have employer endorsement, 16% attract employer sponsorship, 24% are neither sponsored nor endorsed

These findings suggest that the most common approaches to delivering awards tend to align with the following methodologies:

- Non credit bearing
- Optional
- Freely Accessible
- Employer endorsed.

However, our desire at Bedfordshire is to provide a distinctive award so that we are not seen to be simply 'jumping on the bandwagon' of the plethora of awards that are now being developed but add additional value to the learning experiences of our diverse students. Therefore, in Table 1 we outline four awards in more detail by describing their different structures, approaches and requirements of students.

These models by no means cover the full range of ways that awards are currently being delivered, but they do give a flavour of the various approaches that might be adopted by the University of Bedfordshire[1]. Whilst it is not within the remit of this chapter to make a recommendation as to which model(s) might be most appropriate or distinctive for our student body and University 'identity', it is worth highlighting here some of the possible topics which might influence the focus. For example, do we, at Bedfordshire, want an award similar to that at the University of Warwick which comprises a Global Award including activities with an international, intercultural element? Alternatively, the Dundee model, a structured on-line PDP portfolio, resonates with our current e-portfolio located within PebblePad (Norrington, 2010). In this respect the Award could utilise an existing process which might, in turn, encourage student take up. The Exeter Award combines attendance at career and personal development workshops and engagement in work experience or other extra-curricular activities for which points are accumulated. Several of the institutions offer a 'standard' award which can be built upon to offer a 'Gold' or 'Leaders' Award, where the former might be more easily gained by larger numbers and the latter requires more effort and represents a standard of excellence. Finally, the University of Birmingham is one of a minority of awards achieved through formal accreditation of a range of modules. Although quite resource intensive, an award of this nature might motivate students toward the achievement of an 'employability qualification'.

The possible advantages briefly outlined above will require a detailed analysis against a set of pre-determined criteria to ensure that the most relevant and distinctive award for the University of Bedfordshire is identified.

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[1] For a full reports of the survey of awards, please contact Eileen Scott at eileen.scott@beds.ac.uk

Warwick Advantage – poster presentation	Exeter Award – points based, including workshop attendance
At least a term of extra-curricula activities where the following capabilities need to be demonstrated: • Involvement, Inclusion and Interaction • Community • Teamwork and Leadership and • Events and Initiatives Or Global Award At least a term of activities with an international / intercultural element whilst a student at Warwick Capabilities include: Openness, Communication Personal Growth Students need to: Complete a Warwick Advantage application form stating choice of main or gold award. To receive a Gold Award students must present a poster of their achievements at an Awards ceremony to visiting dignitaries.	In order to achieve The Exeter Award, students need to complete FOUR compulsory elements and choose TWO DIFFERENT optional elements before meeting with a careers adviser. Four compulsory elements: 25 hours work experience OR Volunteering OR Active Engagement with Sport, or Music Planning Your CV Session OR Effective Applications Session Personal Development OR Skills Event The Interview Experience Plus 2 other verifiable activities from a long list of options. Students attend/carry out events/activities and have them signed off by a Careers Adviser and attend an Awards ceremony to receive their certificate
University of Dundee – portfolio approach	**University of Birmingham – modular based**
The Dundee Graduate Skills Award promotes and catalogues the personal development of students, it offers a tangible, certifiable, approved by graduate recruiters and also sits on students' University transcript. Students need to assess where their transferable skills by using a templates on a programme called My PDP. There are 8 skill areas against which students must provide evidence of competence and then receive points. Students have to accumulate 100 points to achieve an award. Or 150 for a Gold Award.	Personal Skills Award - can be achieved by completing three accredited skills modules (one compulsory, and two optional according to students' development needs and future ambitions). The core module is 'Employability and Professional Development Skills'. The other two can be chosen from the following list: Enterprising Behaviour and Idea Generation; International Communication and Cross-Cultural Awareness; Leadership and Teamwork Skills; Media Masterclass and Press Release Skills; Planning Your Career; Presenting Yourself with Impact; Project Management

Table 1: Examples of different types of awards

Student engagement and support

Having looked at why the University needs an award it is important to acknowledge that one of the key stakeholders in the process is the student striving to become a 'University of Bedfordshire graduate' (Education Strategy, 2008 – 2013).

An Employability Award could play a key role in evidencing 'graduateness' (Atlay, 2008) and provide a framework within which the five strands of the CRe8 curriculum (see page 251 this volume and www.beds.ac.uk/cre8wiki) can be employed as a valuable link between learning in the curriculum and the transition to the world of 'work' or continuing education.

Whilst our survey (2010) shows that students 'value the programme and it helps with career management skills', we must acknowledge that this will not always happen as a natural process; much thought and preparation is needed to ensure that student learning preferences and motivations are taken into account when designing the programme and associated assessment methods.

Many authors (see Biggs, 1987; Ramsden 1992; Marton et al 1997) describe students as approaching their learning in two qualitatively different ways, deep learning and surface learning. Entwistle describes a further approach which he calls 'strategic' (Entwistle et al, 2001). Adopting a surface level approach to an Award might for example be seen by students as a 'tick box' exercise. At a deeper or more strategic level, students might be reflecting on the meaning and potential application of their learning in a wider range of situations and settings, for example – employers; personal life; career learning and goal setting. They may also be making decisions and choices about the effort they will put into work and resulting opportunities.

An Award that might be seen by some as requiring only surface level application is not necessarily a bad thing, nor that it might, alternatively, be seen as needing a deeper approach. What matters is that, 'students are able to recognise when to take a surface, or deep approach; this requires the skills to engage in effective learning' (Atlay, 2010). In this respect, some of the underpinning processes associated with career management and learning, aim to ensure that students become more critically aware of which approach to take in order to achieve optimum learning value through and from their experiences. There is a danger for example, that if a totally surface approach is habitually adopted (or adopted by default), the learning value would be questionable.

In order to recognise and acknowledge this variation in levels of student learning, a University of Bedfordshire Award might offer two different platforms, for example, standard and plus. This differentiation could serve, to some extent, to meet students own learning needs, levels and motivations. As a significant factor in a student's decision to participate in an award programme, motivation is a subject which warrants further discussion. A summary of the main points is presented in Table 2.

Deep approach: seeking meaning	Surface approach: Reproducing	Strategic approach
Intention – to understand ideas yourself by:	*Intention: - to cope with course requirements by:*	*Intention – to achieve the highest possible grades by:*
Relating ideas to previous knowledge and experience	Treating the course as unrelated bits of knowledge	Putting consistent effort into studying
Looking for patterns and underlying principles	Memorising facts and carrying out procedures routinely	Managing time and effort effectively
Checking evidence and relating it to conclusions	Finding difficulty in making sense of new ideas presented	Finding the right conditions and materials for studying
Examining logic and argument cautiously and critically	Seeing little value or meaning in either course or tasks set	Monitoring the effectiveness of ways of studying
Being aware of understanding developing while learning	Studying without reflecting on either purpose or strategy	Being alert to assessment requirements and criteria
Becoming actively interested in the course content	Feeling undue pressure and worry about work	Gearing work to perceived preferences of lecturers

Table 2: Three different approaches to learning

Encouraging and motivating students to learn is an obvious and important issue for Higher Education – especially in relation to those HEIs who are engaged in widening participation. There is much literature on the subject of motivation which has produced a range of competing theories. One theory of particular interest in this context is that of Kember et al (2008) which characterised motivation as a framework comprising six continua (expanded on below) with positive and negative poles: compliance; individual goal setting; interest; career; sense of belonging and university lifestyle. Interestingly, these differ from the most common motivational constructs of intrinsic, extrinsic and achievement motivation (Biggs 1987, Beaty, Gibbs and Morgan, 2005). Kember's six continua offer some insight into some of the potential motivational risks and benefits of an Award:

1. Compliance (an unquestioning attitude to doing whatever is asked up to a threshold) Access to a university Award scheme could result in many students simply undertaking it because they have been introduced to it early on in their University career, and therefore see it as part and parcel of what the university expects of them. A completely compliant approach could result in surface rather than deep learning. How an Award is introduced and promoted will be a very important consideration.

2. Individual Goal Setting (targets each student sets for themselves) In this research goals appeared to be personal rather than competitive. Achieving the Award, therefore, would need to be seen as something of personal value and extending beyond the curriculum, e.g. to potential employers.

3. Sense of belonging (provides a social or communal dimension to motivation) Personal goal setting is more commonly individual than social or communal. However,

these two can co-exist and may be helpful when thinking about an Award in that it might be something undertaken for personal gain and benefit; however, peer group pressure might cause a student to undertake an Award. But if the programme manager or team adopts the Award, it could reinforce the notion of it being part of the programme 'identity'.

4. Interest (consistent with classic formulations of intrinsic motivation) for example, (Needs Hierarchy, Motivation and Personality, Maslow 1974) It is interesting to note that Kember's research identified distinct differences between levels of motivation, which seemed to correlate with the differences in programme design and delivery. For example, a communication course (TV Production) was seen by students to be well designed with an emphasis on practical application. This approach encouraged students to spend significantly more time working on assignments. In contrast, Social Work students found the teaching less stimulating. It appeared that, in these cases, it was the teacher and their style, rather than the subject content, which negatively affected levels of interest and motivation.

One of the problems with an 'interest focused' approach is that students can possess, at any one time, a variety of divergent and often conflicting interests which influence their behaviour. In the same way that the CRe8 curriculum seeks to;

- provide a curriculum which excites, motivates and engages
- to develop students as independent self-regulatory learners
- to prepare students for life beyond University

A University of Bedfordshire Award should seek to do the same.

5. Career Kember's research concluded that the facets of 'interest' and 'career', can not only co-exist but provide mutual reinforcement with the 'career' facet being more consistent with the learning orientations formulated by Beaty et al (2005). It was noted that interactions between the interest and career element of the framework could be enhanced by ensuring that class content and assignments were relevant to future careers. Similarly, a University of Bedfordshire Award could further facilitate the career strand of the CRe8 curriculum and enable staff and students to make connections between what employers seek in terms of relevant knowledge, specialist and generalist skills, attributes and dispositions, and what students are gaining from their studies.

6. University Lifestyle University lifestyle should not be seen as a 'one-fits-all' descriptor. To those attending university soon after leaving school or college there is often an obvious attraction and benefit to the social side of university life. At the opposite end are costs and obligations such as tuition fees, obligations to parents or other people in their personal support network, which might mean that students have to take part-time jobs to help see them through the financial challenges presented by attending university. These costs to students are likely to motivate them to want to see a return on their investment. A University Award could provide a significant return on investment by offering the incentive to have extra-curricular activity, such as part-time

jobs, volunteering and work based placements recognised in an Award. In turn, an Award might be a motivating or decision factor for employers as part of the graduate recruitment process.

The expectancy theory of motivation, (Vroom 1992) might also be considered to provide an interesting perspective for an Employability Award as it links directly to return on investment. Vroom's theory (unlike those of Maslow and Herzberg which concentrate on needs) focuses on outcomes. He separates effort, (which arises from motivation), performance and outcomes (returns on investment).

Vroom hypothesises that, in order for a person to be motivated, effort, performance and motivation must be linked. He proposes three variables to account for this: Expectancy, Instrumentality and Valence.
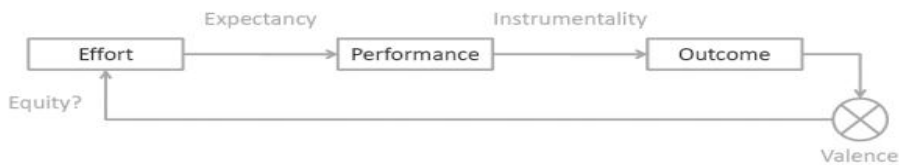
Figure 1: Vroom's expectancy theory of motivation

Crucially, Expectancy Theory works on perceptions and whilst widely used in relation to the workplace. Vroom's theory could equally apply to any situation where someone does something because they expect a certain outcome. For example, a student might engage in an Award because they think it is important to have their extra-curricular activities validated (valence); they think that the more effort they put into extra-curricular activities the more they will get out of it (expectancy); and, they think that the more they get out of it, the greater their chances of demonstrating employability skills and getting a graduate job (instrumentality).

Thus, Vroom's theory is not simply about self-interest in rewards but about the associations people make towards expected outcomes, and the amount of effort they will put in to achieving the required outcomes. Therefore, existing processes such as SOAR (see page 82 this volume) and Self M.A.P. (Kumar, 2007) could be invaluable for students working towards an Employability Award.

Both SOAR and Self M.A.P contribute to the process of Personal Development Planning (PDP) which has been defined as, '…a structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning, performance and/or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and career development' (QAA 2004). We have already commented that departmental reviews indicate that neither employability activity nor careers education, of which PDP is an integral part, are working effectively. We suggest that only through students' reflecting on their activities e.g. via an e-portfolio, will PDP be seen to be of real value. A University of

Bedfordshire Award could thus facilitate PDP and further enhance students' reflective processes.

We also see the Award as having similar aims to PDP in at least three respects:

- It helps students to translate learning experiences into the language of employability
- It develops skills (reflection, recording, action planning) that can help students to sustain their employability and employment
- It provides a bank of evidence that students can draw on in presenting themselves to future employers and articulating their personal strengths and dispositions

However, it is important to note that the benefits of PDP go beyond the University and beyond the Award:

> Attending to employability in this way effectively extends the learning frame for PDP to embrace significant elements of the career frame. This is particularly the case if the concern is not just with the student's immediate employability – their work readiness, and ability to secure a 'graduate job' – but with their sustainable employability: the wider range of attributes required to be successful within jobs to manage their career development in ways that will sustain their employability throughout their working lives (Watts, 2006).

This quote brings together arguments for good PDP practices and good Career Management Skills; both will be expected in order to achieve the Award. In this respect an Award can be seen as a useful vehicle for the promotion and delivery of PDP and provides an opportunity to identify synergies between PDP processes, CRe8, the HEAR and an Award.

The Challenges

Considerable strategic, operational and functional challenges are presented in formulating a decision to develop an Award. For ease of reference and consideration these challenges are grouped in Table 3 under the aforementioned headings to indicate the level of organisational activity, decision-making authority and management responsibility required to help realise a distinctive University of Bedfordshire Award.

Approaches to these challenges will need to be considered at the next phase of development and will inform an action plan to address these key areas. The action plan will need to ensure the involvement and accountability of relevant partners, stakeholders, students, academic and support staff.

Strategic	Operational	Functional
Senior Mgt commitment	Coping with delivery of high numbers	Continued human and physical resources as we move from pilot to full implementation – sustainability
Budget commitment and planning	Access by as wide a range of students as possible	
Engaging with academic colleagues	Validation and assessment processes	The provision of an adequate and appropriate IT infrastructure across a number of platforms
Working with departments to audit their curricula and identify current employability activity	Planned delivery time for workshops	Internal and external promotion
Bringing departments up to date with CRe8 and SOAR	Satellite campus capacity	Staff development to support an award
Identification of and consultation with key stakeholders e.g. students, careers service, student unions, employers,	Assessment and verification activities	
	Tying an award into the CRe8 curriculum	
Employer involvement in development, sponsorship and endorsement.	Delivery of the award through the CRe8 curriculum utilising the expertise of the Careers and Employment Service	
Measures of success: feedback and impact data from key stakeholders e.g. students, alumni, staff and employers	Delivery mechanisms	
Marketing strategy	Employer participation in delivery and assessment stages	

Table 3: Challenges to developing an award

Conclusions

In summary, there are a number of possibilities and challenges presented for the development of a distinctive University of Bedfordshire Skills Award which could serve to:

- further embed employability in the CRe8 curriculum and the student experience, thus making the curriculum something 'more emergent, dynamic and collaborative' (Fraser, 2006:8)
- offer links between pedagogy, androgogy, active learning and the needs of employers
- inform the development of a University of Bedfordshire 'transition pedagogy' (see Corkill, Chapter 16)

- encourage opportunities for students to participate in and gain validation for a wide range of extra and co-curricular activities
- provide opportunities for students to further reflect on and record the perceived and actual value of extra-curricular activities and their transferability to other contexts
- encourage personal self-reflection and personalised learning, leading to a self M.A.P. (Kumar, 2007)
- help prepare students for recruitment and assessment centre processes
- offer practice in the articulation of employer related experiences, e.g. to capture and learn from the value of work experience. *'The strongest single message which we received from employers was the value of work experience. This is particularly emphasised by small and medium sized enterprises that need new employees to be able to operate effectively in the workplace from their first day'* (Dearing 1997: summary report para. 39).
- provide an effective way of validating additional information to go into the HEAR
- serve to further engender an organisational culture of learning
- contribute to employers' understanding and development of their role in a local learning community
- secure the involvement of employers, including the public and voluntary sector, in the recognition and verification of work-related skills, qualities and attributes.

Employers greatly value the knowledge and skills that graduates develop whilst studying at university, along with the skills and experience they gain from undertaking activities beyond the curriculum. The most employable graduates are those who not only have this blend of skills, but who are able to demonstrate and articulate how they have developed their skills and why they are important. The co-curricular awards which the 1994 Group has highlighted are an excellent way to enhance graduate employability and should be strongly supported."
Miles Templeman, Director-General, Institute of Directors (IoD)

It is the authors', belief that a University of Bedfordshire Award can go some way to help realise the University's vision, mission and aspirations through "transformational educational experiences" and "excellent, innovative education" (New Futures, Strategic Plan 2007-2012).

In so doing, it could also serve to improve the student learning experience, offer a more complete and holistic student education, provide opportunities for students to go beyond academic learning and make career management skills, attributes and dispositions more tangible and visible with the CRe8 curriculum (Atlay, 2008). Of special interest to the University of Bedfordshire is the knowledge that an Award could provide a vehicle to further address the issue, among students from areas with

traditionally low participation in higher education and or low income backgrounds, of the lack of ability to articulate employability skills (Future Fit CBI 2009). And, whilst postgraduates are not specifically mentioned in this chapter, it is important to note that 'postgraduates are expected to have a range of skills that go beyond the discipline they have studied' (One Step Beyond: Making the most of Postgraduate Education, 2010).

Having presented the argument for an Award, one question remains, 'Should an employability award serve the many or the few at the University of Bedfordshire?' If it is seen to serve the many, how will it be effectively resourced? If it is seen to serve the few, would it be seen as elitist, unfair or divisive in the student population and wider university community? We have already mentioned that an Award might complement the HEAR, the purpose of which is, 'to provide more detailed information about a student's learning and achievement than the traditional degree classification system' (HEFCE 2007). The HEAR then, may itself provide an opportunity for more detailed recording and validation of curricular, co- extra- and non–curricular student activity. In this respect it will utilise current platforms such as PebblePad (which has its own benefits in terms of easy transference and relevance to work settings and management practice); provide links in to existing learning and development resources and serve to help students develop fully as a 'University of Bedfordshire graduate' (Education Strategy 2008-2013) who, at the end of their course, should be in a state of readiness to articulate to employers their learning from all their life-wide activities. The HEAR itself will also serve as a prompt to employers when trying to determine the extent and value of students' life-wide experiences. Whether the HEAR is seen as a realistic and relevant alternative to an Award or not, many of the issues outlined in this chapter still stand. At this point it remains an important and interesting topic for further exploration.

About the authors

Eileen Scott (MA in Careers Guidance, PG Diploma in Careers Guidance, Cert Ed.) is a professional careers practitioner with nearly 20 years experience within the Higher Education sector. Her Current role is Head of the Careers and Employment Service from September 2010), leading of team of staff to deliver careers education, information advice and guidance services to students, which also comprises a Job Shop and Volunteering Service. Recent activity has been to; co-author the University's 3 year Employability strategy; support the establishment of an Employability Action Group currently being chaired by the Deputy VC Academic; oversee a Bridges – CETL funded Employability Project to further embed employability within the curriculum and project to help establish a University of Bedfordshire Skills/Employability Award.

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With a background in teaching and learning, careers guidance and personal/professional development, Suzanne I'ons has worked extensively as an employee and freelance consultant in and across all levels of the public private and voluntary sector, enabling individuals, teams and organisations to continuously improve the ways they do things. In the past she has: supported the development of Learning

Organisations; developed a Dignity at Work Programme for a local authority; managed a Careers Enhancement Project for Kent schools and developed a High Level Skills Register and Interactive CD Rom and workbook on Graduate Self-Reliance Skills for the University of Derby Careers Service. In this respect she brings a wide range of knowledge, skills and behaviours to support the development of employability skills and processes.

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Section 3

Research informed teaching

Introduction by Petia Petrova

Within the UK Higher Education sector in recent years there has been a concerted effort to bring teaching and research closer together. The University of Bedfordshire has determinedly pursued such links over the last three years. Research informed teaching and research informed learning are key to ensuring that students are taught in an engaging and challenging manner; that their subject knowledge is kept up-to-date; and their research and evaluation skills are developed to better equip them for the challenges of their future careers. All of these areas, in turn, are at the core of achieving our vision of a University of Bedfordshire graduate. Indeed research and evaluation skills are one of the four key skills areas that we seek to develop in CRe8. This section of the book describes five distinct ways of enhancing and enriching students' learning experience through research.

In Chapter 11 Yongmei Bentley and team outline an approach of explicit research informed curriculum development, where a research study is conducted for the purpose of informing a new course development of MSc in Project Management. This approach was used to enhance the team research expertise and to develop a course based on the latest developments and challenges faced by practitioners in the field. Thus students in the new course experienced realistic learning reflecting the practice of project managers and therefore enhancing their employability.

In Chapter 12 Sandra Leggetter and Susan Sapsed describe enhancing curriculum development and delivery in relation to teaching research skills in a distance learning Master's course (in Public Health). They question the assumption that students bring advanced research skills when enrolling for a Master's level qualification. They argue that it is important that we have accurate expectations of student skill levels in order to develop appropriate pedagogy and practice. This is even more so in a distance learning environment where there is no opportunity for face-to-face interaction. They outline a set of interventions to improve students' research skills acquisition.

Student research skills can also be developed and enhanced outside of the formal curriculum. In Chapter 13 Pat Roberts and team outline a model of enhancing student engagement with the research activity of academic staff. Students assisted Pat and her colleagues with their research. Pat captured students learning using an ethnographic approach. Students shared their enthusiasm, noted that the project enhanced their

knowledge of research methods, as well as their employability and personal development.

Sadie Hunt in Chapter 14 also notes the importance of the extracurricular. The way students view, experience and understand research can be affected by what happens in class as well as the way students interact with the University community. Sadie's work builds upon students' conceptions of research, and how developing a junior Research Institute (jRI) in Performing Arts can enable students to have a much more substantial interaction and exposure to research and the Performing Arts research community.

And finally in Chapter 15, Peter Norrington explores the potential of blogs for teaching, learning and research and offers some practical ideas.

All of these chapters exemplify the benefits of explicitly pursuing research - teaching links, be it within curriculum design or delivery or by welcoming and engaging students in the University research community.

Chapter 11

Research informed curriculum design: the development of an MSc Course in Project Management

Yongmei Bentley, Diane Richardson, Elly Philpott, David Owen, Qile He, Yanqing Duan, Vincent Ong

Abstract

Educational institutions seek to provide new courses, and to improve existing ones, to satisfy not only the advancement of knowledge and the on-going changes in student demand, but also to meet increasingly complicated requirements from government bodies and from within the institutions themselves. In addition, students in many cases expect courses to be increasingly practical and work-based, and to improve employability. This paper reports on the application of a Research informed Curriculum Design (RiCD) approach to the development of a new course – an MSc in Project Management.

The first stage of this RiCD was research into contemporary issues in project management research and practice. Several inquiry methods were used and the research provided a detailed up-to-date review and analysis of current project management tools and techniques used in the workplace. In particular, the findings led to an understanding of current practices from project managers' own perspectives. The findings then directly informed the curriculum design of a new MSc Course in Project Management. The success of the first intake suggests that the RiCD approach enhanced the quality of the course offering, and ensured it was vocationally attractive to students. Such research-led focus is likely to be an increasing requirement for academic course development in future, and the approach taken may well be of interest to others developing curricula through research informed teaching (RiT).

Keywords

Research informed teaching; curriculum design; project management

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Introduction

Educational institutions seek to improve existing courses, and to provide new ones, with a view to incorporating advances in knowledge and changes in student needs and the requirements, and also to meet new government and institutional requirements. In addition, in many areas students increasingly expect courses to be practical and work-based, and to improve their employability. As a reflection of this trend, the University of Bedfordshire has recently developed a new curriculum for an MSc course in Project Management which was based on the results of a Research-informed Teaching (RiT) project.

In recent years, the University of Bedfordshire (UoB) has made a significant effort to support RiT initiatives. In part this is to meet a strategic aim of the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE) of ensuring that 'teaching is informed and enriched by research' (HEFCE, 2006). These initiatives were supported by funding from HEFCE's Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund, and their implementation was overseen in the University by the Teaching and Learning Directorate.

RiT refers to the practice of underpinning teaching in higher education with research. While RiT often refers to using the information and perspectives drawn from the research interests of the faculty to enhance course content and student motivation (see, for example, Jenkins, 2004; Griffiths, 2004; Healey, 2005), the RiT project described in this paper was slightly different. The focus of this project was the design of a new MSc course based on research that directly informed the curriculum design of the new course. Hence, the term Research informed Curriculum Design (RiCD) is used where appropriate in the rest of the paper, to indicate this particular interpretation of RiT.

The UK Quality Assurance Agency's *Subject Benchmark for Master's Degrees in Business and Management* (2007) states that a Master's level student should demonstrate: 'a critical awareness of current issues in business and management which is informed by leading-edge research and practice in the field.' Hence, it was the intention of the proposed RiCD project to combine the needs of potential clients (i.e. both students and future employers) in the area of project management with the research team's knowledge and experience of the subject to design the curriculum for the new MSc course in Project Management.

This paper covers the following sections: defining curriculum design, the research subject – project management, the aims and objectives of the research, research methods and findings, the curriculum design of the new course, the reflections on the approach, and a summary and conclusions of the paper.

Defining 'curriculum design'

The term curriculum has different meanings for different people. In this context, it seems appropriate to think about the curriculum from the students' point of view.

Figure 1, a model designed by Prideaux (2003), presents a typical curriculum from the perspective of students.
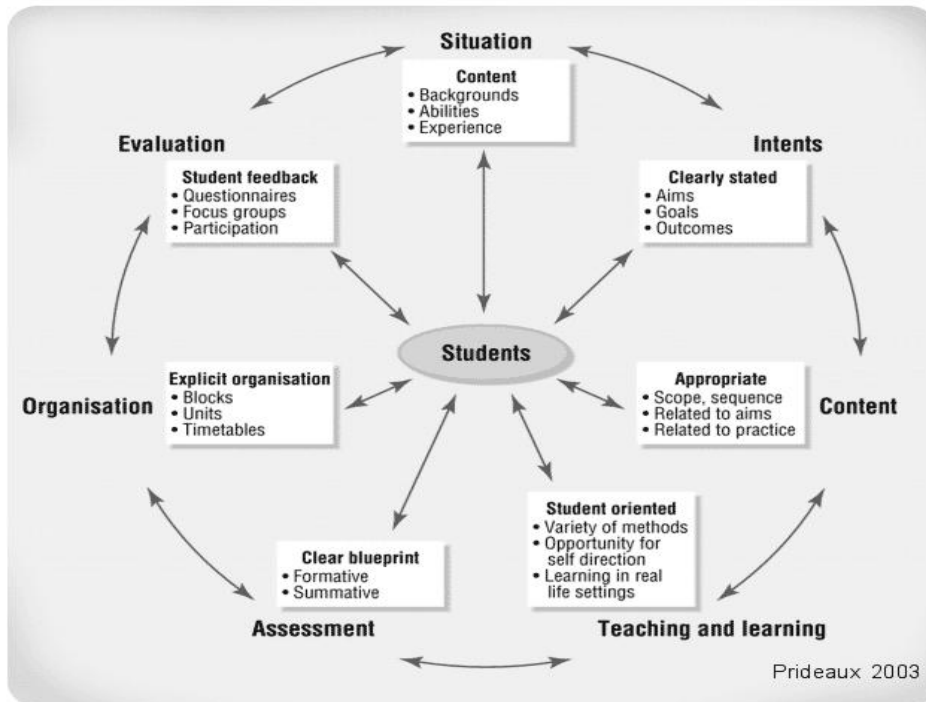
Figure 1: Diagram of the curriculum from the students' perspective (Prideaux, 2003)

As illustrated, the students, who are at the centre of the diagram, are looking out at the various components of the curriculum that will have an impact on their engagement and learning experience, and therefore, their future employability. The components and influences include appropriate scope and sequence of content; student-focused teaching and learning; formative and summative assessment; explicit organization; student evaluation and feedback; the background, ability and experience of the student relative to the situation at hand; and the intention of the curriculum as stated by aims, goals and outcomes. The curriculum is based on a set of values and beliefs about what students should learn – it is the axis about which learning and teaching revolve.

The elements of the model match closely to those considered in the MSc course under discussion though the curriculum design of the course itself, was partly the outcome of the implementation of the principles of the Curriculum Review for 2008 (CRe8) (UoB, 2007a).

CRe8 has three inter-related aims: to provide a curriculum which excites, motivates and engages; to develop students as independent self-regulatory learners; and to prepare students for life beyond the University (UoB, 2007a: 4). It has five overarching and interrelated strands: personalised learning, the curriculum, realistic learning,

employability, and assessment. A summary of the strands is available on the University's website[2] and on page 251, this volume. According to CRe8 (UoB, 2007b), effective curriculum design and delivery involves the following key elements:

- Understanding students: where they are in their development and where they need to get to.
- An open and transparent curriculum with clearly aligned goals, expectations, learning outcomes and assessments.
- Supporting key transition points such as the start of each academic year and ensuring that early experiences set the tone for future activities.
- A 'scaffolded' curriculum which provides students with more early support followed by structured opportunities requiring more independent responsibility and which focuses on higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation.
- A focus on learning as a process and making explicit links between levels, units and activities.
- The appropriate use of technology to support learning and enhance independent learning skills.

The project team believed that the curriculum design should take into account the expected learning outcomes, associated learning and teaching activities, assessment, and evaluation. Curricula should be student-centred and take into account the requirements of a diverse student population. The aim must be to make sure that what is being asked of the students must relate to what they are expected to learn. The aims of the course, learning outcomes, learning activities, assessments and marking criteria should all relate to the other – a process known as constructive alignment.

Note that no curriculum is complete without some reference to that 'hidden' part of the curriculum that is not explicitly planned and stated. This hidden part, according to influential education writers (such as Biggs 2003; Brabrand 2006) consists of the things students learn about their discipline and what is expected of them as learners through experience. Such a 'hidden' curriculum can have a powerful effect on what students do, and how they approach their learning.

The subject - Project Management

After research on the take-up of management courses currently being offered at other UK universities, the Department of Business Systems at UoB confirmed that Project Management was a priority area for the department to enhance its course provision for the coming academic years. To satisfy this requirement, it was considered essential that the department develop a new MSc course in Project Management, and also a

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[2] CRe8 Summary, available at: http://www.beds.ac.uk/learning/curriculum/structures/cre8

corresponding new final year undergraduate Project Management unit, both of which should be underpinned by relevant, up-to-date research to inform the teaching and learning.

Through an initial literature review, it was found that a number of the current textbooks on project management (for example Meridith et al 2006; Lock 2007; and Maylor 2005) have sound accounts on the virtues of project management processes, techniques and tools, such as PRINCE2[3], critical path method (CPM), work breakdown structure and earned value analysis. However, it was judged that most of the texts did not give both lecturers and students a sufficiently rich picture and sound understanding of the use and benefits of project management tools and techniques in businesses today. The literature review revealed limited research in this area, and identified a gap in the understanding of current project management processes and techniques in practice. The following are examples of some of the information drawn from this review.

Winter et al (2006) noted 'the growing critiques of project management theory and the need for new research in relation to the developing practice…to enrich and extend the field beyond its current intellectual foundations and connect it more closely to the challenges of contemporary project management practice.' The authors suggested five research directions, the first of which was concerned with developing 'new theories about project management practice.'

Bryde (2003) noted that 'empirical evidence shows situations in which there are problems in applying theories in practice.' He interviewed 63 people across 22 organisations covering a range of business sectors. His findings showed that while 53% of the organisations studied had a set of written project management procedures, 40% had no such processes/procedures. The author concluded that organisations need more substantial evidence that if a certain project management practice is adopted, project outcomes are likely to meet success criteria.

Maylor (2005) published an appendix article entitled 'To PRINCE or not to PRINCE?' This article considered the two sides of this argument, and demonstrated that some organisations were selective in their use of parts of the methodology. However, there were no details as to which parts of the methodology were considered most useful or beneficial.

Murphy and Ledwith's (2007) paper noted that there has been a lack of research into project management practice in small organisations. Their findings show that 'project management tools and techniques are being used to a limited extent by high technology SMEs.' They reported that 19/40 organisations who responded to a survey (of 200) use project planning tools, 16/40 use MS Project and 14/40 Gantt Charts, with 4/40

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[3] PRINCE2 (PRojects IN Controlled Environments) is a process-based approach for project management providing an easily tailored and scaleable method for the management of all types of projects. The method is the de-facto standard for project management in the UK and is practiced worldwide. (Source: http://www.apmg-international.com/APMG-UK/PRINCE2/PRINCE2Home.asp accessed on 8th April 2010).

using critical path methods. Unfortunately, there was no further explanation or analysis given.

In conclusion, it would seem that while the benefits of formal project management are accepted, there is little evidence of wider application of PM tools and techniques, especially in small businesses. At best tools and techniques are applied inconsistently, and where they are applied there is little case-based evidence that their application shows real benefit as measured by accepted metrics.

Therefore, in designing a new course, there was a clear need to enhance the understanding of what processes, tools and techniques organisations are using in practice and why they choose to use or not use them. Moreover, the literature review suggested that there was a lack of up-to-date, relevant and suitable business case study materials for the research to inform teaching. Therefore, the department considered it important to conduct timely research into this area with the intention of informing the course development. Coincidently, there was a call for RiT proposals from the University's Teaching and Learning Directorate (funded by HEFCE) and the department's response to the call, to carry out the research described here, was successful. As planned, this RiCD project lasted 18 months, from March 2008 to October 2009.

The aims and objectives of the RiCD project

The main aims of the project were:

- To design the curriculum of the proposed MSc course in a way that was not only vocationally based and theoretically informed, but also met the requirements of CRe8
- To enhance the research experience and capacity of the project team, other members of the department, and the students on the course.

To achieve these aims, the project had the following specific objectives:

- To produce an updated project management literature database to inform the curriculum development, course content and future research
- To investigate current practices in project management as used by contemporary business organisations, through empirical investigations using mixed research methods, so as to inform the design of teaching materials in project management

- To establish the course goals, and design the activities to reach these goals, covering specifically selection of units for the course, the links between units, details of contents to be covered in each unit, the course delivery method, and the delivery technology to be used
- To monitor and evaluate the course by obtaining feedback from various sources and make on-going improvements
- To promote the project culture by disseminating the findings and new insights to a wider academic community through periodic seminars, relevant conferences, and research posters.

Research methods

To achieve the research objectives, a number of inquiry methods were used. These included desktop research providing an extensive review of recent project management literature, holding focus groups, a questionnaire survey, and semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Table 1 provides more details:

Research Methods	Participants	No of participants	Research period
Focus Groups	Postgraduates with PM experience	Two groups with 25 participants in total	04/2008 (1st group) 10/2008 (2nd group)
Questionnaire Survey	Practitioners in Project Management	73 out of 1000 polled	11/2008-01/2009
Semi-structured Interviews	Senior Project Managers	4	04/2009 – 07/2009

Table 1: Summary of the Research Methods and Groups

The review of project management literature was extensive. It accumulated a wide range of recent as well as historically significant papers on the topic which were then collated. Most of these provided information directly required for project management course content. The subsequent research activities set out Table 1 are now described in turn.

Focus groups

Data for the RiCD project was first collected from two focus groups which had 25 participants in total, drawn from the UoB's work-based postgraduates, and from people, in employment who were taking a part-time Chartered Management Institute (CMI) Executive Course. The focus group members were selected because they all had experience of project management in the organizations they were working for. The focus groups served as an exploratory study into issues related to project management

concepts, tools and techniques, and key project management success factors. Each focus group session took about 1 hour. Three key questions were asked:

- What is the current practice of project management in your organisation?
- What tools and techniques are currently used in your organisation for project management? Why? Are they effective?
- In your opinion, what are the critical factors affecting the success of the project management?

All focus group discussions were recorded verbatim and transcribed later for analysis. This approach involved reading the transcripts and writing down interpretive comments and analysis based on the data (Gordon and Langmaid, 1988). Relevant comments with similar themes were highlighted and put together for discussion. The qualitative data collected from focus groups generated useful insights which covered a number of areas related to project management, including those that were related to the roles of the project leadership in effective project management.

The focus group approach was employed because it allows participants to freely express their understanding and perceptions in a permissive, non-threatening environment (Krueger and Casey 2000).

The questionnaire survey

The purpose of the survey was to investigate the project management tools and techniques currently used in organisations. In total 1000 questionnaires were posted to randomly selected organisations using the FAME database (a database that contains comprehensive information on companies of all sizes in the UK and Ireland), and 73 responded on the second call. Although the response rate was lower than expected, taking into consideration the various industries the respondents represented, the survey resulted in a reasonable coverage of opinions from a wide business community. A summary of the coverage of the questionnaire and the key findings is given in Appendix 1. The top ten project management tools and techniques with regard to their 'frequency of use' and 'usefulness' in the respondents' organisations are presented in Table 2.

'Frequency of use' combines how often a tool or technique was selected from the printed list, and how frequently it was then said to be used. The top ten items listed in Table 2 (left column) stood out significantly. In terms of the 'usefulness' of a tool or technique (right column), it was perhaps not surprising to see that much the same items were also in the top ten as for 'frequency of use'. Overall, the minor differences in order among the top nine items were not significant. Both 'Quality Management Standard' and 'Quality Plan' were mentioned equally often. 'Quality Management

Standard' was more frequently used, but was considered of average usefulness, whereas 'Quality Plan', while less frequently employed, was considered very useful.

Ranking Order by Frequency of Use	Ranking Order by Usefulness
Gantt charts	Project Initiation Document (PID)
Project Initiation Document (PID)	Gantt charts
Microsoft Project	Microsoft Project
Risk Register	Risk Register
Cash Flow Analysis	Cash Flow Analysis
Work breakdown structure	Communication Plan
Job Cost/Operational Estimating	Work breakdown structure
Communication Plan	Critical Path Method [CPM]
Critical Path Method [CPM]	Job Cost/Operational Estimating
Quality Management Standard [ISO9000]	Quality Plan

Table 2: Top 10 Project Management Tools and Techniques

During a follow-up interview, when asked why 'Project Initiation Document (PID) was on the top list, one project manager's comment was:

> "PID sets out the strategic objectives, the business drivers, ... the roles and responsibilities of everybody involved, it establishes the SRO (Senior Responsible Officer), the project sponsor, the key suppliers, … and it establishes the governance structure, so it identifies all the main stakeholders. It includes a risk analysis, and it includes a quality assurance plan – that's why it's so important, that PID."

Surprisingly, it was noted that the well-known and highly promoted PRINCE2 methodology was not at the top of either category. The main reason for this, according to the investigation was that PRINCE2, which requires intensive training, was considered too formal and a bit too resource intensive to implement. Maylor (2005) indicates that only a small number of organisations used such a formal method, and some were selective in their use of parts of the method. Though it is said that PRINCE2 can be used for a wide variety and size of projects[4], small organisations have rarely been reported to have adopted the approach in practice.

Semi-structured interviews

Four face-to-face semi-structured interviews were undertaken with senior project managers who either worked for large UK companies, or who provided consultancy

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4 PRINCE2® Foundation/Practitioner Course, available at: www.spoce.com/prince2/course-outlines/p2-practitioner-course-outline.aspx accessed in April 2010.

services for large corporations. The participants were selected after the focus group study and the questionnaire survey to gather a more in-depth understanding and knowledge of the issues concerned. Semi-structured interviews were adopted because they have the flexibility to give interviewees the freedom to express their views in more depth and in a relatively unconstrained manner, but at the same time retain sufficient formal structure to ensure that key points and controversies are addressed.

These interviews helped elaborate and confirm the findings from the questionnaire survey and the focus groups. As with the previous investigations, the interviews covered questions related to project management practice, tools and techniques, and key success factors. In particular, in these interviews, the range of questions was extended to cover views on the role of the project leadership in providing effective project management. Each interview lasted about one hour.

Curriculum design of the course

Overview

The curriculum design of the MSc course in Project Management described here took into consideration of the findings from the research, the aims of CRe8, and the elements from the curriculum model discussed earlier in Figure 1.

The MSc course in Project Management, as developed in this project, consists of nine units as shown in Figure 2, seven of which were specifically designed for this course. The remaining two units were existing units (Financial Analysis, and the Human Side of Management) taught by other departments of the Business School, but where their teaching contents were redesigned to fit the purpose of this project management course.

While Figure 2 is the course structure for the year-long full-time course, the part-time course was designed for work-based students to complete over a period of two years. The full-time course units are delivered on a weekly basis whereas the part-time units are delivered in concentrated blocks on Fridays and Saturdays. In addition, as a final project, the full time students need to complete the Applied Management Project (AMP), while the part-time students are encouraged to undertake an in-depth work-based research project, and to submit a dissertation.

The feedback from the research projects, and from the students on the course, has suggested that the course delivery approach has adequately taken into consideration of the learners' situation – background, ability and experience (as indicted in Figure 1), and in addition was considered appropriate to manage the differences between the needs of full-time and part-time students.
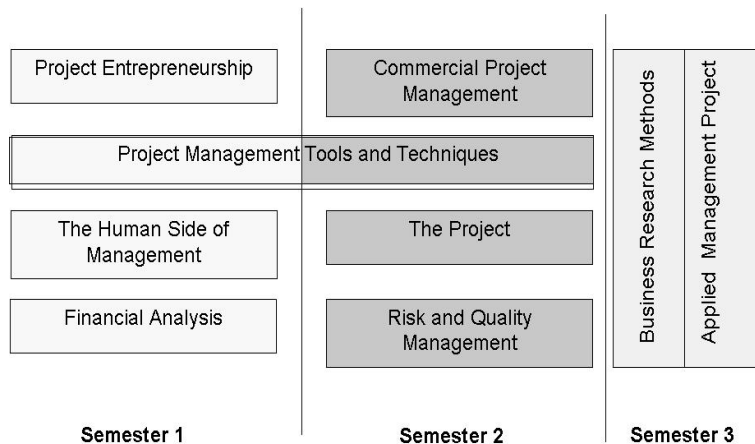
Figure 2: Full-Time course structure

The course units

An overview of the units designed for this course is presented in Appendix 2. The following provides additional information about course units and explains how the findings from the first stage of the RiCD research have guided the unit selection, content focus and assessment approaches.

Project Management Tools and Techniques: The research at first sight was ambiguous on the importance of project management tools and techniques to practitioners. On one hand, the survey of practitioners listed a variety of tools (such as Gantt charts, PIDs, Microsoft Project, CPM tools, a risk register and so on) as both frequently used and as being high in the usefulness. On the other hand, the focus-group and individual interview responses downplayed the importance of tools, and stressed instead that what determines the success and effectiveness of project management is the ability of project managers to create an appropriate culture for effective project management, to form a holistic governance structure for project stakeholders, to manage the dynamics of change, and to enforce and encourage effective communication. Nevertheless, despite this second view, it is clear that the tools and techniques are a key element in modern project management which all practitioners are expected to know, and for this reason the course unit on this topic was given the highest priority of the course, having doubled credits (2*15), and being delivered throughout the academic year for both full time and work-based part time students. In addition, the schedule of the unit was designed so that students would be introduced to the main project management methodologies, and would be able to critique them, prior to opting to specialise with a one-week intensive PRINCE2 Practitioners' course delivered externally to the course.

Risk and Quality Management*:* The ability to assess project risk and quality was also essential to future practitioners, and so it was recognised that the course must contain a unit covering this area. This unit is delivered in Semester 2, and by then the students have the experience of analysing a great number case studies and have obtained a good understanding of the importance of project risk and quality management and learned the basic tools and techniques for their management.

The Human Side of Management*:* Findings from RiCD research revealed that the human side of project management, such as leadership and communication skills, is very critical to the success of the project management. Informed by the research findings, one unit was particularly assigned to address the human side of management. This unit focuses on the 'soft' issues of project management such as the skills needed for conducting effective communication, negotiation, and project leadership. Effective communication is a critical factor for effective project management (see Wysocki 2006; Hyväri 2006; and the focus-group and interview responses), and project managers are as responsible for the communication process as for technical process. Project managers need to have both technical knowledge and be excellent communicators. For example, comments from project managers included:

> "Project management is communication, communication, communication. … Without communication … people don't really understand what a project is."

> "It is an awful lot about communication, about talking to people, knowing exactly what is going on at any given time and also relationship-building with the customer…"

Project: The research also found that the ability to apply theory learned from the course was important, and therefore the course would benefit from the inclusion of a specific Project Unit where students would work in small groups and deliver a real project for a client. (In this context a 'real' project is one that has to be based on an actual situation known to the students, not just a documented case study, or a project where the information is drawn from literature or the web). This unit is scheduled for the second semester so that the students by then have had a reasonably good knowledge of the subject and have had sufficient time to think about the project they would like to deliver and to prepare for the implementation of the project management ideas. When the project is closed, the students were requested to submit a report and make a group presentation on the delivery of their project to a panel consisting of lecturers of the course.

PRINCE2 course and AMP accreditation: Another important finding from the RiCD research was the importance of project managers' practical skills and knowledge. Therefore, to keep the course grounded in practical requirements and enhance the students' employability, the course was designed to give students the opportunity to take a PRINCE2 course delivered on-campus, but by an external professional body. This allows for Master's-level critique and reasoning across a wide range of project management methodologies, while providing an opportunity for students to obtain the

additional professional qualification. If students could be given the option of taking a professional qualification concurrently, then professional accreditation from the Association for Project Management (APM) would also be possible. To add value to, and improve the popularity of the course, the department is also in the process of seeking professional accreditation from APM for the course.

The course was designed to make full use of both the university-licensed tools such as BREO (Bedfordshire Resource for Education Online), and external software tools such as MS Project, Predict!/Crystal Ball, to reinforce classroom learning. In addition, the department is partnered with a leading software provider in the collaborative assessment of risk management tools. The relationship also provides case-based data on the strengths and weaknesses of these tools in different contexts. This information can be used for lecturing purposes and the students can become actively involved in the application of available tools in project scenarios.

Validation and launching of the new course

A draft of the course structure, with constituent units, was circulated in December 2008 to a group of external stakeholders from the public, private and not-for-profit sectors. Comment was generally positive regarding the content of the course. In a gesture of support, the stakeholders agreed to continue as an 'employer advisory panel' for the ongoing development of the course. This was seen by the project team as a very positive step towards ensuring that the course would remain commercially grounded and attractive to potential employers and employees alike.

The MSc course with all its units successfully obtained validation in March 2009, with the course team received a commendation for the work undertaken in the development of the course. The Validation process was helped by the fact that the course was designed based on research linked to the University's wider RiT project and therefore enabled University quality and validation requirements to be readily met. Moreover, the RiCD project enabled the course development team to have most up-to-date knowledge of contemporary project management practices and research, which inevitably enhanced the capability of the course team to validate the course and deliver subsequent teaching successfully. After the successful validation, this MSc course in Project Management was launched in the academic year 2009/2010, with a very successful first intake of 41 full-time and 7 part-time students in September 2009.

Reflections

A number of important reflections can be summarised to illustrate how the research findings and insights have contributed to the curriculum design, guided the course organisation (timetable, blocks, units, etc), informed the teaching content selection, and influenced the assessment strategy and approaches. This RiCD approach provided in-depth, research-led, and work-based information which enabled the production of well-researched and practice-oriented teaching materials for the students on the course. The

research work also provided a sound platform of credibility at validation and in recruitment. The model set an example of good practice which it is felt can be used to facilitate the design of other new curricula.

For example, informed by the findings on importance of the human factors in project management, a specific unit called Human Side of Management was selected as an important course unit. To emphasise the development of practical knowledge and skills – considered as very important in project management success by the RiCD research participants – the teaching and assignment in the units offered all have a high degree of real-world focus by using case studies and problem solving exercises. In addition, the course requires the students to develop and deliver a real project within the duration of the MSc course. The units of the course ensure that the principles taught are grounded in real-world examples, and help to secure student knowledge in this area.

To enhance the employability of the students, a special feature of the course is that it is designed to provide students with the opportunity to take a professional project management course and exams in PRINCE2 concurrently. For the first cohort, 14 out of 41 students have been awarded their PRINCE2 qualifications. Such a professional qualification will help improve the students' employability as PRINCE2 is a *de facto* standard used extensively by the UK Government and is recognised and used in the private sector, both in the UK and internationally.

Using the information and contacts established through the RiCD empirical research, an Employer Advisory Panel was formed to review the course and to provide inputs. In addition, a number of the project managers interviewed during the research have agreed to act as external speakers to give students periodic guest lectures on topics of interest so the students on the course will be better informed of best practice in the subject.

Very importantly, information gained from the RiCD research activities has enabled the whole course team to better understand the practical needs of practitioners. Course team members are therefore more capable of choosing the most relevant and appropriate cases and assessment materials to assist the course delivery, thus improving the quality of teaching and learning.

In addition, participating in RiCD project by team members brought colleagues together to achieve the specific goals, and hence, there was a need to create a project culture in which value orientations could be rapidly formed and shared among team members. Such a project culture is important for effective project management as it helps form a holistic governance structure for project stakeholders, manage the dynamics of change, and enforce effective communication. The team felt that they have brought this culture to the classroom. They told the students to manage the course they are taking as if they were managing a real project, and they have done so seriously.

This RiCD project has not only helped the new MSc course design and development, but also brought the team members into a new area of research which could lead to follow up research activities such as publications, and internal and external research bids. Moreover, the contacts established through the project can also facilitate other

research projects. In addition, this project created an impact on student and staff research culture and continuous learning, and on the university profile of the outcomes of individual projects.

Conclusions

This paper reports on the adoption of a Research informed Curriculum Design (RiCD) approach to the development of a new MSc course in Project Management. To achieve the overall aim of RiCD, the project went through two main stages of work. The first stage involved extensive research, via desktop research and empirical investigation, which aimed to gain in-depth insights into issues in contemporary project management research and practice. This research stage involved literature review, focus groups, a questionnaire survey, and in-depth face-to-face interviews. As a result, a substantial amount of qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed. This resulted in a sound understanding of current practices in project management from project managers' perspectives, and a detailed evaluation and analysis of current project management methods, tools and techniques as used in the workplace. The findings from this first stage were then incorporated into the second stage of the project, which was the curriculum design of the MSc in Project Management. This course was designed explicitly for those who will work in project management in businesses and industries, and a block-structured part-time route was also incorporated to provide a flexible learning option for students in employment. After the successful validation of the course it had a high take-up first intake in September 2009.

The success of the curriculum design and implementation confirmed that it is useful for new courses and units to be research informed and practice-based, to ensure that students have a realistic learning experience, and a curriculum that is designed to support their employability through subject knowledge, vocational applicability, contextualisation and career orientation. It is expected that the use of such a research-led focus is likely to be an increasing requirement in the development of new academic course over coming years.

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Appendix 1: Summary of Key Findings from the Questionnaire Survey

Organisation Type: The 73 responses covered most organisation types, with a bias towards construction and manufacturing.

Organisation Size: Nearly three in four (74%) of the respondents' organisations have more than 100 employees, of which 19 (26%) report more than 1000. Three are single-figure-staffed consultancies.

Use of Project Management Tools and Techniques: Half (52%) of the organisations report using project management tools and techniques for every project, the remainder use them "sometimes".

Project Team Size: Half (48%) of the projects described had project teams made up of fewer than 10 people, while 7 of the projects had teams of over 100.

Budget and Revenue: Figures on project budget and, especially, revenue are less clear, as several respondents did not complete one or both of these questions. However, the 63 budget amounts mentioned have an average of between £500,000 and £1,000,000, with 9 projects having a budget of more than £10,000,000

International Aspect: Most (63%) projects had no international aspect to them; 22% dealt with international aspects both within and beyond the organisation.

Critical Success Factors at Project Outset: The main success factors identified at the outset of projects were, predictably, "completion on time" and "completion to budget". "Completion to quality" came a close third, followed by "completion to customer satisfaction".

Critical Success Factors for Project Completion: The critical success factors for completion of projects were "effective project management", "adequate resources" and "effective project team". "Specific objectives stated", "senior management commitment" and a "realistic schedule" were also highly valued, while, interestingly, the contribution of "project management tools and techniques" came a distant last.

Appendix 2: An overview of the units designed for the MSc course in Project Management

Units	Unit Description
Project Entrepreneur ship	The unit introduces PM concepts and develops students' understanding of the scope of PM in a wide variety of contexts and sectors. It is structured on the theme that projects are the creation of something new in response to an opportunity/threat, and hence creativity and business modelling are key features of the unit. Provides theoretical underpinning and skills required a later 'Project' unit.
Project Management Tools and Techniques	This unit is designed to explore the theory and principles of PM as applicable to the management of public/private, large/small, national and international projects. It considers the appropriate application of PM methodologies and tools and provides the opportunity to evaluate commercially available software in real-world cases. PM Techniques covered include: PM theory and methodologies (PRINCE2, PM standards and Bodies of Knowledge (BoK), software and tools. PM tools covered include: project initiation document (PID), work breakdown structure, Gantt chart, critical path method (CPM), program evaluation and review technique (PERT), PRINCE2, Microsoft Project.
Commercial Project Management	This unit focuses specifically on large projects and programmes in a variety of contexts and considers the challenges faced by project managers in both the private and public sectors and the interface between these two sectors. The emphasis is on managing the issues and problems encountered within any project and the difficulties of delivering projects and programmes within the agreed objectives.
Risk and Quality Management	This unit explores the theory and principles of risk and quality management as applicable to the management of public/private, large/small, national and international projects. It considers the appropriate application of quality and risk management methodologies and tools and provides the opportunity to evaluate the use of commercially available tools in real-world cases. The contents covered in the unit include: quality management as a strategy, quality gurus, quality management standards, TQM and projects, variability, quality tools and projects; risk management and projects, risk register, risk management models, risk and quality standards, good practice and guidelines for risk and quality management in projects.
The Human Side of Management	Leaders and managers have to support their staff and colleagues in ways that ensure that the appropriate skills, knowledge, and behaviour are available as environmental demands change and the organisation adjusts to those demands. An understanding of the basic principles of employee behaviour, an informed appreciation of the value of the human resource, and the ability to draw on the former to add to the latter, can optimise employee performance within the organization. This unit covers: project leadership, communication plan, negotiation skills, and so on.
Financial Analysis	This unit is core for the MSc generalist suite of programs. This unit starts at a basic knowledge level, but advances rapidly through the course to enable students to reach Masters level in this subject. The unit covers balance sheet, cash flow analysis, job cost and operational estimating, and other the basics of both Financial Accounting and Management Accounting.

Business Research Methods	This unit focuses on developing students' capabilities to carry out business research independently. It is designed to help students prepare for and plan their dissertation or Applied Management Project (AMP). This unit covers research methodology, methods, techniques and practices appropriate to students following the MSc PM course.
The Project	Whilst this unit incorporates an eclectic mix of theoretical concepts and models from other disciplines, its fundamental nature is one of using models and techniques to achieve concrete outcomes. As such, practice is an essential part of acquiring the skills of PM. This unit provides students with important real-life experience. The unit will enable students to learn from experience of managing a real project by critically assessing a range of PM models, choosing from them in a flexible way to fit organizational demands in a given practical situation. PM involves a deliberate and reflective assumption of role, and students are encouraged to reflect on their own performance as project manager and leader. They will need to draw upon course material from other units to make sense of their assigned project, and implement practical solutions.
The Applied Management Project (AMP)	This unit is designed to give students the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of business as well as the skills essential for effective operations in a business environment. It can enable the students to demonstrate their ability to formulate a problem, identify information needs, retrieve and synthesise information, produce creative solutions, write a well argued and supported report, work effectively in a group, work effectively in a time constrained situation. The unit begins with an intensive one week induction to brief the requirements of the project and provide the students with necessary support. The students are required to manage this final assignment as a real project, and reflect on the learning achieved through the process.
Dissertation	As an alternative to AMP, this unit is designed to enable the work-based students to undertake a sustained piece of in-depth research and thereby to achieve the following objectives: to recognise, organise, and address an issue of organisational and corporate importance at an advanced level; to integrate material across different subjects and functional areas; to gain practical experience in selecting and using research techniques; to gain experience in handling and resolving problems of methodology in practice; to develop critical thinking, analytical and reflective skills, in handling arguments that lead to a conclusion supported by evidence.

Chapter 12

Identifying and addressing the challenges of facilitating the development of key research skills in Master's level public health students with a diverse range of educational and ethnic backgrounds

Sandra Leggetter and Susan Sapsed

Abstract

Within UK Higher Education, strategies to improve teaching and learning have persistently remained high on the agenda. One recent strategy identifies the need to secure the UK's position as a leader in international education. Recruitment of international students at the University of Bedfordshire has seen a sharp increase in recent years and the Master's in Public Health recruits highly from this population. We identified that some students arrive with a limited knowledge and understanding of key research skills. The perception of the teaching team was that the international students faced additional challenges due to being unfamiliar with the UK education system and English not being a first language. As an online mode of delivery was introduced we started to consider whether additional teaching and learning challenges would present and started to explore our curriculum framework. It became increasingly clear that we needed to explore the nature of our student population and the interaction between student and teacher in more detail. Only after exploring what our students expected from us, and the course, could we evaluate our pedagogy and practice in relation to the development of Master's level research and evaluation skills. Early findings challenge our perceptions and the possible reasons for this explored. Changes to pedagogy and practice are examined, future challenges identified and implications for the University's post graduate curriculum framework and recruitment strategies are explored.

Keywords

Internationalisation; Master's level research skills; curriculum

Introduction

The Dearing Report (1997) identified that HE in the UK needs to be "at the leading edge of world practice in effective learning and teaching". Just under 10 years later, in 2006, The Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education (PMI2) echoed this sentiment. This 5 year strategy set out to "secure the UK's position as a leader in international education" and stated that in order to do this it is imperative that we maintain our reputation within the international arena (PMI2 2006). Although exact figures are difficult to determine, the British Council figures indicate that there are over half a million international students studying within the UK (Pont 2009). This figure suggests that the UK is closing in on the United States of America – the world leader in international student recruitment. Twitchell (2004) identifies that in the USA 'Higher Ed, Inc.' is a multi-billion dollar business that is "bigger than religion and much bigger than art" (p47). Indeed, the University of Bedfordshire (UoB) has seen a rapid expansion of the enrolment of postgraduate students and in the 5 year period between 2004 and 2009 report an 11% increase in the number of EU students and a 33% increase in non-EU students (Atlay et al 2010). However, the growth in internationalisation is not without problems. In the UK it has led Higher Education institutions (HEIs) to question whether the predominantly 'white and Eurocentric' curriculum fails to characterize the diversity of cultures in the UK today (Open University Curriculum Planning Group 2000 cited by Haigh 2008). Haigh (2008) contends that international students are 'dumped' into an educational system that is geared to meet the needs of home students. He further suggests that international students are disadvantaged by a system that assumes an understanding of local knowledge and conventions of teaching, learning and language. A system, Maguire (2001) advocates that even students from non-traditional backgrounds can struggle with. Stier (2003) identifies that for many students studying in an educational system that is unfamiliar to them requires greater effort because they have to cope with such things as varying teaching styles, mutual expectations (in terms of being autonomous learners), and unfamiliar assessments methods. Indeed, this does seem to be something that is supported by our diverse student population. One of our international student recorded in his reflective blog "hmmm...I hope I can handle all these [units] ??? quite different, the method of study here, assignments and all as compared to practicals and exams in Nigeria". As a consequence it is now commonly accepted that if internationalisation is to be successful, HEIs must re-evaluate and adapt their pedagogy and practice in order to ensure there is constructive alignment between their educational mission, financial goals and management structures (Haigh 2008).

Changing academic environment

Strategies to improve teaching and leaning within UK HE are many and varied and remain high on the agenda and academics in HE are now working in a rapidly changing environment. Fanghanel (2007) argues that:

> …in a context of increased massification, teaching has become an activity at the same time more complex (directed at an increasingly diverse body of students in increasingly 'flexible' learning environments), more problematized (through educational development and targeted funding initiatives), and more managed (through audits and managerialist understandings of practice (p4).

Norton (2009) argues that these continuous changes have resulted in academics facing a number of competing demands on both their time and energy. Incorporated into these demands is the need to be excellent at teaching, research and administration. Revisiting curriculum design and constantly evaluating pedagogy and practice, in addition to already increasing work loads, adds to these demands.

Student support also remains an important academic role. Historically the types of support required of HEIs have included such things as emotional and personal issues, and concerns surrounding academic work load. More recently, with changes in legislation and the Labour Government's commitment to widening access to HE, the range of support that needs to be offered has extended. Equity of access to HE is now available to those designated as non-traditional students by virtue of their income, class, age or ethnicity (HEFCE/ LSC 2001). HEIs now have the additional responsibility of supporting, not only international students who do not have English as a first language, but also home students who now enter HE with a broad range of cultural beliefs, customs and learning styles and who may also have underlying communication and language problems.

Developing e-learning is also firmly on the UK education agenda. Recently, during the Learning and Technology World Forum in London the then Prime Minister Gordon Brown declared that the UK could become a "global education superpower", with e-learning as one of its fastest growing exports (Lentell, 2010). Indeed, whilst recruiting for our Master's in Public Health course it became apparent that there were many more enquiries from potential students than applications received. Despite a considerable number of potential students showing an interest in the course (n=88) we identified that the majority of these did not go on to recruitment and we questioned why this might be. An audit, whereby all applicants were emailed a short questionnaire, identified that the 80% attendance requirement was problematic for the majority of them. The strong message that came across was the need to offer a course that was delivered purely via distance learning. With this need identified, we launched the online Public Health Master's course (Sapsed et al 2008). However, having done so a number of challenges have been identified that were not previously considered.

Skills acquisition

Reynolds et al (2002) argue that learning is a process of acquiring new knowledge, skills and capabilities. However, although there is no question about the importance of the role of HE educators in ensuring students 'learn' it has also been suggested that learning organisations must facilitate the learning of all its members and continually

transform themselves (Pedler et al 1991). Stier (2003) suggests it is vital that an empathic, tolerant and respectful and productive learning environment is created if students are to feel motivated and at ease. The author proposes that the same kind of environment is equally important to academics if they are to be sufficiently knowledgeable and motivated to develop curricula that are 'fit for purpose' in a rapidly changing HE system. Furthermore, there is also the additional expectation for graduates to demonstrate high level employability skills (Yorke 2006) and it is no longer acceptable for HEIs to just concentrate on 'subject specific learning' (Pedagogy for Employability Group, 2006). Jenkins et al (2007, p3) reinforce this viewpoint by stating that "teaching students to be enquiring or research-based in their approach […] is central to the hard-nosed skills required of the future graduate workforce".

In the UK the standard-setting body for specialists in public health is the Faculty of Public Health. This body defines the competencies required to work as a practitioner within this field and our course has incorporated these into its curriculum. The course learning outcomes are well aligned with the three domains of public health practice, health protection, health improvement and service quality (Faculty of Public Health, 2009). Central to public health practice is knowledge and understanding of research and evaluation. Practitioners must have an understanding of research methods appropriate to public health practice; including epidemiology, statistical methods, data handling and interpretation skills, critical appraisal skills and other methods of enquiry including qualitative research methods. It is essential that our curriculum prepares students for employment, be it in the UK or internationally, and hence, this was one of the key drivers for undertaking this research. Additionally, during the development the course, our curriculum was also mapped against the National Health Service Knowledge and Skills Framework (Department of Health 2004) and the Public Health Skills and Career Framework (Public Health Resource Unit 2007). Other considerations when the curriculum was being developed was ensuring that the assessment and delivery were aligned to the UoB's Master's level descriptors and addressed the requirements of the UoB's curriculum framework – CRe8 (see Mark Atlay and Lesley Lawrence, Chapter 17; Atlay, 2010.)

Whilst Brew (2006) believes that by the time students reach university they have already had considerable experience in investigation, project research, and inquiry based learning, others disagree. Schroeder (2004) suggests that contemporary HE students have changed dramatically, which has resulted in many experienced lecturers feeling both "bewildered and frustrated". He also asserts that many HE students display a lack of confidence in their intellectual abilities and are uncomfortable with abstract ideas. Additionally he believes that they have difficulty with complex concepts, a low tolerance for ambiguity, are often less independent in thought and judgement and more dependent on the ideas of those in authority. Contemporary students are also more dependent on immediate gratification and exhibit difficulty with some basic academic skills. Schroeder (2004) further suggests that these students require a practice-to-theory approach rather than the more traditional theory-to-practice approach. Whilst developing and launching our Master's in Public Health we shared similar expectations to Brew (2006). However as time passed it soon became apparent that this was not the case and we began to observe in our student population many of the traits described by

Schroeder. This was further supported when we asked the 2007 student cohort about their research experience prior to enrolling on the course and discovered that 28% perceived that they had no prior research experience and 22% only limited experience (n=32). Hence, 50% of our students entered the course with a lower perceived level of research knowledge than we had anticipated for M-level students. As the Faculty of Public Health's learning outcomes require students to be able to design studies, critically appraise published papers and draw appropriate conclusions from quantitative and qualitative research it is important that we use effective teaching strategies that complement our students learning approaches so that students gain the research skills required for 'real world' practice (see also Sadie Hunt, Chapter 14).

Our student demographics

Our student population is diverse and many face difficult challenges in their studies. It includes not only a large number of international students (approximately 40%), but also many home students who do not have English as a first language or who have not previously studied in the UK. Experience highlights that academic skill in such student populations are variable with many struggling with basic concepts. Topics such as literature searching, evaluating the quality and content of the literature and referencing are not familiar to many. However, our students' perception of some key research skills on entry to the course indicates that they are generally quite confident with referencing and ethics but perceive themselves to be least confident with critical appraisal skills and statistical analysis and interpretation.

The notion of independent and self-directed learning appears to be a particularly challenging concept to grasp. Although it has been argued that the key to getting and keeping students actively involved in learning lies in understanding learning style preferences (Halstead & Martin 2001). Anderson (1988 cited by Smith 2001) argue that many learning style models are underpinned by 'Western' assumptions and do not consider differences in cognitive and communication styles that may be culturally based. With the knowledge that the character of students entering Higher Education has changed it became clear there is a need for us to respond to these changes. In order to know that what we are teaching has real value we can benefit from understanding both the effect of how we are presenting our material; and to whom we are presenting it. One major issue for us as educators is to come to an understanding of the nature and level of support required by students to gain the most from their learning activities. Doing this will not only allow us to explore which teaching approaches enhance learning but will also allow us to evaluate whether the learning experiences in both the campus-based and the online courses is similar. Our findings will identify how future provision needs to change in order to improve the student learning experiences and enhance their research and evaluative skills.

Perhaps another important consideration with our diverse student population is the length of time available for contemporary students to develop the necessary skills in time to complete the research-based dissertation. Not only do many have to familiarise themselves with an 'alien' education system but the full time students (who are expected

to complete in one year) have to submit a research proposal and ethical approval application within the first 4 months of the course in order to ensure they gain approval in time to carry out their research and write up their dissertation. This is a difficult task for UK educated students who are familiar with our education system. However, when considering the additional challenges faced by many non-traditional and international students, and the fact that many lack a number of the basic key skills to approach this task, the question needs to be asked whether they do not achieve as well as they could have done had they had more time to develop these skills? Recently Olcott (2010) provided a thought-provoking, and perhaps contentious, debate on the length of UK Master's courses. He states that "at its core a masters degree is an empirical and scholarly degree" (p33) and, hence, it is key that if students are to be able to objectively assess, comment on, and learn from, existing research it is imperative they are taught the rudiments of scholarly and empirical research, critical analysis and synthesis– all essential skills that our students perceived they lacked confidence with. Although it is not conceivable that the UK will move away from short Master's courses in the near future it is important that HEIs develop curriculum frameworks that facilitate student development of these skills (see Mark Atlay and Lesley Lawrence, Chapter 17).

Methodology

An action research approach was adopted and the full findings will be published at a later date. Action research (AR) is a form of research that focuses on the effects of the researcher's direct actions on practice within a participatory community with the goal of improving the performance quality of the community or an area of concern (Reason & Bradbury, 2001; McNiff 2002). One definition offered by Carr and Kemmis is:

> Action research is a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out (1986: 162).

As AR is interpretive it is only after the research cycle has been repeated and study refinements made, that teaching practice can be reviewed holistically (Norton 2009). This aspect of AR is key in this study as it is considering different groups of students over time, making changes to practice and then re-evaluating these changes in line with the findings. At its core, action research allows the researcher to test new ideas and implement action for change (see Arti Kumar, Chapter 18).

Carr & Kemmis (2002) identify macro and micro levels as the first of five dimensions which help distinguish different types of curriculum research. They explore relevant research studies that investigate the macro level in terms of the education system as a whole; the effects of education and family in relation to inequalities, educational policies at systems level, and individual school (and classroom) curriculum research. They discuss micro levels in terms of studies that explore the "specific interactions between teachers and students" (p22) as these can identify some revealing insights about the

consequences of different kinds of learning opportunities and learning processes. Although it is impossible to discount the macro level the main focus of this work will be on the micro level, in terms of looking at interaction between student and teacher and pedagogical belief.

Discussion

Lecturing staff on the Public Health Master's perceived that a significant number of international students were entering the course without the underpinning knowledge-base or experience of research methods. Hence, the quality of their work was judged to be low. Likewise, it was perceived that, as developing research skills within the taught cohort was challenging, the students studying via the online mode of delivery would be disadvantaged as they are limited by the amount of opportunities available to gain the face-to-face support from lecturers and/or peers. As research underpins the whole curriculum it is important that students are facilitated to develop key skills that will enable them to successfully complete the course and evidence a high level of employability skills (Public Health Faculty 2009; Yorke 2006). This work has enabled us to explore some of these perceptions and to evaluate what actions can be taken to ensure that teaching and learning strategies are effective for both taught and online students.

Although there is insufficient evidence to suggest that there is a difference in attainment between the home and international students, we have identified a need to explore our students' personal and educational backgrounds in greater depth. In other words although the data will measure attainment in relation to grades achieved it will not identify whether the students who achieve the lower grades do so for the same reason. International students are limited in the number of hours they can work and therefore may potentially have more time to concentrate on their studies yet find this difficult because of the lack of the required skills. Conversely, perhaps the home students are attempting to study whilst working full time and time management, not lack of skill, is the key reason they do not achieve their full potential. Carr & Kemmis (2002) state that by concentrating on the micro level, insights into different learning opportunities and learning processes should be revealed. By incorporating additional questions which allow students to identify external factors that may have the potential to impact negatively on their study, a deeper understanding may be gained. Likewise by determining where undergraduate qualifications were gained will illustrate how many of our home students were educated outside of the UK system. This may be a better indicator of outcome than classifying students by home or international status alone. At present there is no evidence to suggest that the online students are achieving any differently from the attending students. However, numbers of online learners are small (28 compared with 74 face-to-face) and as we re-visit the AR cycle with future cohorts and sample size increases this may change. Similarly student engagement and motivation will be evaluated by accessing course statistics to determine how frequently individual students access online teaching and learning material and explore if those who engage more achieve higher grades.

Shroeder (2004) offers his perception of contemporary students entering HE today and what is being observed amongst the Public Health Master's students within our institution emulates these perceptions. Although they identify a relatively high confidence level in terms of referencing, ethics and citing authors it is clear from assessments that this confidence is somewhat misplaced. Students are displaying less confidence with research skills such as qualitative and quantitative research methods, critical appraisal skills and statistics. Preliminary findings suggest that knowledge and understanding of the research process is a challenge for a large number of students, regardless of where they were educated. When questioned about the skills they felt they had not achieved at the end of the course, all still identified a lack of understanding and confidence with data analysis. Although it could be argued that perhaps our students are not unique in identifying this as a particularly challenging skill it does highlight the need for the teaching team to explore how this can be addressed.

If, as Schroeder (2004) suggests, contemporary students need a more practice to theory approach this is something that that needs to be considered within the teaching strategy. Students have identified that additional taught research sessions are needed. However, timetabling issues mean this is not always possible and this approach may not benefit the online students. In order to facilitate more autonomous and critical thinking learners perhaps the best way to approach this is to utilise the e-technology available and increase the range and number of online tasks that all students can complete with the aim of enhancing their learning. Students have already positively evaluated video and podcast material used and as a result more of this type of material has been incorporated into online teaching material. Additionally more 'workshop' type of activities has been introduced in the classroom setting whereby students are given public health practice related material and work in groups to critically analyse and discuss in terms of research (practice-theory). However, this presented another challenge - how could this approach be adapted for the online students? One solution identified, and implemented, was to provide all students with the same tasks and get them to engage with online discussion and present their conclusions via the course Wiki. As well as engaging the students in self-directed and critical learning this also facilitates a much wider community of learners as the online students, the taught students and the lecturers can all interact electronically. In addition, further online activities have being introduced this year in light of student feedback. These include such things as more online discussion forums, and the inclusion of games (such as crosswords and hangman) as educational tools. To date these have been positively evaluated.

A key priority now is to further develop our online material in order to advance the development of research skills, particularly in areas such as data interpretation, data analysis and critical thinking, as these have been identified by students as being particularly challenging. These have also been identified as challenging skills that are not being developed sufficiently throughout the course and if we agree with Olcott (2010 p34), who suggests that "poor fundamentals equal poor results", it is vital we work at rectifying this. In line with the AR process the research cycle will need to be repeated and data gathering tools refined to allow for new ideas to be implemented and evaluated.

Interestingly, preliminary data analysis suggests that qualification level at point of entry is not necessarily an indicator of outcome. Students who do not have a first degree but have the required level of relevant work-related experience to access the course achieve on a par with those educated to a higher level. This leads us to ask whether where they were educated and the type of degree gained is more important. In light of this finding this may be something that needs to be explored at an institutional level as it may have implications for policy in terms of entry criteria for Masters level study. Only by constantly reflecting on, and evaluating our teaching practice will the student experience be enhanced and our pedagogical knowledge improved. This AR study is only just beginning to 'unpick' some of the issues and challenges identified in relation to the effectiveness of our teaching practices and the impact these have on student learning

About the authors

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Chapter 13

Engaging students in research: Developing a student research community

Pat Roberts, Candan Ertubey, Ian Robertson and Kevin Teoh

This chapter is being submitted to an external journal so only the abstract can be published here for copyright reasons. For further information, please contact the authors.

Abstract

Psychology is a science-based discipline in which research, in some form or another, is inextricably embedded in the teaching. In some cases research informed teaching treats the students mainly as an "audience", in others they are active participants. This study details the steps taken to involve final level Psychology undergraduate students as researchers in a staff-led neuropsychology project that involved working in two community settings: an acquired head injury unit and a primary school. The aims of the project were to engage the students in active learning and to foster the development of research methods skills, appreciation of ethics and critical awareness of experimental designs – through the development of a learning community. The key questions are: to what extent has this research benefited the students who have taken part in this staff-led research and how has taking an active part in research facilitated their ability to link theory to practise? Students worked in groups during training in the use of specialist equipment necessary for carrying out the research, collected data from fieldwork and evaluated their own experiences of being involved in the research. An ethnographic approach is used with a view to learning from the experiences of a small (6) number of students who took part. They reported gaining excellent experience from working in a community setting and articulated their enthusiasm for taking an active part in "real life" research. The project also aided the development of students' knowledge of methodological designs together with the theoretical perspectives that underpin them. Furthermore, students acknowledged the benefit of this work for their future personal development and employability.

Keywords

Students as researcher; theory to practice; learning community

About the authors

Pat Roberts and Candan Ertubey have worked collaboratively for a number of years in the area of teaching and learning within the Psychology Division. Since 2005 we have worked on a number of HFEC funded Teaching and Learning projects that have explored the undergraduate learning experience. During the period 2008 to 2010, we have been working on a large staff-led project exploring how we can engage students in research by developing a student research community in the context of neuropsychology from the aspects of acquired head injury and child development. In this chapter we present the findings of student evaluations of their engagement in a staff-led research project. We have presented the findings of our projects to conferences locally, nationally and internationally at subject specific conferences.

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Chapter 14

Junior Research Institutes: an exploration into the need for, creation of and benefits from developing undergraduate research initiatives at UoB.

Sadie Hunt

Abstract

When students join a university they become part of a large community. It is generally acknowledged that within the umbrella of the university community many other communities exist to which students can belong. Students within the division of Performing Arts and English (PAE) belong to varying communities, from the extensive arts community to smaller specific groups. However, do students within PAE feel part of the research community within the division and the University? What are their perceptions of research and the research community to which they may belong?

This chapter begins by exploring the existing field in undergraduate research and argues the benefits to student learning through this mode of study based on existing published research. The chapter progresses to identify current localised perceptions of research from dance students within the division of PAE at the University of Bedfordshire. It discusses the creation of a Junior Research Institute (jRI) set up as a pilot scheme within the division of PAE, addressing how we make an inclusive research community shared by staff and students. The chapter offers a reflective evaluation of the early work of the jRI specifically within the division and ends with considerations of how to progress the scheme.

Keywords

Inclusive research communities; undergraduate research; Junior Research Institutes

Introduction

Brew (2006) describes an appealing vision of collaborative partnerships between staff and students to create 'inclusive scholarly knowledge-building communities'. In the evolving world of teaching and learning in Higher Education (HE), the benefits of developing students as researchers and cultivating shared research communities is increasingly recognised. This has been my intention in developing a divisional Junior Research Institute (jRI).

It is evident that the University of Bedfordshire has made considerable steps towards bringing together research and teaching through the work carried out by the Teaching and Learning Directorate and the development of Research informed Teaching (RiT) throughout the university (Petrova 2010:120).

It was through the progression and expansion of RiT that the division of Performing Arts and English (PAE) begun to identify and explore levels of student engagement with staff research. Initial work by Louise Douse[1] to map existing RiT practice present in PAE enabled staff to identify the ways in which their research informed their teaching. She chose to use Healey's categories exemplified in his *research–teaching nexus*; Research Tutored, Research Based, Research Oriented and Research Led (Healey & Jenkins 2009: 7).

This internal divisional research questioned 18 academic teaching staff. Generic definitions of each category from the *research-teaching nexus* were distributed and in turn staff identified which they used in their teaching. Some made multiple selections whilst others indicated the single category most prominent in their practice. In the dissemination of this research it was highlighted that findings were evidence of best practice, consequently the results can be misleading in many respects. The findings do not highlight the predominant usage of one aspect of Healey's grid, but give an indication of which are more popular among staff when considering best practice. The amount of teaching these percentages relate to is unclear, how much of our practice do we define as *best*? It is also not explicit whether these figures were unit dependant, group dependant or contextualised regarding delivering theoretical or practical elements of the courses. Staff perceptions of each category, dependant on subjective interpretation of the generic definitions, could also have created inconsistencies, including opinions of tasks they believe constitute as facilitating and incorporating these aspects of Healey's grid in their teaching practice. As part of the continuation and development of the jRI it would be beneficial to do further research in this area.

The value of this research is that it established a basic indication of the general staff vista regarding the integration and impact of research informed teaching. It is also

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[1] Louise Douse is a PhD student and research assistant within the Performing Arts and English Division, for more information on her research please contact louise.douse@beds.ac.uk

evident that as a division, staff are willing to engage with and accept the use of research and inquiry based learning and that this is already practiced. As this previous research related to staff viewpoints only, it provided a base upon which to inaugurate the further development of a shared research community between staff and students. Therefore my case study research discussed in this chapter focused on the student perception of research as opposed to staff views. I believe that to move towards Brew's inclusive vision referred to at the beginning of the introduction, it is important to gauge where students believe they are positioned currently within the divisional and university-wide research community.

As this chapter progresses from exploring the existing research within the field of inquiry based learning in HE, case studies of dance students from PAE will identify examples of student perceptions of what research is, how it impacts on them and whether they feel part of this community. This will then lead to details of the creation and structure of the pilot jRI scheme within the division and finish with reflections and forward thinking in relation to the progression of this scheme.

Research and inquiry based learning

The many changes facing universities has been a common topic for discussion in much recent literature (Brew 2006; Healey and Jenkins, 2009). Of relevance to this paper are those that identify differences in the way research and teaching are perceived as coexistent or co dependant, and the increasing developments in the provision of undergraduate research opportunities to enhance learning.

Following initial US research published in Boyer's reports (1990) the shift from the traditional role of the university is well researched and discussed. UK universities have now largely embraced concepts of what Fry et al (2008) call 'the various categorisations' of how students learn. Universities are promoting 'learning which is less abstract and discipline based and closer to the problems and issues found in work contexts' (Tennant et al 2010: 8). This identifies the importance of employability embedded within the curriculum (as is evident in CRe8), and the opportunity for students to learn life skills that will benefit them in the world of work. There are numerous debates within the literature about changes to curriculum regarding student experience, enabling and facilitating deep learning and employing methods that prevent passivity. These changes create what Tennant et al call a 'learner centred' education, effectively putting 'what is learned' a greater importance than 'what is taught' and through this shift 'content and the specification of what is to be learned is subordinate to the learners' experience and participation' (Pratt & Nesbit, 2000:120).

It is this concept of participation and experience to enhance the learning of both content and skill that is most relevant to this chapter, specifically in relation to research. I believe that the provision of undergraduate research opportunities through a shared research community addresses all these changing aspects of the undergraduate learning experience. Undergraduate research can be a constituent feature of employability

strategies and projects. Healey and Jenkins (2009) give several examples of this specific work at various universities nationwide. However, fundamentally by equipping students with research skills through inquiry based learning we can improve employability. By accepting the acquisition of research skills as content to be learnt, we must facilitate this learning through varied learning approaches providing the opportunity to learn through different modes of engagement and participation. Through being research active undergraduate students are actively learning research skills, not sat passively in a lecture about research skills. They are effectively becoming 'research apprentices' engaging in what Lave and Wenger (1991) identify as 'communities of practice', in this example, a research community. They discuss how 'It crucially involves participation as a way of learning – of both absorbing and being absorbed in the culture of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991:95). For example encouraging students to participate in the research community indicates a humanist approach to their education. Through their contributions to research projects their human qualities 'such as personal freedom, choice and the validity of subjective experience' (Tennant, et al 2010:17) become part of their learning experience. A humanist approach allows the students ownership of this learning, through being part of a learning experience they 'make the culture of practice theirs' (Lave and Wenger 1991:95). Finally, through being involved in undergraduate research, students are engaging in content in a different way, they are part of the production of new knowledge, rather than being taught it, therefore deep learning and understanding of subject specific content also occurs (see Pat Roberts and Candan Ertubey, Chapter 13).

Student perceptions of research: case study

This case study relates to six undergraduate Dance and Professional Practice students from the division of Performing Arts and English. These students vary in their year of study and level of experience regarding research. Students were selected for this study through their response to attending a jRI concept mapping workshop. The concept mapping workshop was a trial and a research initiative in itself. The workshops were advertised through a visually striking paper invitation, it clearly referred to the Junior Research Institute and identified that concept mapping was a valuable tool to develop for research purposes. By advertising the workshops as development for research skills and as part of the jRI, I was able to analyse the response in relation to student perspectives of research. By highlighting the research content or purpose of the workshops it would be interesting to see which students responded and attended. Which Performing Arts and English students were willing to give one hour of their time to attend a workshop to enhance their research skills?

Seventeen students out of a potential 319 from the division attended one of the three workshops. Whilst it is recognised that every student will not have received an invitation this figure does loosely indicate a lack of interest in research from Performing Arts and English students. One very notable feature of those students was that 47% were non-traditional students over the age of 23, which is not comparable to the average number of non-traditional students within the whole division. 29% of students

were in their first year of study, 65% in their second and only 6% in their third year of study. It was unexpected that third year students, actively engaged in research through the compulsory dissertation did not attend in greater numbers. This led me to ask whether these students recognised the dissertation as research? 53% of those in attendance were Dance and Professional Practice students and 47% were English students. I questioned again why there was no attendance at all from Performing Arts students or Theatre Studies students who form a large proportion of the division? Do these students see developing research skills as beneficial or relevant to them or their practice?

The percentages detailed above enable some speculative analysis relating to student perceptions of research. The students that attended these workshops were given a one hour workshop exploring concept mapping, the purpose, uses and benefits of concept mapping, they analysed examples of concept maps and created their own. The sessions ended with a discussion on how they felt concept mapping could enhance their studies and practice. These workshops were enthusiastically received, and it is six of these 17 students who became the research subjects for my exploratory case study.

Using the students newly acquired concept mapping skills I based my research method on that used by Petia Petrova[2] in her recent research comparing staff and student conceptions of research. The use of concept mapping to allow research subjects to explore an idea or theme, in this case their perception of what research is, followed by a one to one interview (see Figure 1 for an example). The six students were all able to complete the concept maps competently as a result of the workshops they had voluntarily attended.

I chose to use concept mapping in my research methodology because I wanted to know each students understanding of research, rather than a factual deconstruction of what research is. The purpose of this research was to identify what each individual thought and felt in relation to research, not to regurgitate what they had learnt about research skills. Concept maps are ideal for this purpose, 'Concept maps are not limited to the inclusion of facts or factual understanding. Affect – emotions, feelings and other affective concepts has a natural place in concept mapping' (Freeman, 2004:1 see also Jankowska 2009). Perception is unique to the individual and so methods that gauge perception were essential.

Each of the six students was asked to create a concept map with the first node posing the question, what is research? This was followed by a recorded interview using set questions.

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[2] This information was acquired through discussion with Petia, rather than through published documentation. For further information contact Petia on petia.petrova@beds.ac.uk

The concept maps created varied in structure, despite having all had the same initial training, each response was unique. There is, however, evidence of emerging patterns regarding the students' perceptions of research.

Five out of the six concept maps identified gathering, collecting, broadening and or enhancing knowledge as the purpose of research. Vocabulary such as 'gain' and 'acquire knowledge' as well as 'improve and deepen knowledge' were recurring terms used. This indicates that an understanding of research used to find out new knowledge as well as develop existing knowledge is evident but not explicitly discussed. Four out of six of the maps highlighted the use of research to contribute to the betterment of something external to their own development, although there was no consistency in what the something was. Half of the concept maps specifically labelled a node either 'impact' or 'effect' of research, however the nodes and links stemming from these differed. Three of the six maps identified research as a theoretical and practical experience and identified workshops and studio based practice as research. The latter is a predictable pattern as the six students are studying dance, so kinaesthetic practice is part of their studies.

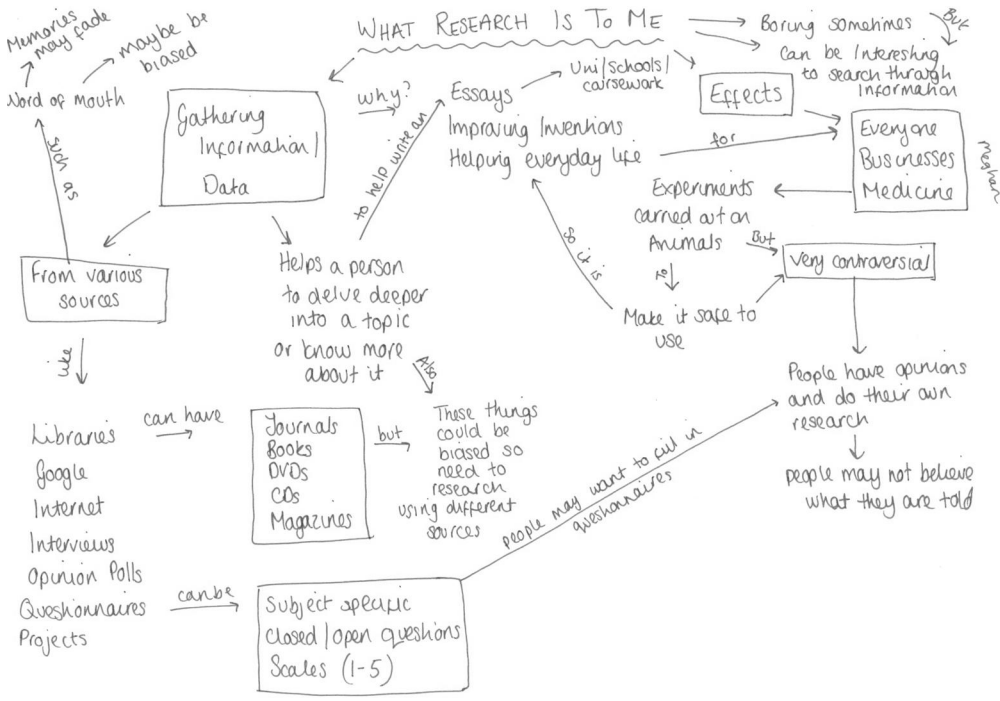Figure 1: Concept Map from a 2nd year Dance and Professional Practice Student

None of the maps highlighted research outputs explicitly, there is no reference made to the production of something at the end of research. All of the maps contained the words, library, books, journals, but these were used to suggest sources to research from, not as outputs for research done. Interestingly in a group of six dancers not one map

suggested a performance as an output for disseminating research, despite half of them identifying studio based practice as potential research.

Finally only one map put forth the idea that research can be controversial; in this same map there was a focus on the potential problems of bias viewpoints skewing research, and the need for a broad range of sources to ensure parity in research. This was the only negative aspect of research examined in all of the maps. No other references to problems, issues or restrictions were made.

Through analysis of the concept maps produced it is evident that the students participating in this study do have a general understanding of research, its purpose and some features of the research world. However a lack of experience and a naivety towards research is also demonstrated as is their inability to refer to research within their curriculum explicitly.

This is further enhanced through the one-to-one interviews. Their responses to questions relating to who, what, why and where tallied with their concept maps whilst they elaborated and gave examples, both verbal and written perceptions were generally consistent. However some of the questions in the interview indicated variations between each of the students as well as between their initial written concept maps and the verbal interview.

Students were asked what percentage of their learning they felt was achieved through research based tasks, their responses varied regarding the percentage, between 30% and 90%. However it was their explanations of these percentages that were most interesting:

> Student 1 "I think it is maybe 50% of what we do is like theory, everything that we do at home like reading and stuff is our own research."

> Student 6 "I would say about 30% with the essays that we do and then more with the cameras, we are looking into more things, so we get books to read and reading lists."

Student 1 does not acknowledge in this response that any of her practical learning has been achieved through research. This is a concern as composition and improvisation form a large part of the course; to not recognise this work as research indicates a misunderstanding of what choreography is. Student 2 again focuses on theory based work as research, interestingly the focus on reading lists and books as the research aspect when working with cameras again demonstrates a misunderstanding of the unit, in which students make a dance film.

> Student 2 "I'd say about 40% in essays but actually when you're improvising you are researching your own body and other people's bodies."

Student 3 "I would say about 80%. Through practical work we do workshops and find out information from that. Obviously then we do essays, reading, dissertation."

Student 4 "Actually quite a lot in so much as we have improvisation classes, where you are researching yourself and your own mind. And we have also have written work which is obviously mostly research based, so I would say 50 – 60%"

The last three responses are representative of all three levels of undergraduate study. Whilst they all acknowledge workshop based improvisation as research there is once again more emphasis on theory work as research. The second interesting aspect of all responses is that technique classes as research are completely over looked as are units on dance leadership and dance and entrepreneurship.

This focus on research being predominantly theoretical is further supported in the students' answers when questioned on the skills needed to be a good researcher. Whilst the majority of them gave innovative and thoughtful responses regarding motivation and inquiring minds, all of them cited the need to know how to use the library and the internet and an interest in reading as the most important skills required in research.

Students were then asked whether they are aware of their lecturers being engaged in research.

Student 4 "Not really, I suppose that I am aware that they are all doing their own thing but I don't think of it as research."

Student 3 "Um, yes sometimes but then other times not. Like I was aware of ***** being involved in a research project because when I first got here we were told that we would never have them teaching us because of the research. I know that others are involved in research but I do not know what it is."

It is evident from these first two responses just how closed the research community is to the students. They are either unaware of its existence or relevance or see it as a reason for academics to have limited contact with them.

Student 5 "I know some of them are, I'm not sure, some maybe that I don't know about. But yeah I am aware that it is a research environment."

Student 2 "Yes, I saw a dance last night with my lecturers in it."

These last two comments highlight an awareness of research taking place, but they are not able to define or elaborate. Also student 2 identifies the lecturers who danced/ performed as the example of research taking place, the focus is on the end product, the research output, which she does not consider in the concept map.

Students were also asked whether they felt that their lecturer's research filtered into what they taught to students.

> Student 2 "I'm not sure, some of the time, I can tell when my teachers have been on courses or when they are passionate about a subject, so like when (gives two examples). I'm not sure about that one, it's not that evident."
>
> Student 3 "I think it probably does, but because I don't know what they are doing I can't see it happening."
> Student 4 "I can really only mention it in one class, with *****, I am more aware that they are an academic. Like last term we were doing (gives example) and we were working off something they had researched."
>
> Student 6 "No, I think most of the classes that we do are based around technique or conversation or choreography depending on the unit, they don't tell us it is their research, is it?"

It is possible to extract from these replies the issues relating to students perceptions of research.

- The current research community is either unknown or closed off to students
- There is limited or no communication between staff and students about research, either staff or student generated
- There is a misunderstanding of what constitutes research in practical subjects
- Students do not connect staff research with staff knowledge

Setting up the Junior Research Institute (jRI) pilot scheme

The concept of jRIs was set out in Petrova (2010: 130). The Teaching and Learning Directorate invited departments to pilot this scheme. The Division of PAE saw this as an opportunity to build on its current RiT practice. The structure and nature of the pilot PAE jRI was created in response to the PAE student perceptions of research and the issues raised above.

It evolved from a relatively blank canvas regarding existing practice within the University however research into existing models of like schemes at other UK universities was carried out. Identifying existing practice in the UK HE sector regarding undergraduate engagement with research, specifically the work done by Mick Healey and Alan Jenkins was instrumental in the creation of this pilot. Their work researching undergraduate research in the USA and their projects at the University of Gloucestershire and Oxford Brookes (*The Reinvention Centre* in collaboration with

Warwick University) was an inspiring catalyst for the creation of the jRI. Published evaluations of these successful existing projects or schemes exemplifies that having a shared research community between staff and students is viable.

> They suggest here a fundamental conceptual shift from the notion of students as passive audience for the research output of individual academics, to the idea of students as active stakeholders in a research community (Segal in Healey & Jenkins 2009: 2)

Research by Angela Brew has also assisted in the initial shaping of the divisional pilot jRI. She explains that 'Involving students in [the research] process is an important step towards the development of scholarly knowledge-building communities' (2006: xii). Her publications have heavily influenced the chosen structure of the scheme.

The jRI coexists alongside current RiT work being done within the division as well as providing additional opportunities for students to become part of the existing PAE research community, either collaboratively with staff or independently as researchers. It is an opportunity for students to enhance lifelong inquiry based skills, to participate in current inspirational research and to develop and acknowledge the value of their own research contributions within this community.

This pilot scheme promotes the following benefits of the jRI to both staff and students:

- The scheme enables PAE to extend and expand our research community through students' contributions to staff research and engaging in their own research within the division;
- The scheme fosters a culture of greater dialogue between staff and students as researchers, encouraging students to impact upon future curriculum design and raising awareness of a research culture;
- The scheme inclusively develops research and inquiry based skills through three different modes of engagement, valuing student diversity and accommodating varying student needs;
- The scheme allows student engagement in staff research enhancing curriculum transparency, lessening the intimidation that often surrounds research and increasing self esteem through their active role in said research;
- The scheme provides opportunities to experience and take ownership of research that strengthens subject knowledge and nurtures vocational skills through identifying the applied aspects of research.

Structurally the jRI maps directly onto the division, addressing all academic fields within the Division of PAE. Whilst the predominant focus of the jRI is to initiate and support

extra-curricular research projects within the undergraduate body of the division, it also maps existing research opportunities into the scheme to enhance and acknowledge these research experiences, for example the dissertation unit.

It is possible to become involved with the jRI through attending events such as lunch time lectures, skills development workshops, performances and symposium events. These may be led by staff or student researchers. The level of engagement in these instances is minimal and generally passive and does not lead to membership. However there are three modes of engagement that enable students to participate in and become members of the jRI, as detailed below. The aim of the jRI membership structure is to provide students with progression through the institute, from demonstrating an interest in research and building skills, to participating in staff research and eventually emerging as independent undergraduate student researchers.

1. Staff Led

Students are involved in or participate in RiT projects and staff research. These experiences aim to provide insight into what it means to be a researcher, allow students active engagement in current research in the field and be aspirational. The staff member(s) take responsibility for, and ownership of, the research and the dissemination of their work. On completing the criteria students become Associate Fellows of the jRI. There is a long history in universities of students being involved in staff research but this has always been selective, what Healey and Jenkins refer to as the 'research elite', (2009:16). High achieving students who demonstrate the desired skills being approached by members of staff for collaborative research is a common practice in universities. One of the aims of the jRI is to open up this selection process and make it more transparent.

2. Staff Initiated

Staff are not leading the research but are providing, facilitating and guiding students in their research in line with the curriculum. This mode of engagement is aligned to the curriculum, and is prevalent in the final undergraduate year regarding dissertation and end of year research projects. The research is credited to the student in line with their studies but is staff supervised. Students achieving a 2:1 in their dissertation will have the opportunity to become Associate Fellows of the jRI.

3. Student Led

Entirely student initiated, the student takes full responsibility for the research and ownership of the process and outcomes. Staff may be involved, to advise and offer support, but the onus of the research is on the student. Predominantly this type of research will be extra-curricular in nature, however, in exceptional circumstances some students may extend their curriculum based research into this mode of engagement. Students have the opportunity to bid for funding for their research, to put towards production costs, travel (research related), to see work and attend workshops or

courses. On the completion and dissemination of their research students become Fellows of the jRI.

Conclusion

It is too early in the life of the jRI to be able to make any firm conclusions about its impact. Whilst students are currently embarking upon various levels of the scheme, until the projects have concluded and students have reflected and evaluated their involvement it is not possible to give quantitative or qualitative conclusive findings regarding the benefits. The intention is to repeat the methodology again next year and make a comparative analysis to identify whether the culture is changing, as the research community extends. The intention of this paper has been to argue and justify the need for the existence of the jRI. This conclusion will make suggestions for the progression and continuation of the scheme.

As academics we know that our research impacts and informs our teaching. The initial research done by the division and the enthusiasm for RiT projects among colleagues demonstrates that this is an important feature of our teaching practice. However it is evident that the borders of our research community only permit minimal filtration, in one direction. Communication to students about our research and their research is so limited that students do not know when they are researching or when we are using research in our teaching. If we want to create a 'shared knowledge building community' we need to encourage communication and transparency within the research community.

The jRI currently exists predominantly as a provision of extra-curricular research opportunities (excluding the dissertation) within the division. This means that despite efforts to make the opportunities inclusive there is still an element of exclusivity even if this is resultant from student reluctance to engage in additional work external to the curriculum. To be truly effective the jRI needs to have an impact on curriculum design, assessment procedure and course development so that research and inquiry based learning is recognised, acknowledged and valued by staff and students as part of the shared research community. Interestingly it appears to be a common feature of strategies and initiatives to enhance teaching and learning that in many cases 'curriculum is notable for its absence' (Barnett and Coate 2005:20). I feel that the jRI could fall victim to this, becoming an 'add on' to the curriculum rather than an integrated feature of the holistic student experience.

I aim for the jRI to be an organic and responsive scheme within the division. To change the culture of the division and indeed the university to develop a shared research community staff and students alike need to be motivated and enthused.

About the author

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Chapter 15

Blogging for teaching, learning and research – some practical ideas

Peter Norrington

Abstract

This chapter explores what blogs and blogging are, and what they can be employed for. Blogs can support students – and indeed staff – in data gathering, knowledge acquisition, writing skills, and deeper skills leading to collaborative inquiry. While many aspects of this chapter are applicable to other genres of communication, the particular benefits of blogs and blogging are developed here. Examples are presented throughout, with the intent to show how small but effective additions and changes can be made in both learning and research environments, as well as wider-reaching embedding of blogging. They also provide opportunities for students, staff and the University to create a presence with impact.

Keywords

Blogs; communication skills, learning communities; research culture; engagement

Introduction

My intention is that it may act as a guide for staff considering what blogs can offer to their teaching and learning environments, whether in small or large ways, whether to improve efficiency, to enhance practice or to transform it in innovative ways. Similarly, blogs can offer researchers interesting opportunities, both directly for research and research-related outcomes, and for underpinning an academically secured, research-enriched approach to teaching and learning. Blogs can support implementation of the University's CRe8, SOAR and RiT strategies, or they can be used in more incidental ways as needed.

Evidence base

This chapter is based on conversations with many dozens of people – staff, students, colleagues, friends, workshop participants – from novice to experienced with blogs, with varied backgrounds and interests, both inside and outside the University. It is based on examples of blogs in use in a variety of contexts, personal experience and academic sources.

There is also a growing body of research literature, covering theoretical positions and case studies. However, this chapter is not intended as an introduction to literature, rather as a guide to practical recommendations for implementation, and a stimulus to practitioners who wish to investigate new approaches to teaching, learning and research activities. Indeed, this is a new enough area that we can innovate and contribute to that literature. If you have examples of use from your own practice or reading, or have already published around blogs, this author is interested to hear from you.

I have provided a "blogiography" at the end of sites you may find interesting.

Chapter style – language and presentation

In keeping with the style of many blogs, I have adopted a deliberately conversational approach. It may not suit everyone! One of the important features of blogging is communication with an audience (oneself, one other or thousands), so if you as a particular reader don't like this style (and you are welcome not to), consider how you would ask others for an appropriate style, or how you would construct this yourself.

You will notice that I've used many short sections. These should, I hope, enable you to browse quickly through the topics. Although blogs certainly do not have to consist of short pieces of writing, I'm using this approach to mimic blogging style: a blog entry title with a blog entry; blog entries are also know as blog posts –you post an entry to a blog. Some of the entries are followed by indented text, mimicking a comment on an entry; in a real blog this comment might be by a member of the blog's audience, if

allowed to comment, or by the author at a later date. There is another reason for adopting this style, but that I will be clear about at the end.

Background to blogs

What is a blog?

The term "blog" comes from "web log", an online journal. Blogs weren't invented for educational purposes; they are very much what people make of them. There is a growing education-based literature about them but, as indicated, it isn't my intention to rehearse this here. Basic descriptions define them as reverse date order online journals. The reverse date order simply indicates that (in general) journal entries are displayed on-screen with the most recent entry at the top, which saves the reader from scrolling down long web pages.

Describing a blog as a "journal" or "diary" carries a health warning. The cultural status of the diary, at least in English literature, ranges from the respectful to the trivial: compare *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* – which is now available online, indeed as a blog[1] – to *Bridget Jones's Diary* (which may perhaps not see an online form until it falls out of copyright). The cultural status of these diaries actually hides things they have in common: they are *both* simple records of events (dates, people, conversations) – which may make them seem trivial; and they are both used for more *reflective* purposes, on the nature and quality of experiences and their implications for future actions – which makes them more attractive pedagogically.

Blogs and audience

Like a journal, an important aspect of a blog is its audience. Blogs may be kept entirely private, or they may be opened out to a wider readership. The readership may be selected by the author or self-selecting as people discover or are told about the blog. I will return to this later.

"Types" of blog

The online nature of blogs extends the possibilities of journal entries beyond what is possible on paper. Blog entries can be text, or they can include pictures – a photo journal – or audio (sometimes called plogs, podcast logs), video (vlogs) or multimedia clips; these clips might be the actual entry itself, or be the thing commented on in the entry. There are also variants on blogs, like micro-blogging which is well adapted to use on small mobile devices (e.g. phones), such as Twitter, which dispenses with a journal entry title and restricts the entry itself to 140 characters.

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[1] http://www.pepysdiary.com/

Do you have to do this online?

No. Blogging online has advantages over other approaches, for example: including non-text media; the ease with blogs can be shared; or the option and ease to reuse blog material for other activities or evidence of development. But the principles of blogging can be carried out on paper too, and the uses suggested later can be adapted for other academic working formats.

Is blogging a marginal activity?

Student self-led blogging

In my current role, when introducing blogs to students, I ask whether they keep a blog, read them, or not at all. My anecdotal results for every 30 students are: one keeps a blog, three to five read them, and the rest say they're merely aware of them or not at all. This seems consistent across subject areas and years (except those where web literacy and production forms are themselves the subject). The range of experience of staff is equally diverse; although more staff express negative or indifferent interest, there are some very active blog users amongst you. But note that that the 1-in-30 who keep one are keeping it for their own purposes, without external drivers, which suggests that we have a natural base of use to build on, rather than blogging being an imposed activity.

> Two very different examples of student self-led blogging (used with permission) are:
>
> - FOUND.IN.A.CAVE.BLOG – http://www.foundinacaveblog.com/ by recent B.A. graduate Martin Meehan, around his interactions with art; and
>
> - Life Blog – http://www.zhihua-lai.com/?do=Life.Blog – by recent computing PhD graduate Zhihua Lai, with reflections on computing topics, and an insight into an online interview.

Wider blog-like activity

Meanwhile, if you ask students if they use social networking sites, you will find expressions everywhere from active use to those with no interest (or even hostility). But the student of *any* age who hasn't heard of them is increasingly rare overall; and many have some experience of them, directly or through friends. Again, staff tend to be more sceptical. The relevance is that people who use social networking sites have experience of writing about themselves and their interests, reading about other people and theirs, asking questions, sharing information, commenting and contributing to others points, … and this has something to do with what blogging is about.

So, many of your students do have blog-like experience, even if they don't recognise it as such. Staff using professional networking sites (such as LinkedIn[2]) may also have this experience.

And once you take other communication environments into account – such as forums – so do more staff as well. In development and training sessions I've run, some staff explicitly and sometimes to their own surprise recognise this without prompting, as indeed do some students.

Is blogging academically credible?

Issues around academic credibility, for example acceptability and respectability, are important for determining the use and extent to which we should employ blogs as active components in teaching and learning or research.

In fields where change is rapid – there are fewer and fewer where this isn't so – journal material can date in critical ways, if simply due to the length of print publishing cycles. (I'm not arguing against their value.) Meanwhile, communication speed within and between audiences is increasing, whether academic, commercial, voluntary, governmental, or publics of various kinds.

A simple point comes out of this: academics and the various communities and institutions they form part of *need* to communicate quickly with others. Blogs offer a possible channel for this communication. Holding blogs as credible is thus not a judgement on other modes of communication, rather an assertion of the importance of an activity to be taken up responsibly by the academic community. The need to communicate effectively with different audiences is a skill required of researchers, as much as of people in many careers or their personal lives.

Other parts of this chapter offer further suggestions for the use of blogs to support sound pedagogic and research practices.

Blog resources at the University of Bedfordshire

Where to find blogging resources?

The University has invested in several, centrally supported platforms which support blogs in different ways, and there are many blogging tools/platforms available for anyone's use on the Web, for which central support is not available, see Table 1. (The distinction between tool and platform used informally here is that a tool is part of a platform, whereas a platform is an entire offering of one or more tools.)

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[2] http://www.linkedin.com

Location		For and By	Contact
Centrally-supported			
BREO	UoB Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)	in Unit Sites – for the Unit site as a whole, and for groups or individual members of the site (tutor-led) in EXPO – for individual BREO users	e-Learning Team mark.gamble @beds.ac.uk
PebblePad	UoB Personal Learning Environment (PLE)	for groups or individual members of the site can be tutor- or individual- led	
Blogspot	customised external platform	for University-focussed and branded activities	Marketing Team kris.collins @beds.ac.uk
Not centrally-supported (a small number of examples, used in the University)			
WordPress	external platform	for individuals and groups	www.wordpress.com
Blogger	external platform	in public domain	www.blogger.com

Table 1: Blogging resources

Support and training

For development and training about blogs, over the broad University of Bedfordshire community, contact the e-Learning Team for the TELS Mode2 booklet and the BREO blog guide, and use the ODTU's[3] staff development activity calendar for e-Learning Team staff development sessions and Learning Resource's Web2.0 course. The e-Learning Team will be happy to discuss blogs and how to use them, whether on their own or as part of a wider technology enhanced experience for blended learning (Mode 2) or distance learning (Mode 3).

Personal experience of blogs

Why does personal experience matter?

I'm currently in a position where I'm involved in the personal development of others. I find it reasonable to support my belief in the usefulness of blogs for others with evidence that I engage with them myself. I think it's also uncontroversial to suggest that if you have the opportunity to gain experience yourself, even as a reader, you will sound more convincing when introducing blogs to students. Reading this, you will see how some of the individual ideas for use presented later apply directly here. Certainly, I've converted from blog-indifferent to blog-friendly through personal engagement.

What's my own experience?

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[3] See the staff intranet, http://in.beds.ac.uk > Departments > ODTU.

Initially, I was completely indifferent to them. I viewed them as being somewhat narcissistic, or at best an insight into what people had eaten for lunch today. During my Masters (2003-04), I started to read bits of blogs that turned up in online literature searches for assignment material. I found they could point the way to resources other people recommended, and to current material, which hadn't yet reached academic journals or conferences. But blogs themselves appeared to fall outside acceptable academic reference material, so they were still of marginal interest.

By 2007, I was part-way into a research degree; and with fellow students, we were discussing blog content related to our research topics (and some for fun). Two of my peers actually had blogs – one professional, one personal – although neither of them maintained them with any regularity. Nevertheless, from this point on I now find blogs useful ways of picking up ideas about what's current in a field.

The contact with peers who keep blogs acted as encouragement to "give it a go", and for over a year I kept a blog exploring several cultural issues. This helped me rediscover enjoyment of writing as a structured and enjoyable leisure activity, and provided practice at writing as a disciplined activity.

Now I use blogs as a direct part of my work. I'm involved in several group projects where we use blogs to exchange, record and comment on ideas. Organising the University of Bedfordshire Conference 2010 is being partly conducted with a blog (and a webfolio), as a part-alternative to emails. The JISC-funded Aardvark project in the Research Graduate School uses an internal blog for informal idea exchange, and will have an external blog as a required part of its public reporting activities. I also have contact with some staff for personal exchanges about our CPD, and keep an occasional blog for my own development (something I'm getting used to).

The fuller story would cover relationship to other e-issues, economic circumstances, accidental prejudice, living conditions, skill relationship to real jobs, relationship to wish-led jobs, self-led discovery of research utility, shared peer group experience, contact with and encouragement from actual blog writers, enjoyment of writing as an activity, having a readership, feedback from readers, impact on the real world, blogging for work, and seeing the range of uses blogging can be put to.

Blogging – supporting strategic aims

This section is a quick reference for some – *but by no means all* – strategic aims you might have in mind, and these overlap in various ways. The aims are taken from various strategic areas: Cre8 (the University's curriculum approach), Research informed Teaching (RiT), extra-curricular support and continuing professional development. This section should be taken with the following one on skill development to create a combination of why and what blogging is good for.

Personalised learning

Blogging engages the author in saying something about their own experiences. By creating activities which are relevant to all students, where each can have a distinctive response, it possible to make learning activities that are naturally personalised. These activities can easily be constructed around, for example, students' understanding of themselves and their diversity, without exposing the students writing to an entire class.

Curriculum

Transition points, such as the start of years, can be supported, by creating opportunities to "get stuck in" immediately with short, meaningful activities, which build towards larger activities later that year, or even across years. The blogging activities can be thus be scaffolded to work towards larger goals; or can be scaffolded with a view to changing the level or type of support as they go on.

Realistic learning

Reading the latest thoughts of and disagreements between leaders in a field, finding pointers to recent reports, watching or taking part in the conversations around these, all these can be ways into a better understanding of a discipline and research, and their place in the world. Shared blogs can be used for co-construction of knowledge, with collaborative challenge and support. Private blogs, perhaps only shared with a tutor, can be used for personal, reflective development.

Employability

A blog used (particularly) for long-term authoring, can show the author's commitment to aspects of their discipline or self-development to a potential employer.

Assessment

The immediacy of blogging – the entries are time-stamped – allows developmental flow to be drawn out, whether for formative or summative assessment. The tendency towards shorter pieces of writing in a blog format allows for feedback that can focus on aspects of the content of the writing, or help towards motivating the author by showing that they have an audience who is present.

Research-led teaching

Blogs are widely used for transmitting discipline news, research and information (e.g. by professional bodies and discipline leaders); so this has value for delivering mini-packets of knowledge, as text, podcasts or videocasts; or showcasing research work; and as a bonus, showing how showcasing is done. An approach requiring even less effort than producing a blog oneself is to include a couple of blogs in a course handbook.

Research-tutored teaching

Students can discuss papers (books, artworks, theories, people, etc.) for areas defined by subject teams or for their own interest. The choices of topic may be provided in more or less detail by tutors, or selected by students. This approach is known by some as patch writing. It enables a personal or collaborative effort to build up a "library" of research, and examples of work to showcase the ability to analyse, for example.

Research-orientated teaching

Students can contribute to and engage in the process by which knowledge is produced and the development of a research ethos by, for example, adding new material into a shared blog, thus developing analytical (and writing) skills; incrementally creating knowledge; reflecting on the development of such skills; and exploring the ethics of writing and publication.

Research-based teaching

Blogs can be used for generating collaborative, inquiry-based activities, as the teaching mode can based on cooperation and dialogue, where the learning division between teacher and student is minimised. The use of blogs to develop dialogue on an equal footing can be achieved through collaborative blogs, where students and tutors ask questions and reply to each other.

Personal staff-student tutoring

Blogging activities can be used by staff to encourage interaction between tutors and students they support. This can be through structuring questions around key issues – first impressions of the University; personal expectations of a course or unit; related personal experiences. But it can also occur through students "blowing steam" about an issue – a difficult moment in a course; issues between peers; unexpected absence – where even small, supportive comments or direction to a support service from a tutor may keep a student engaged; and this doesn't require booking meetings.

Mentoring

As blogs can be shared between students and/or staff, it is possible to use them for mentoring and peer-led support, with or without any formal structure, without the requirement of face-to-face contact.

Continuing professional development

As more professions move to frameworks for continuing professional development (CPD), requiring explicit evidence of engagement with development, blogging can provide a way of showing both a "narrow" engagement with one's own development, and a "broader" cooperative and collaborative engagement between professionals. The

relative safety of student life is a good opportunity to develop the habits of professional life; and staff have the option to use this for their own development too.

Blogging – supporting skill development

In this section, I will suggest some ways in which blogs can support students (and staff on occasion) with developing academic, professional and personal skills.

Gathering data through to reflection

Observation comes before reflection. Reflection is desirable to change behaviours and attitudes, to develop. But for some people, the act of observing carefully and recording these observations is a skill which needs to be developed first. Observation is fundamental in many academic endeavours, whether you seek to capture qualitative, phenomenological experiences, spectators' chants about refereeing decisions, photographs of a view changing over time, through to quantitative data on snowfall in the summer. On this it is then possible to build reflective practice, on the meanings, affective qualities and purposes of these observations.

Abstracting and Reviewing

A blog can provide an opportunity to encourage – or require – students to complete an abstract or review of (key) works (articles, artworks, computer games, sociology theories, educational practitioners, etc.), which may be of the tutor's or student's choosing. The level of understanding required of the work is built into the way the task is set, and understanding of the purpose of "keeping it short" is built into the presentation format – for example, by creating a list of short pieces which can be scanned by eye for content – and the possibilities of sharing personal lists to create group or class lists.

Thematic writing

A sequence of blog entries can be used to scaffold writing towards a larger goal by writing around a central theme: defining key terms; identifying and analysing key positions and taking them in turn; collecting references and quotes while researching; locating evidence for and against; comparing and contrasting issues; and reaching conclusions. These pieces can then be woven into a single piece (patchwork writing).

Audience engagement

All communication is to an audience (even for yourself). Blog writing can provide an opportunity to explore authoring one or more pieces in different styles, with a view to finding out about styles that work or don't work – and why – for different audiences, as they can provide feedback.

Evidence for reflecting on the development of skills

By maintaining a blog over a longer period, it is possible to use the pieces as evidence of improvements in skills – meta-learning; the skills developed might be in selection of topic, analysis, evaluation, or aspects of the authoring skills themselves.

Discipline

Authoring on a regular basis – even short pieces – requires the development of discipline. For some students this may help them with understanding the effort it can take to develop longer pieces, and indeed may help them develop the momentum to author longer pieces with less support as their course progresses. Authoring on a regular basis (whether frequent or not) is a behaviour fundamental to many positions inside and outside academia.

Confidence building

Particularly for students who are not used to authoring – notably writing – whether on a regular basis or even at all, blogging enables short successes which can be supported with feedback, helping to build a student's confidence that they can write, without plunging them into writing thousands of words right from the start. As an approach to starting the student on a scaffold of authoring tasks, this can also support the student who is not a native English user.

Explicit employability skills and self-promotion

Blogging may in itself be an activity that evidences explicit skills in communication that interest an employer, in any sector, taking into account topic, audience and style skills. Equally, the blog may become a "product" which attracts people to the author, and even if in some way "badly-written", the author's appearance on the wider stage may create opportunities not available to the shy.

Transitioning to extended writing

As you'll see from the explicitly scaffolded construction of this chapter, it is possible to construct long, coherent (I hope!) text from short pieces, each built around a simple question or topic area. Apart from the autobiographic section (just under 315 words), only one part exceeds 200 words (still under 210), which is (I believe) an achievable target for any novice writer. Writing short text is sometimes desirable in itself, but this is not the whole story.

Course teams will, of course, want to consider how to move students to extended, coherent writing (or audio, etc.). In part, this can be answered directly here. Blogging, as developmental or genre writing, doesn't happen in isolation; students will be exposed to and participating in many cross-supportive activities.

Conclusion and further work

Structurally, blogs are very simple. This simplicity can be a great benefit as it demands little explanation or effort to get started. However, this simplicity hides the richness of experience a blog can bring to students and staff alike.

I hope that the possibilities explored here – and there are others – will offer enough for staff with different interests and skills to find something of value, from including a couple of discipline-related blogs into a unit reading list, to using blogs for providing a structured series of reflective writing opportunities, to developing a long-term, cross-boundary, research community focus with external impact.

It would be valuable for our collective and shared practice to develop greater awareness of approaches to and research on blogging taken across the University. I'm interested in hearing from you!

About the author

Peter Norrington's involvement in PDP at the University began on a work-based learning course project exploring research student experiences as he started his PhD. He was active in supporting research student development throughout his PhD, which investigated the tensions between human and technological factors of online security. His current role develops connections between PDP, e-portfolios and the PebblePad personal learning environment.

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Blogiography

Skim through these to see the range of authors and uses, which is the main function of this list; some of them may even make interesting reading.

To find a blog on more or less anything – **Google Blog Search**: http://blogsearch.google.com/ (Other search engines offer this kind of search too.)

University of Bedfordshire institutional blogs: http://www.beds.ac.uk/aboutus/blogs - student experience (by a student), alumni, marketing and others.

new media research group in RIMAD, University of Bedfordshire: http://spooner.beds.ac.uk/nmrg/

OII Blog – Research, Events and Publications from the Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford: http://people.oii.ox.ac.uk/research/

Research staff blog from Vitae (formerly UKGRAD):
http://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers/156431/Research-staff-blog.html

Intute Blog – Research tools and methods (selected by tag "research tools and methods"):
http://www.intute.ac.uk/blog/tag/research-tools-and-methods/

Warwick Blogs – student learning blogs: http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/

Blog Research – References for Blogging:
http://www.macloo.com/blogresearch/index.htm

Deception Blog: http://deception.crimepsychblog.com/ – Collating information about
applications of psychological research on deception

Social Media Research Blog: http://socialmedia.typepad.com/

Sarah Chesney (2010), **'Anything other than silence': using a Personal Learning System for
staff Continuing Professional Development**, Innovations in Education & Teaching
International (accepted)

Governor Blog, University of Glamorgan: http://staffgovernor.blogs.glam.ac.uk/

Splash, University of Sussex: http://splash.sussex.ac.uk/ – Public blogs, tweets (from Twitter)
about the University, Latest blog posts about the University (multilingual)

Professor Laurie Taylor posts a weekly report to **Times Higher Education** from the front line
at **Poppleton University**: http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/section.asp?navcode=110

University Research Office Blog, University of Lincoln: http://research.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/

Learning Zone, University of Glamorgan: http://learning.weblog.glam.ac.uk/

Student Blogs, Liverpool Hope University's Prospective Students Site:
http://www.hope.ac.uk/prospective/blog/

Mapping Medieval Chester: http://blog.medievalchester.ac.uk/ – official project blog of the
AHRC-funded research project

The Bald Woman's Blog: http://www.lutontoday.co.uk/the-bald-womans-blog/The-Bald-
Woman39s-Blog-Part.6077633.jp – a series of online diary entries by cancer survivor Su Candy,
on Luton Today

Blog of the Department of Students Services at London Metropolitan University:
http://blogs.londonmet.ac.uk/studentservices/

Vice-Chancellor's Blog, Macquarie University, Sydney Australia:
http://www.vc.mq.edu.au/blog/

Section 4

Transitions

Introduction by Peter Norrington

The Higher Education landscape is in flux, and on so many fronts. Recent economic events have only just begun to shock the HE system, and more are due. The relationships between HE and FE – once perceived as distinct educational levels with distinct purposes – are shifting. Transnational education and international student flows are creating cohorts with different interests and requirements. Widening participation brings new challenges and rewards. Increasing demands for higher level employability skills, at home and abroad, drive demand for higher level courses. Reconciling research and teaching and learning strategies needs flexible solutions.

Transition is a way of life. This section offers some insights and solutions to some of these issues.

Foundation degrees are a strange landscape, which Helen Corkill in Chapter 16 shows may be tamed by CRe8. For some students they provide a final award and an exit point from HE in FE; for others they are an alternative route into HE, arriving there at an entry point different from the traditional one. This creates paradoxes for those on the FE "side", preparing students towards diverging ends. On the HE "side", it raises issues on how to merge two different student streams during the flow of a course. With, for example, a focus on personalised learning, CRe8 may offer a transition pedagogy we didn't know we had.

Taught postgraduate provision has increased dramatically in recent years – and this will continue. Mark Atlay and Lesley Lawrence in Chapter 17 investigate the applicability of CRe8 principles to developing postgraduate curricula, for the curriculum itself and its role in moving students into postgraduate study and out into the world. Looking at two distinctive cohort types – small, motivated groups and large, diverse groups – they show that CRe8 is a viable approach to these issues. Beyond this, they reveal the complexity involved, and highlight specific questions that the University as a whole and courses locally will need to address for success.

The work of the Action Research Consortium (ARC), evaluated by Arti Kumar in Chapter 18, shows how purposeful changes in curriculum design and delivery can support the development of staff both as effective pedagogic practitioners, and also as

effective researchers. Action research offers a way for staff to expand productively on their motivation and engagement – moving themselves, their courses and their students forward. Arti also highlights some of the difficulties experienced by ARC members, notably ethics committees' understanding of action research principles.

Staff motivation and engagement with the subjects they teach is vital if students are to remain motivated and engaged – and, even – retained. Sam Elkington and Lesley Lawrence in Chapter 19 look at the experiences of non-specialist teachers, whether the non-specialism arises for the teacher in subject or pedagogy, or both. These experiences are a reality for many teachers, given the speed at which course offerings and cohort compositions are changing, for new and otherwise experienced teachers alike. The authors offer a flow-based model of these experiences and point towards developing support strategies for non-specialist staff.

Connecting research and teaching is a very current agenda. Petia Petrova in Chapter 20 discusses her experiences as an educational developer moving forward research informed teaching (RiT) projects across the University. This chapter is published externally, the abstract being presented here.

And finally in Chapter 21 Annika Coughlin and Petia Petrova discuss the benefits of writing retreats in developing practitioners to become scholars of teaching and learning, increase staff's confidence and act as a vehicle for creating a community of writers.

Chapter 16

'A most ingenious paradox'[1]?: building a 'transition pedagogy' from foundation to bachelor degrees

Helen Corkill

Abstract

Transition is a fundamental feature of twenty-first century life, where factors such as economic challenge and globalisation are introducing new risks and uncertainties thereby disrupting traditional patterns of lifecourse transition. Similarly, student transitions into, through and out of higher education have seen new patterns emerge, and assume a greater importance as increasingly diverse student intakes into increasingly diverse forms of higher education have grown. Managing such educational transitions effectively has become a focus for policy, practice and research in the UK .

Foundation degrees were introduced to offer a new type of short-cycle, work-focussed higher education award, with the dual function of being both a transfer qualification and an exit award. Dual-function and short-cycle awards may also challenge perceptions of 'graduateness' and institutional responses to these. These factors lead to complexities and paradoxes, not only in terms of the transitional context, but also in terms of curriculum design and the approach to the particular academic and vocational mix within teaching, learning and assessment. While all students require curricula that are relevant and engaging, transitional curricula also need to be appropriately phased and 'intentional'. Many of these factors are embedded within the Curriculum Review 2008 (CRe8), and should provide a substantial contribution towards ensuring an effective 'transition pedagogy'.

However, could this translate in practice? This paper explores the idea of 'transition pedagogy', and ways in which CRe8 could be used to support such an idea.

Keywords

Transition; pedagogy; foundation degree; intentional; CRe8

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[1] W S Gilbert (1879) 'The Pirates of Penzance'

Introduction

Transition is a fundamental feature of twenty-first century life, where factors such as economic challenge and globalisation are introducing new risks and uncertainties thereby disrupting traditional patterns of lifecourse transition. Similarly, student transitions into, through and out of higher education have seen new patterns emerge. These have assumed a greater importance as increasingly diverse student intakes into increasingly diverse forms of higher education have grown. Managing educational transitions effectively has progressively become a focus for policy, practice and research in the UK and yet a greater understanding still is required of how students navigate the complex demands of diverse transitional contexts (Ecclestone, 2009; Ecclestone et al, 2010).

A substantial international canon exists within the field of student transition and within this sits a well-established body of work on the importance of the first-year of higher education. Much of the literature in these intersecting areas is allied to the field of student retention, a global problem and one where few issues in higher education have received as much attention (Tinto, 2005; 1999; Yorke and Longden, 2004). The post-millennium decade has also spawned a growing literature around student engagement, linked to theories of retention and persistence (Krause, 2007; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Lowe and Cook, 2003).

More recently, and with much of the work originating from the USA[2] and in particular Australia[3], greater attention has been paid to the importance of holistic curriculum design within the context of transitional phases,

> institutions (need to) see the transition to and through university as a holistic process which begins well before enrolment, extends beyond graduation and includes so much more than what happens in the classroom. (Krause, 2005b: 66)

Changing patterns of student engagement necessitate changes in approaches to teaching and learning, including the requirement to support key transition points in the undergraduate (and postgraduate) lifecycle. Too often homogeneity among student cohorts is assumed and appropriate changes are not effected,

> Widening access has fundamentally changed the assumptions that can be made about students' [entry] skills and knowledge. This has not always led to the necessary changes in learning, teaching and assessment approaches. (Yorke, 2002: 2)

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2 For example, multiple works published by the National Resource Centre for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, University of South Carolina; multiple works by Tinto; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005.

3 For example, work undertaken under the auspices of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council; multiple works including by Krause, Kift, Kuh, McInnes.

At the University of Bedfordshire, the Curriculum Review 2008 (CRe8) paved the way for such a holistic and whole-institution approach to curriculum design. Now embedded widely across the majority of the undergraduate curriculum, it is now possible to enquire if CRe8 has actually been used to facilitate transitions as well as framing curriculum design. In this context, this paper explores the concept of intentional transition pedagogy and looks at the synergies with CRe8.

Transition

What exactly is understood by 'transition'? At the macro level the field of educational transitions includes the contexts of system and institutional transition, including the power shift between higher and further education (Trow, 2005; Parry, 2003). At the micro level sit the transitions affecting individuals, such as life- or learning- transitions. Whereas the idea of transitions as presented in policy are discernible events experienced in a linear sequence of progression through funding, institutional and achievement structures, 'transition' for the individual involves the idea of transition as a continuum rather than a linear sequence. However, transition is not synonymous with any of the more ubiquitous terms of 'movement', 'transfer' or 'progression' but conversely it can involve all of these, depicting changes and shifts in identity and agency as people journey through the education system (Ecclestone, 2009).

As the context of higher education itself has changed in the past 25 years, so too has the complexity of the transitions being undertaken. The more diverse the background of the students, the more correspondingly diverse the transitions themselves and the more difficult they are to define (Christie et al, 2005). Not always helpfully, adult transitions are often painted as a deficit model, grounded in assumptions that these transitions are inherently difficult, unsettling or troublesome (Ecclestone, 2009; Ingram et al, 2009). The increasing ability to combine employment and higher education also indicates that a more fluid and dynamic concept of 'transition' may be needed to capture hybrid forms of participation.

While transition into and between forms of higher education are recurrent themes in research and literature, transition through higher education is less prevalent (Krause 2006a; Christie et al, 2005). The expansion of short-cycle awards in higher education adds to the growing diversity of those progressing to post-graduate awards. The traditional assumption that once students have made the initial transition into higher education and that subsequent transition merely represent a continuation of study has to be challenged (Tinto, 2008; Tokuno, 2008; O'Donnell et al, 2009). Not only does this misconception need addressing, but the idea of transition assumes an even greater importance in the case of dual function awards such as foundation degrees.

Foundation degrees

A major contributor to the diversification of undergraduate higher education since 2000, foundation degrees were introduced to offer a new type of short-cycle, work-focussed higher education award, with the dual function of being both a transfer qualification and an exit award. This has lead to complexities and paradoxes not only in terms of the transitional context, but also in terms of curriculum design and the approach to the particular academic and vocational mix within teaching, learning and assessment.

At the University of Bedfordshire, as elsewhere, many of the foundation degrees originating from the early part of the 'noughties'[4] were based largely on pre-existing institutional Higher National awards which in turn were modelled very closely on the first-year curriculum of allied articulated bachelor degrees. Designated as 'co-designed awards', these Higher Nationals offered students from differing backgrounds a way through to completing a bachelor degree by means of a different route. The close alliance and duplication of curricula and approaches to teaching, learning and assessment might have given rise to various debates about the purpose and identity of such Higher Nationals, but conversely they served to ensure that students could feed as seamlessly as possible into a parallel award.

Foundation degrees, while they may also be designated as 'co-designed', are more multifaceted and intended to be substantially different in nature from bachelor degrees. The complexities of developing these demand-led, dual-function awards with work-based learning and sectoral requirements at their core are therefore significantly more challenging with respect to ensuring smooth transitional processes. In addition, about half of all foundation degrees nationally, and the majority of those at the University of Bedfordshire, are delivered in associated colleges of further education (HEFCE, 2010). This puts additional challenges into play when starting to think about a transitional pedagogy.

Foundation degrees, therefore, designated as both exit and transfer awards, sit squarely in the middle of the post-compulsory sectors, placing them in an arena of competing discourses on skills, widening participation, access, progression and identity. Garrod and McFarlane (2007) maintain that foundation degrees have helped to weaken boundaries between further and higher education, but question nevertheless whether systems are always in place to bridge even a narrowing divide, leaving students potentially caught in the middle of an institutional chasm. Within this chasm, curricula divides also prevail, even where mechanisms such as 'co-designed' programmes and articulation agreements between institutions nominally exist.

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[4] the 'noughties' – popular expression referring to the first decade of the 21st century

Institutional mechanisms

Transitions can also refer to the institutional structures that facilitate and support transitions. Stuart Hunter (2006) suggests that higher education institutions themselves exist in a constant state of transition. There is constant change and therefore, by default, transition between one state and another. The cyclical nature of the educational year defines an annual state of transition as one group of students (and staff) start their programmes and another leave. Each new student and staff cohort will bring with them different experiences of world events and contemporary culture that will shape attitudes and behaviours towards transition. Every year therefore brings change and challenge associated with new human considerations, but there are also considerations of curriculum constantly being reviewed, new technological applications to be assimilated and in the current economic climate, new implications of new government policy and funding constraints. Institutions and their staff, working in such a constant state of transition, should have empathy for students in transition … but do they?

A major purpose of the educational enterprise is to help students progress through successive tiers of the system and this does require co-ordinated approaches from right across the institution. Institutional philosophy coupled with the relevant structures, strategies, policies and processes coupled with appropriate approaches to teaching and learning all need to play their part – in an integrated manner. However, as Brew (2006) contended, traditionally universities are not inclusive places and tend to have their disparate communities of academics and students, administrative and support staff. This in fact may lead to the quality of student experience varying more within than between institutions, as expressed by Kuh (2007) and others. There is therefore a particular need for institutional management to help bridge the gaps between academic, support and administrative functions, to 'transcend the silos...' (Kift, 2008:1), and to create coherent and active learning programmes where silo mentality is not prevalent (Tinto, 1999; 1996).

Krause (2006a) likens the effective institutional management of major student transitional points to a state of war. Extending this analogy, the question can be asked as to whether an institution has an overall 'battle plan', a clear and unified mission for accommodating its newest students. All areas of the institution need to be actively engaged, with student learning needs to be placed at the centre of such a mission. Often there are institutional barriers, and sometimes these are acknowledged, but often in terms of suggesting that such barriers are long-established, deep-rooted or very difficult to change. Whether or not one subscribes to the 'battle' analogy, there certainly is an argument to be made for the importance of strategic and tactical thinking, planning, policymaking and action as fundamental to supporting successful student transition to higher education.

It is important that whole-institution strategies for supporting student transitions are themselves located within a socio-cultural framework as they are socially situated and

should be integrated with the social practices through which learning occurs (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Krause (2006b) argues that it is very important for staff to understand this context in order to facilitate learning and actively integrate students into university communities (Tinto, 2005). It has been widely identified that in order to facilitate the development of new academic identities a sense of 'belongingness' to the university community, or indeed communities, staff need to support new students in both academic and social integration (Tinto, 2002; Krause, 2006a; 2005a; Lowe and Cook, 2003; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1998).

Failure on the part of receiving academics to accept and integrate transfer students can have significant impact (Tinto et al, 1996). University staff need to acknowledge that transfer students, such as foundation degree students, are new and valuable members of the university and not just in-filling existing lecture structures. Receiving academics need to understand what experiences students bring with them, and treat them as 'people with something to offer' (Hockings et al, 2007: 727). Transferred experiences cannot simply be academic, but will include life and cultural experiences and increasingly, as in many foundation degree students, a wealth of valuable workplace experiences.

Haselgrove (1994) observed that some university academics also hold a particular view of students transferring from short-cycle awards delivered in colleges, regarding them as graduates of a learning environment with little research culture, limited library provision and a lack of suitably academically qualified staff. While this observation was made some fifteen years ago and pre-dates foundation degrees and while things have undoubtedly moved on in terms of professional updating for staff, the fact remains that a higher education experience delivered in a college will be necessarily different to that delivered in a university. The argument may then be made that although the experience might be different, it might also be equal. However, it has to be accepted that transferring foundation degree students will have experienced an educational environment very different from that of a university, possibly with a much more prescriptive approach to teaching and learning and consequently adjustment will have to be made. To enable such adjustment, at whatever the transitional point, there has to be 'transition pedagogy', including curriculum for transitional stages which is engaging, supportive, relevant and social and above all, appropriately phased and 'intentional'.

Intentional curriculum design

Increasing focus is being placed on the idea of curriculum design being 'intentional', that is mediating a relevant, involving and social transition into the various levels of academic study (Kift, 2009a; 2009c). The idea of intentionality is especially significant in the context of foundation degrees. The transition into higher education is significant for all students, no matter where the student is transferring from, but, as in the case of many vocationally orientated students, they have gone from school to college or work before entering higher education, they have already been subject to a significant series of transfers and transitions, all of which take them further away from the more highly

structured environments they have previously known (Yorke, 2002). No sooner are foundation degree students settled into the first year of higher education, then they are faced with the prospect of the next transition, and then the next. The challenge for curriculum design here is how to manage this multi-staged process of transition, while addressing the further challenge of how to do this at the same time as creating both a self-contained exit award and a coherent transfer qualification.

Curriculum design, especially in an era of mass or near universal higher education, has to recognise this paradox (Trow, 1987). As the unit of resource diminishes, so the necessity for students to take responsibility for their own learning expands. However, at the same time, good curriculum design will try to take account of the fact that appropriate assistance is required to facilitate this. The less face-to-face contact time is afforded, the more that contact has to be of the highest quality. There is then a significant role for the use of e-portfolios, which can not only underpin the whole of the curriculum and allow the ongoing articulation of skills, academic and personal development, but as in the case of foundation degrees, can bring together all the processes that underpin work-based learning, in turn, underpinning the whole curriculum (Norrington, 2010). Many curriculum frameworks, including CRe8, therefore stress the importance of curriculum being designed to be student-focussed, explicit and relevant providing such foundations and scaffolding to enable initial and ongoing success, an example of intentional curriculum design contributing to an integrated and coherent whole.

Transition pedagogy

Transition pedagogy has been defined as a guiding philosophy for intentional curriculum design, and was originally applied to first-year curriculum. It is an attempt to articulate carefully considered, integrated and scaffolded curriculum design such that would engage the increasingly heterogeneous cohorts of students entering and progressing through higher education today (Kift, 2009c:1). The notion of transition pedagogy embodies the ideas of co-curriculum design and also acknowledges that good curriculum design must be concomitant with teaching and proactive, just-in-time support and service provision (Kift, ibid).

However, transition pedagogy is not solely concerned with curriculum design and neither can it be viewed as an alternative teaching and learning strategy. It is a deliberate attempt to move beyond extant separated institutional policies or discrete initiatives for an institution's newest students. It is a philosophy directed at moving practice towards more holistic and sustainable institution-wide approaches and enhancements to support the newest students.

> A transition pedagogy …focuses on intentional …curriculum design as the theoretical foundation for enhancing the learning, retention and success of first-year students. The theoretical foundation and institutional framework that arises from it,

offers a context-sensitive approach than can be applied to many other…settings.
(Tinto, in Kift, 2009b: 58)

Implementing such an agenda is problematic and is far from straightforward – the challenge of 'bridging the gaps between academic, administrative and support programs' is substantial (McInnis, 2003:13).

Transition pedagogy has the following interconnected organising principles:

- Transition
- Diversity
- Design
- Engagement
- Assessment
- Evaluation and Monitoring (from Kift, 2008: 1-2).

At first sight, there appears to be little that is out of the ordinary in the headings here, other than perhaps the particular linkage of the individual elements themselves. There are striking similarities with CRe8, so do we already have a transition pedagogy without it being labelled as such?

Aligning CRe8

Intentional transitional curriculum should be designed to be explicit in assisting students to prepare for, go though and emerge from a process of change. In the University of Bedfordshire concept, this would equate to bridging in, through and out of higher education. In the transition model, the idea of transition as a process that has a long timeline, with roots spreading out before the actual point of change and a legacy that lasts in to the new phases of change is emphasised so that the curriculum should be designed to mediate and support transition as a process that occurs over time. In this way, the first year curriculum will enable successful student transition into first year, through first year, into later years and ultimately out into the world of work, professional practice and career attainment (Kift, 2009c). While the essence of this is enshrined within both the principles of CRe8 and the founding principles of the Bridges – CETL, how this might translate is practice across the transition from foundation to bachelor degree is less certain.

CRe8 acknowledges the diversity of the University's students. The Personalised Learning strand not only recognises the individuality of each student, but also the diversity of students' experiences which can be drawn on in teaching and learning approaches. So, on the surface CRe8 as a model maps very closely with the transition pedagogy model. How these approaches to diversity within the curriculum manifest themselves in practice is perhaps a more interesting question, but the specific question

in the context of this paper is how this is put to practice within the context of an approach to intentional transitional curriculum between foundation and bachelor degrees. For example, foundation degree students progressing to bachelor level study will have all experienced some form of work-based learning. How is this taken into account and used across the transitional divide? And how is CRe8 put into practice to ease that transition?

Again, CRe8 accords well with the principle of design within an intentional transition pedagogical approach. Like the transition pedagogy model, CRe8 supports curriculum design and delivery which is student-focussed, explicit and relevant in providing the foundation and scaffolding necessary for effective learning. Many of the principles of transition pedagogy are to be found in the Curriculum section of CRe8, but equally areas such as the intentional integration and sequencing of knowledge, skills, and attitudes are reflected in the Employability section, with some reference also to Realistic Learning.

There are also synergies between the sections on engagement. Both the transition pedagogy and CRe8 models include aspirations to involve active and collaborative learning, CRe8 aligning this within the sections on Realistic Learning. Likewise, in both models the importance of learning communities to the engagement of students is recognised, as is both peer and tutor engagement. While being part of a community may initially be imposed at registration, predication happens through active engagement with the community through set tasks, independent research and study, and with others, peers and tutors. How we construct the curriculum and interact with students affects how rapidly and effectively students become incorporated into their community of learning (Atlay et al, 2008).

In intentional transition pedagogy, the curriculum should be designed to ease students into the processes and requirements of assessment, while the assessment tasks need to increase in complexity from the first to later years of curriculum design. Regular, formative evaluation of work early in their programme of study is essential in providing feedback to both students and staff. There is nothing new in any of this, and in fact, as a curriculum model, CRe8 would be significantly more exciting. The provision in CRe8 for utilising the outcomes of assessment to help develop future learning would ensure that in assessment, at least, this section is already in place across the institution.

The final principle of the transition model is that of evaluation and monitoring which holds that good curriculum design is evidence-based and is therefore enhanced by regular evaluation which leads to revision and renewal in the interests of improving student learning. Transitional curriculum design also needs to include embedded strategies to monitor all students' engagement in their learning and to identify and intervene in a timely way with students at risk of not succeeding or fully achieving desired learning outcomes. There is nothing new in this, and models for good practice in this area are offered both within CRe8 and in the Education Strategy. In short, the majority of the six principles of transition pedagogy are already embedded within existing structures at the University of Bedfordshire.

Informing teaching and learning by research

There is one further, if tangential, principle underlying a rounded transitional model. Intentional transition pedagogy needs to take account of the complexities of the contested area of the teaching / research nexus (Brew, 2006; Krause, 2005c; Petrova, 2010). On the one hand, encouragement needs to be given to stimulate the discovery and generation of knowledge, and often for work-based learners, this may include the generation of some form of new knowledge. On the other hand, there is the question of establishing right from the start 'belongingness' to an academic community, a community of scholars. One of the debates around the expansion of mass higher education via delivering higher education within further education settings is that the teaching is less likely to be informed by research and therefore the learning is less likely to be underpinned by research (Haselgrove, 1994; Young, 2006). While there may be compensatory factors in terms of experienced practitioners delivering vocationally-orientated curricula, the research basis has to be considered carefully in the context of transition.

It is important that practical approaches applying the principles of research-led teaching and learning, or research-led pedagogy, are embedded into the curriculum from the beginning.

> Research-led learning and teaching is pivotal in connecting students to the disciplinary community, its research methods, results and direct involvement in research experiences. This should be a feature of the first year undergraduate experience, just as much as it is in later years. (Krause, ibid: 8)

This is doubly important for foundation degree or other students who may engage at an early stage with either work-based or problem-based learning. A traditional approach where 'research methods' are introduced just before the final stage of undergraduate study is arguably of little value to many foundation degree students. This is too late to inform research-based activities that underpin work-based learning and an irrelevant 'bolt on' for those students for whom foundation degrees are an exit award, the imminent foundation degree graduates.

Challenges of 'graduateness'

The focus of attention within student transitions tends to be the initial transition *into* higher education. Rather less attention is then paid to the various transitions *through* higher education, as Krause (2006a) observed. Currently the global economic downturn and the increasing emphasis on employability are serving to focus attention on the transition *out of* higher education and into the workplace. These transitional stages accord with the first phase of work undertaken within the Bridges – CETL, bridging in, bridging through and bridging out. Within the significant canon around the transition from undergraduate study to the workplace, there is debate about the nature

of the actors within that transition, the graduates. However, foundation degree students are also 'graduates', and indeed those foundation degree graduates who transfer and complete a bachelor degree effectively become double graduates. Within the concept of the transition out from undergraduate study, how does the notion of foundation degree 'graduateness' sit and how does this accord with the building of a whole institution transition pedagogy?

In 1996, the HEQC[5] set out a model of 'graduateness' based on the three dimensions of cultural values, curriculum (as an assimilation of a body of knowledge) and cognitive or intellectual attributes. At the time there was inclusion of a corpus of transferable skills, but these were identified to be acknowledged separately. There was also no reference to different types of undergraduate students, and of course, foundation degrees had not even been mooted then. Today things should be a little better defined, perhaps. However, Glover et al (2002: 294) argue that the distinction between 'graduateness' (defined as the effect of knowledge, skills and attitudes, of having undertaken a course of undergraduate learning) and 'employability' (defined as enhanced capacity to secure employment) is now blurred, as the lines between what is gained as consequences of the university experience per se and what is gained through annexing workplace learning, additional experiences and activities are less clear. This becomes further blurred when the nature of a dual-function award is considered.

The University of Bedfordshire attributes one single vision of the notion of 'graduateness' which can be applied to any level of award,

> Our vision is of a University of Bedfordshire graduate who is knowledgeable, critical and creative; who understands who they are and what they want to achieve; who can communicate effectively, evidence attainments and function in context, and who has the skills, self-confidence and self-regulatory abilities to manage their own development. Such a graduate is eminently employable, capable of working with and learning from others, of adding significantly to their local community and prepared for life in an ever-changing environment. (The University of Bedfordshire Education Strategy (2008 – 13): Transformational Education: 3)

How does this relate to foundation degree graduates?   Looking at the national picture as a whole, foundation degree students are far from being a homogenous group either in terms of age or previous educational attainment, but as recent statistics demonstrate, they are an eminently employable group on graduation (HEFCE, 2010). This may be due to the vocational nature of the majority of the programmes, or because foundation degrees are inherently work-focussed awards. Therefore the match between higher education study and employment is a much closer relationship than with many more traditional awards (Arthur & Little, 2010).

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[5] Higher Education Quality Council

As Harris (1996) cogently argues, both 'university' and 'graduate' are relative concepts, based on the traditional idea of both a university and its products. If we adopt Trow's (1974) typology, these concepts are not sustainable for the mass or near universal market. If we therefore update this notion to 2010 and substitute 'higher education' and 'foundation degree graduate' the complexities deepen still further, notwithstanding any subject differential. Dual-function and short-cycle awards may therefore challenge perceptions of the nature of 'graduateness' and how institutional responses to these notions may be made both in terms of equality with bachelor degrees and of recording achievement. This raises questions about capability (Walker, 1998: 2), levels of graduateness and conflicts between 'graduateness' and, 'employability'. These are all significant questions, well outside the scope of this paper, but nevertheless merit attention if a holistic approach to transition is to be debated.

Conclusion

In terms of curriculum design, a dual-function award such as a foundation degree is arguably a paradox. While there may be considerable overlap, at some point the requirements of an exit award must necessarily deviate from those of a transfer award. While all students require curricula that are relevant, engaging, supportive, and social, it has been identified that transitional curricula also need to be appropriately phased and 'intentional'. Posing further challenges for staff working across an institutional divide, foundation degrees also need to have a solid teaching and learning base situated within both reflective practice and problem-based researching. The majority of these factors are already embedded within the University of Bedfordshire's Curriculum Review for 2008 (CRe8), which, if applied appropriately, should provide a substantial contribution towards ensuring an effective 'transition pedagogy' to aid the journey from foundation to bachelor degrees.

The development of CRe8 has effectively provided the University of Bedfordshire with a clearly identifiable curriculum pedagogy, and one that is indeed 'intentional'. CRe8, as a curriculum framework, is designed especially to support a learner-centred approach and this has now been implemented right across the University's undergraduate curriculum. Yet to develop CRe8 into an intentional *transition* pedagogy would arguably require taking the framework on a slightly longer journey. Like the development process for CRe8, that journey would have to involve a similar spirit of whole-institution change, but this time the fellow travellers would need to include the wider University community and not just the academic one. As Kift (2008) observed, transition cannot be left to chance, to piecemeal actions. The challenge is now to extend a curriculum framework to include a transition framework, so that at the University of Bedfordshire, student transition really does become 'everybody's business'.

About the author

Helen Corkill is the Foundation Degree Fellow based in the Bridges – CETL. She also works closely with the University's Partnership Office and network of partner colleges of further education. While Helen's main research and dissemination interests within the Bridges – CETL are connected with the understanding of work-based learning, she has also written and presented widely both in the UK and abroad on the subject of the student experience, notably on the experiences of first year and foundation degree students. Helen's current research is in the field of student transitions, particularly on the transition between foundation and bachelor degrees.

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Chapter 17

Rising to the Master's challenge: Standards and Outcomes in Postgraduate Education

Mark Atlay and Lesley Lawrence

Abstract

This chapter considers the implications for teaching and learning of the recent expansion in taught postgraduate activity in the University. It sets this within the context of developments in the UK and in Europe designed to more clearly articulate and harmonise what is expected from postgraduate education. Finally it reviews the usefulness of qualifications descriptors, credit-level descriptors and the University's curriculum framework, CRe8, in defining standards and establishing effective learning opportunities for students. In particular it explores the challenges presented by two different types of postgraduate education: specialist Master's addressing the needs of a narrow, often professional, area and characterised by relatively small numbers of highly motivated students, and broad Master's focused on the learning of a large and diverse student population. The analysis is used to identify areas for further action by the University.

Keywords

Postgraduate outcomes; curriculum delivery; curriculum design

Introduction

The question at the heart of this chapter is: 'How is a Master's qualification defined and how can the outcomes best be delivered?' There is limited literature discussing this question, and a 'dearth of research on taught postgraduate students' with most research tending to focus on undergraduates or postgraduate research students (Universities UK, 2009). The chapter considers the way in which the curriculum for different types of postgraduate courses, and differing client groups, can be constructed and articulated to provide a bridge between theories and concepts of learning, including the nature of postgraduate education, and practical teaching and study methods. It explores the frameworks within which postgraduate qualifications operate at an institutional, national and European level including the University of Bedfordshire's curriculum framework (CRe8) and its Master's level credit descriptors. Much of the documentation regarding CRe8 and its development rarely explicitly distinguishes between an undergraduate and a postgraduate curriculum; it was designed with all students in mind. CRe8's key strands are interrogated for their postgraduate applicability against two different types of postgraduate education. The outcomes of the preliminary exercise identified in this chapter and to be followed up by further investigation[1], are informing the University's review of taught postgraduate structures and support mechanisms being conducted during 2010 and 2011 (University of Bedfordshire, 2008). The chapter concludes by identifying areas for future work and development in relation to the review. But first, we set the scene with some background on a changing national and local picture.

The expansion of Postgraduate Education

The national picture

The last five years have shown a significant expansion in postgraduate education in the UK as shown in Table 1. Taught postgraduate students now make up almost 20% of all students in UK HE institutions and 80% of all postgraduate students (Universities UK, 2009). There has been a 36% rise in the number of students studying for higher degrees over the past ten years (CIHE, 2010) and in the past five years the number has risen by nearly 16,000 with the majority of the growth arising from non-EU countries.

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[1] This follow-up investigation falls outside the scope of this chapter and will be reported elsewhere when analysis is completed.

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	% change last year	% change last 5 years
UK	337685	343900	343825	333655	353430	6%	5%
EU	39840	40895	41245	42285	44285	5%	11%
Non-EU	104815	107845	117675	125200	139100	11%	33%
Total	482335	492640	502745	501135	536815	7%	11%

Table 1: Growth in postgraduate education in the UK (Source HESA 2010, SFR 142)

Growth in postgraduate numbers can be seen as part of the phenomenon of qualification inflation (Duru-Bellat, 2009). In order to stand out in an increasingly competitive labour market there is a need for an additional, higher, qualification. Although, as Maja Jankowska reports elsewhere in this publication (Chapter 5), some students are intrinsically motivated to study to a higher level whilst some view it as conferring greater esteem.

Increasing competitiveness is one factor but Master's qualifications are also seen to add value. A recent report by the Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE, 2010) found that:

> Seven out of ten employers sought out Master's students, and nine out of ten of those who did, valued the analytical thinking and problem-solving a Master's brings. (p6)

Whilst a recent government commissioned review of postgraduate education (Smith et al, 2010) stresses the need for higher skills in a global, knowledge-rich, economy:

> The review has found that postgraduate education in the UK is a great asset – it is world leading in many areas. But there is scope to build on this success. Making postgraduate provision more responsive to employer needs and encouraging more people to train to postgraduate level will ensure that the UK has the higher level skills needed to succeed in a global knowledge economy. This will be critical to securing the location of high-value business in the UK and to the creation of new employment opportunities in growth sectors. (Executive summary)

A further aspect, highlighted by the government (BIS, 2009) and in the Smith report, is the value to the UK economy of the income from postgraduate education.

> As other countries invest heavily in their own postgraduate provision, the UK will need to work hard to maintain its competitive advantage. This will mean doing more to strengthen and promote UK postgraduate education on an international stage and to attract the very best students from around the world. It will be even more important to ensure that we get the best possible value from the money that

taxpayers, employers and individuals invest in postgraduate education. (Smith report, 2010, Executive summary)

As we will discuss later, these twin tracks of making postgraduate education more responsive to employer (and employee) needs and sustaining expansion in international recruitment are uneasy bedfellows.

Postgraduate Education at the University of Bedfordshire

The growth nationally has been reflected in the University with a significant increase in the enrolment of postgraduate students particularly in Biochemistry, Computing and Business and Management. There was an 81% increase in postgraduate numbers from 2007/08 to 2008/09 (n=2565 to 4644) as illustrated in Figure 1 with the majority recruited from the Indian sub-continent.
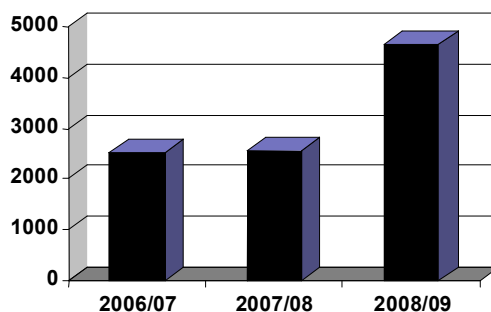
Figure 1: Increase in taught postgraduate numbers (Source: University of Bedfordshire Postgraduate Scheme Review 2009)

Although there has been an increase in part-time student numbers, the majority of the rise has been in full-time postgraduate students who are now in the majority at postgraduate level ,as shown in Table 2.

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Part time	1358	1413	1733
Full time	1179	1152	2911

Table 2: Growth in full-time and part-time postgraduate numbers (Source: University of Bedfordshire Postgraduate Scheme Review 2009)

The growth of both part-time provision (largely aimed at home students following specialised postgraduate study) and full-time provision (attracting large numbers of international students) is part of the University's expansion plans and a response to the current limit on undergraduate recruitment. Supporting this expanded student

population and ensuring that students attain appropriate Master's level outcomes, is thus important and the challenges are common across the sector. International students arrive with undergraduate degrees from diverse linguistic, cultural and educational backgrounds and many of the educational challenges are similar to those for undergraduate education – compounded by the fact that postgraduate students are only studying for one full year.

Expectations of taught postgraduate qualifications

What is it that students are prepared to pay for that makes a taught postgraduate qualification different and distinctive from an undergraduate award and for which, potentially, employers are willing to pay a premium[2]? The recent CIHE report (2010) notes concerns about the quality of postgraduate qualifications:

> The increasing plethora – and perceived variable quality – of postgraduate qualifications puzzles some employers, who question how much some programmes stretch graduate students. Clearly there are marketing issues which the HE sector must address further to get clear and consistent messages to employers. (p.12)

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the UK (QAA, 2010) identify three types of Master's degrees: research (e.g. the MPhil), specialist/advanced study (e.g. the MSc and MA), and a third professional/practice category (e.g. the MBA, MEd, MTL and LLM) where the predominant mode of delivery is through work-based or practice-related learning. The broad expectations of the outcomes of each type of Master's Qualification are equivalent and set out in the QAA's Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ).

Master's degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice
- a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship
- originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline
- conceptual understanding that enables the student:

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[2] Data in the Smith report, Table 11, suggests that those with a Master's qualification earn 15% more over their lifetime than undergraduates.

a) to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline

b) to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences
- demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level
- continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level.

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:

    a) the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility

    b) decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations

    c) the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development (Source: QAA 2008, pp.20 - 21)

Traditionally, in the UK, a Master's qualification is undertaken over one full calendar year, whereas in Europe, such qualifications require two further years of study beyond degree level. The relatively short length of the UK Master's qualification is seen as giving the UK a competitive advantage through reducing costs (to institutions and students). However, it does raise issues about the comparability of standards. Furthermore, the integrated Master's in the UK, in which students complete the undergraduate component and 120 credits of Master's level study within four years, further extends the variability of Master's provision.

The Bologna declaration[3] represents an attempt to achieve a clearer and more consistent definition of European qualifications to enable greater mobility and transparency. The expectations of awards are set out in the Dublin descriptors, which

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[3] See http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc1290_en.htm

set high-level expectations of the qualifications[4]. European developments identify first cycle (undergraduate degrees), second cycle (Master's) and third cycle (doctorates).

Qualifications that signify completion of the second cycle are awarded to students who:

- have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with the first cycle, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context;
- can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study;
- have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements;
- can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously;
- have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous. (Source: Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation. Copenhagen (2005) A Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050218_QF_EHEA.pdf)

Whilst the development of such *qualifications* descriptors as set out by the QAA and in the Dublin descriptors is helpful in ensuring some consistency of practice and in aiding student mobility they do present some problems for postgraduate education. Within the space of one year, for full time students, three qualifications are recognized: postgraduate certificate, postgraduate diploma and Master's. All are situated at the same level within qualification frameworks. The FHEQ notes:

> The descriptor provided for this level of the framework is for any master's degree which should meet the descriptor in full. This qualification descriptor can also be used as a reference point for other level 7 qualifications, including postgraduate certificates and postgraduate diplomas. (p. 20)

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[4] The intention was that European countries would take these descriptors and amplify them for their own use as with the FHEQ. However, most European states appear to have adopted them with little refinement.

The Dublin descriptors and the FHEQ, whilst providing vital benchmarks for determining the standards expected of a Master's qualification, are insufficiently detailed to help course teams writing learning outcomes for courses and units which clearly articulate to internal and external audiences, including students and employers, the expectations of the outcomes of postgraduate study. Likewise they are not particularly useful for those responsible for ascribing credit for work-based or work-derived learning through the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), an increasingly important area. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes, allied to professional bodies and/or sectors of the economy, are increasingly expecting Master's level study (e.g. in the area of Education see TDA, 2010[5]) and recognizing work-based learning is often a key component of this activity. The recent Smith report (2010) noted:

> Increasingly, postgraduate level continuing professional development is being developed with and for employers and delivered in flexible ways. This model of responsive and tailored postgraduate provision will play an important role in upskilling and re-training the UK workforce. (p. 5)

We need more detailed clarification. At undergraduate level these are set out for particular subjects in the UK in Subject benchmarks[6]. However, there are currently only nine Master's level subject benchmarks compared to over 50 at undergraduate level. The QAA's guidance on Master's degree characteristics (QAA, 2010) identifies the characteristics of graduates for the two types of non-research Master's as set out in Table 3 with the key differences highlighted.

Thus there are minor differences in the subject-specific attributes between the two types (including no expectation that professional practice students necessarily undertake a major project) but the generic attributes are identical.

Credit-level descriptors can be helpful here including those defined by credit consortia such as SEEC[7] of which the University is a member.

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[5] Training and Development Agency, (2010) Master's in Teaching and Learning. www.tda.gov.uk/leaders/teachers/mtl.aspx [Accessed March 2010]

[6] See www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/Master's/default.asp

[7] Originally the South East England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer, SEEC has grown to cover institutions in the south and southern midlands of the UK. NUCCAT is the corresponding consortium for the northern half of UK. For further details see www.seec.org.uk

Specialist/Advanced Master's	Professional Practice Master's
Graduates of specialised/advanced study master's degrees typically have:	Graduates of professional/practice master's degrees typically have:
i) subject-specific attributes	i) subject-specific attributes
• an in-depth knowledge and understanding of **the discipline** informed by current scholarship and research, including a critical awareness of current issues and developments in the subject	• an in-depth knowledge and understanding of **their profession**, informed by current **practice**, scholarship and research, including a critical awareness of current issues and developments in the subject **and the profession**
• **the ability to complete a research project in the subject, which may include a critical review of existing literature or other scholarly outputs.**	• **the ability to apply research to professional situations, both practical and theoretical** • **the ability to use a range of techniques and research methods applicable to their professional activities.**
ii) generic attributes (including skills relevant to an employment-setting)	ii) generic attributes (including skills relevant to an employment-setting)
A range of generic abilities and skills that include the ability to:	A range of generic abilities and skills that include the ability to:
• use initiative and take responsibility	• use initiative and take responsibility
• solve problems in creative and innovative ways	• solve problems in creative and innovative ways
• make decisions in challenging situations	• make decisions in challenging situations
• continue to learn independently and to develop professionally	• continue to learn independently and to develop professionally
• communicate effectively, with colleagues and a wider audience, in a variety of media.	• communicate effectively, with colleagues and a wider audience, in a variety of media.

Table 3: the characteristics of graduates for the two types of non-research Master's

Credit level descriptors are essentially aids to course development while qualification descriptors, such as those in the FHEQ and Dublin descriptors, are aids to the quality assurance of terminal qualifications (SEEC, 2003: 5). Credit level descriptors define 'the level of complexity, relative demand and autonomy expected of a learner on completion of a unit or programme of learning' and provide a description of levels of learning through a hierarchy of knowledge and skills (SEEC, 2003: 2). Credit level descriptors are not meant to be prescriptive or limiting, or to devalue aspects which are not strongly reflected but which might be relevant to particular subjects or contexts. Rather, they identify a set of skills and attributes which act as a guide for academics and others seeking to define or recognise learning and ascribe it to a particular academic level thus helping in establishing common standards. SEEC identifies five principal uses of level descriptors: (a) curriculum design, (b) to guide the assignment of credit, (c) to provide guidelines for validation and approval panels, (d) to provide guidelines for the recognition of the level of learning from experience in non-formal settings, and (e) for the purposes of staff development (SEEC, 2003: 3).

The SEEC descriptors range from first year undergraduate through to doctoral level and are currently undergoing revision to reflect changes in the use of credit since they were last reviewed and revised in 2001. Two aspects are particularly important in establishing the level and in interpreting the descriptors. Firstly the *context* in which learning takes place and the related *autonomy* expected (Master's level students are expected to be working semi-autonomously in complex, often unpredictable and specialised settings), and secondly the *Knowledge and understanding* which provide the basis for the development of many of the other skills and attributes (Master's level students are expected to have a deep and systematic understanding within a specialised field of study).

In defining its level descriptors for postgraduate work in 2001 (see Figure 2), the University of Luton as it then was, drew on the SEEC work and included particular descriptors, drawn from the NCVQ key skills at level 7, defining the ability to plan, manage and review performance at this level since such skills are an essential requirement of undertaking the Master's Dissertation. These descriptors were benchmarked against external expectations, as they then were, and provide a guide to staff in articulating the outcomes of postgraduate study.

With these descriptors in mind, we now turn our attention to considering the extent to which the University of Bedfordshire's institutional framework (CRe8), which has been more recently developed, is applicable at postgraduate level. In doing so, we consider the factors that now need to be considered as the University considers revising its M level descriptors against the changed external environment as defined by the revised FHEQ (QAA, 2008) and SEEC descriptors (2010).

Curriculum development at the University of Bedfordshire

The University of Luton combined with the Bedford campus of De Montfort University in 2006 to form the new University of Bedfordshire. Alongside a new set of regulations, a new institutional framework was implemented in September 2008; it became known as the Curriculum Review for 2008 – or CRe8 for short. CRe8 establishes the education principles and priorities for the University (Atlay et al, 2008, Atlay 2010). All course teams – undergraduate and postgraduate – throughout the University over the past two years have reviewed their curriculum design and teaching practices to align with the expectations of CRe8. The CETL's final report acknowledges that whilst the CRe8 agenda does apply to all students 'its prime focus was undergraduates' (Bridges CETL, 2010: 9). This focus is unsurprising for several reasons. Serving the needs of undergraduates is central to the University's mission, retention of undergraduates feeds directly into league tables and affects university funding, impacting across the University. Postgraduate students, by contrast, make up less than 20% of the student population, are largely located in specific subject areas, are externally funded, and are meant to be independent learners and thus, in a better position to 'look after themselves'. Through its Education Strategy, the University acknowledged this, and stated its intention to review its taught postgraduate structures and support mechanisms during 2010 and 2011 (University of Bedfordshire, 2008) to

ensure that its curriculum and how it is delivered meets the needs of its postgraduate students.

In order to inform this review, CRe8 has been re-visited to consider its applicability at postgraduate level and in the next section we present some preliminary observations. We are also in the process of a dialogue with staff who teach at postgraduate level to elicit the challenges they face and determine the extent to which CRe8 and the level descriptors are helpful to them in their course design and in their teaching8. For review purposes we have identified two groups as characterised below and as flagged up earlier in this chapter (although we recognise that the categorisation is not as simple as this typography would indicate). Unlike the QAA's designation (QAA, 2010) we have focussed on the students rather than the type of Master's award. There are some similarities but also some differences. We are also exploring with staff what constitutes effective learning, curriculum design and delivery in both types of provision:

Type A. This provision is usually full-time and further characterised by the diversity of the students and their prior educational experiences (the majority are international students from countries often with a more didactic approach to education). The challenges presented include learner dependency, academic writing, cultural differences and large cohort sizes. Teaching is likely to emphasise more formal and traditional methodologies including lectures and seminars. e-Learning supports students with language and communication issues. Assessments are characterised by an element of standardisation to enable broad comparability and to cater for the large student numbers and the associated workload.

Type B. This provision is likely to be predominantly part-time. Often students have clear career goals and current or recent, often relevant, professional experience. Teaching and learning methods are likely to emphasise flexible modes of delivery with significant elements of small-group working. e-Learning supports flexible delivery. Assessment is likely to be characterised by differentiation to enable the demonstration of theoretical understanding and its practical and professional application to meet the needs of individual students and/or employers.

In the next section we explore the extent to which CRe8 and associated structures meet the needs of these two types of provision.

CRe8's applicability at postgraduate level

The University's vision for a graduate of the University of Bedfordshire does not distinguish between *under*graduate and *post*graduate: 'Graduate is used here as a generic

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[8] We also intend to: review University Course Information Forms (CIFS) and Unit Information Forms (UIFS); examine institutional summary external examiner and approval event reports to identify strengths and weaknesses; review course journals for good practice and issues being identified on M level courses; and review course handbooks to see if and how course teams explain M levelness and incorporate any transitional preparation.

term to encompass students who complete any University of Bedfordshire award' (University of Bedfordshire, 2008: 3):

> A University of Bedfordshire graduate is knowledgeable, critical and creative; understands who they are and what they want to achieve; can communicate effectively, evidence attainments and function in context, and has the skills, self-confidence and self-regulatory abilities to manage their own development. Such a graduate is eminently employable, capable of working with and learning from others, of adding significantly to their local community and prepared for life in an ever-changing environment (University of Bedfordshire, 2008: 3).

So the first issue that will require consideration is whether this vision can be used to characterise *all* University of Bedfordshire graduates or whether we need to reformulate it to provide greater differentiation and more clearly reflect Master's outcomes as defined by the FHEQ and by the University's aspirations for its postgraduates. The University is considering developing a Graduate Impact Strategy and this might consider the need for greater differentiation between graduates and postgraduates.

Supporting documentation on the CRe8 framework and its development very rarely explicitly distinguishes between an undergraduate and a postgraduate curriculum; rather, it refers to the University curriculum or the curriculum. Thus, CRe8 (See Figure 3) was designed to be applicable at all levels and has three inter-related aims:

- to provide a curriculum which excites, motivates and engages;
- to develop students as independent self-regulatory learners;
- to prepare students for life beyond the University.

These are sufficiently general to be appropriate to both undergraduate and postgraduate learning.

As part of our preliminary exploration, the briefing papers for all five strands[9] and the specific dimensions within each strand were examined, with several questions in mind, but primarily: how applicable was each strand and inherent dimensions to what we would consider an M level taught curriculum? On the whole, we found fairly clear applicability across the strands of the framework with only a few areas to be further explored.

Personalised learning

The *personalised learning* strand has relevance to postgraduate provision and students should be in a better position to take responsibility for their own development.

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[9] See CRe8 wiki – http://www.beds.ac.uk/cre8wiki

However, a real challenge, and an increasing reality for many tutors particularly on type A courses, is that many students arriving for postgraduate study are lacking what might be expected at the end of an honours degree in terms of autonomy and responsibility for their own learning, and are apparently not particularly motivated to take such responsibility. This is not saying that all are in this position, indeed there are many postgraduate students who are highly motivated and autonomous learners, or that students cannot learn to develop such attributes. However, such development does take planning and time, scarce commodities, if the requirements of the FHEQ are to be demonstrated:

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:

    a) the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility
    b) decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations
    c) the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.

'*Valuing and acknowledging the diversity of students' experience*' is a key element for Type B provision where students' experience can provide a rich learning resource for all. However, it is more difficult for Type A where students may predominantly come from one country with a common learning experience and with limited relevant experience. Here tutors, through their scholarship, research and, where appropriate, professional experience, need to provide the richness of experience essential to the curriculum. The University's Research Informed Teaching activities, described in other Section 3 of this book, provide a basis for this.

Curriculum

The structure of the curriculum might vary for Type A and Type B provision. Type A favouring large units (in credit terms) enabling the development of knowledge, skills and understanding in an integrated manner over an extended period for a discrete cohort. Type B, on the other hand, might be characterised by more flexible provision both in terms of delivery and in terms of curriculum design. Cohorts may be difficult to identify as students dip in and out of study as they develop their theoretical understanding alongside their continuing professional development needs. Unit sizes

may reflect this although mechanisms will need to be put in place to ensure the overall coherence and 'mastery' of the programmes. Learning may be at the same time more focussed (on needs) and more fragmentary (in terms of time and location) – Just-in-time education.

The *Curriculum* strand in CRe8 includes *'Understanding students: where they are in their development and where they need to get to'*. In Chapter 12, Leggetter and Sapsed identify the importance of understanding postgraduate students thoroughly and not drawing premature conclusions without interrogating the data on student attainment more closely. Stereotyping needs to be avoided. However, they do note the poorly developed research and evaluation skills of many of their Master's students. An *open and transparent curriculum* is aided by the appropriate use of level descriptors and we might add this to the list of potential uses of credit descriptors as noted by SEEC earlier. They provide the basis for interaction with students around expectations and outcomes – but just presenting the descriptor is not sufficient. Active engagement for understanding is required.

The CRe8 framework states that this strand involves: '*Supporting key transition points such as the start of the each academic year and ensuring that early experiences set the tone for future activities*'. Many of the issues beginning to emerge in our consideration of the applicability of CRe8 at postgraduate level, support this and the growing recognition across the sector that the transition between undergraduate and postgraduate study is often neglected and assumptions are made at the state of readiness of students for postgraduate study (Alexander, 2009).

For many international students, part of the issue around transition is not only of responding to a learner-centred pedagogy rather than a didactic one, but also of developing the requisite academic writing skills to match growing needs. The Dublin descriptors expect that Master's students:

- can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously

English language competence is an important issue both for engaging with complex ideas and for communicating them but responding to this issue is no simple matter. Some students, when immersed in an English-speaking culture, respond to the increased language skills required whilst others fail to make the necessary transition. Our initial analysis (Atlay, 2009 internal document) suggests that there is no simple correlation between IELTS[10] scores, for example, and student attainment so just increasing IELTS expectations is not the answer although more work is required to explore this non-correlation further.

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[10] IELTS is the International English Language Testing System and provides a benchmark for English language skills.

For Type B courses transitions are important because often such students have been away from education for some time and may require their skills (and confidence) to be refreshed.

How practically can such a key transition point be supported given the diversity of both students and postgraduate courses? Similar questions are posed in Helen Corkill's Chapter 16 where the focus is much more on the transition from foundation to undergraduate degree, and where the notion of creating a transitions pedagogy is explored.

The University's Postgraduate review needs to explore this issue further along with the problems in effectively designing and delivering '*a scaffolded curriculum which provides students with more early support followed by structured opportunities requiring more independent responsibility and which focuses on higher order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation*'. We can see how it works in a three-year undergraduate course, and to a lesser extent a two-year part-time Master's course, but what does a scaffolded curriculum mean for one-year postgraduate students?

The FHEQ expects Master's' level students to demonstrate:

- originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline

For full time Master's students, how do we build scaffolding into their course so that they emerge at the end of their course at the requisite M level? Some international students expect their tutors to provide appropriate knowledge in an amount which, through regurgitation and the application of 'hard work' over many hours, will result in high grades. With such students, how do we develop independence of analysis, synthesis and evaluation that we expect and value? The answer has to be, at least in part, in the way in which we structure the transitional period to be shorter and more focussed (postgraduate students should be able to cope with this) and in establishing Master's level actions and attitudes from the outset. It is here that the level descriptors can be of use in defining appropriate outcomes and in explaining to students precisely what is expected of them. To achieve an effective transition we need to work with students to develop a shared understanding of expectations and precisely what is meant by the terminology.

Realistic learning

Realistic learning is appropriate for both Type A and Type B postgraduates but it is clearly more challenging for tutors to adopt an 'active' approach when confronted by large student numbers. Active learning involves student autonomy. Thus, how can we do more to help our Master's level students to be 'demonstrating self-direction and

originality in tackling and solving problems, and acting autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level' (as expected by the FHEQ)?. Part of the answer lies in setting clear expectations and the level descriptors can help here if they are effectively communicated to students.

Teaching environments (physical and virtual) have a role here and one we need to explore further. Andrea Raiker in Chapter 3 considers the reflective dimension in more detail. She argues that understanding and defining the relationship between knowledge and understanding on the one hand, and the academic skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation on the other, "holds the key to determining the levels of final year undergraduate and Master's work."

Employability

> Employers expect postgraduates to have a range of skills that go beyond the discipline which they have studied. These include business awareness, languages, numeracy and quantitative methods skills. *Higher Ambitions* asks HEIs to demonstrate what they are doing to boost the employability of their students and this should include postgraduates. HEIs need to be more pro-active in providing postgraduates with the opportunity to develop the core competencies they need to succeed in a competitive job market. (Smith report, 2010: 6)

The employability strand of CRe8 applies to both types of student although for Type B the issue of *developing a career orientation* is not as prominent since such students have typically chosen additional study to further their careers. For Type A provision it is more problematic because the course needs to prepare them for employment within the context of their home country.

The CIHE report (2010) notes some concerns about postgraduate students' employability skills:

> Postgraduates often lack work-wisdom, which is a loose collection of requirements based around commercial nous, understanding of the market, willingness to put aside personal interests to focus on what the business needs, team-working and maturity. On the whole, deficiencies in the behavioural skills such as employability and cultural fit, which businesses seek from all graduates nowadays, are more of a concern than deficiencies in technical skills. (p.13)

Whilst many of the challenges and outlined above have applied more to the course design and delivery of full time Master's students and their learning, one area emerging from our discussions that does not seem to feature within the current strands of CRe8 is that concerning the development of management and leadership skills. This is particularly, but not solely, true for students on Type B courses. Improving access to management and leadership posts is an expectation for many part time Master's qualifications (Leitch, 2006) and this is a core element of employability for many

postgraduates – they are expected to be able to demonstrate leadership – yet it does not feature within the employability strand of CRe8.

Significantly this strand contributes towards the attainment of the Dublin descriptors in terms of social and ethical responsibilities (an aspect which is not explicit within the FHEQ):

- have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements

Assessment

Much of the Assessment strand is appropriate to all students. CRe8's expectation is that '*students develop self-regulatory behaviours through self-assessing and peer-assessing against criteria and are supported and encouraged to use feedback to develop their skills and improve performance*'. Whilst arguable this may be difficult to attain at the end of three or four years of undergraduate study, if students do not arrive for postgraduate study having developed such behaviours, how do we get the full time Master's students up-to-speed in as short a time as possible? Transitions and clear expectations are important here as noted earlier.

In an ideal world, less applicable within CRe8's Assessment strand should be the need at postgraduate level for a '*detailed assessment brief which clearly articulates the task, the expectations and the relationship to past and future activities within or beyond the University*'. Should we be expecting postgraduate students to be requiring the same amount of detail in a brief that undergraduate students would be expecting? Should postgraduate students not be making the connections and understanding requirements to a much greater extent? Or is it the case that detailed briefs are still required but it is through the complexity of the terminology, context and outcomes that postgraduate outcomes are demonstrated?

Conclusions and implications

Our analysis so far suggests that, with some fine-tuning, the CRe8 framework in conjunction with the considered use of the level descriptors can provide an appropriate framework for the definition of postgraduate standards and for ensuring the quality of the learning experience for our students. Reviewing and revising the University's Master's level descriptors against recent sectoral developments including the FHEQ and revised SEEC descriptors would provide a helpful starting point. However, further work is required in ten key areas as set out below (no priority is implied):

1. Considering appropriate curriculum structures for postgraduate provision (Types A and B).

2. Identifying the *impact* expected from students graduating from postgraduate courses (Types A and B).

3. Developing our structures and processes to support effective transition into postgraduate study (Types A and B).

4. Integrating academic communication skills into the curriculum (Type A predominantly).

5. The development of leadership skills and characteristics (Type B predominantly).

6. Considering the provision of career development skills for postgraduate students (Types A and B).

7. The articulation of assessment activities and assignment briefs appropriate to postgraduate outcomes (Types A and B).

8. Articulate expectations with respect to the relationship between scholarship and the postgraduate curriculum (Types A and B).

9. Clarification of the role of technology in supporting postgraduate learning (Types A and B)

10. Consider how the delivery of the postgraduate curriculum might be differentiated in terms of physical and virtual space (Types A and B).

If we aspire to excellence in teaching and learning then we will need to address these issues and importantly, provide the necessary staff development to support postgraduate curriculum design, teaching, assessment and learning. In trying to unpack key components pertinent to the Master's challenge, the chapter has also demonstrated complexity and the absence of simple solutions. Consequently we will need concerted action by all areas of the University to respond to the challenges, but we have a sound basis on which to build.

University of Bedfordshire Descriptors: Level M

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT	General	Responsibility	Ethical Understanding
At level M the Learner:	Should be working within complex, unpredictable and normally specialised fields demanding innovative work which involves exploring the current limits of knowledge.	Should be largely autonomous in planning and managing the learning process and in reviewing and meeting her/his own learning needs.	Should be aware of personal responsibility and professional codes of conduct where appropriate, and is able to formulate solutions to ethical issues as they impact on professional practice or research through dialogue with peers, clients, mentors and others.

COGNITIVE DESCRIPTORS	Knowledge & Understanding	Analysis	Synthesis/Creativity	Evaluation
By the end of Level M the Learner:	Should be able to demonstrate a depth of knowledge and a systematic understanding of his/her discipline(s), across specialist and applied areas, and be critically aware of and deal with complexity, gaps and contradictions in the current knowledge base with confidence.	Should be able to autonomously analyse new and/or abstract data and situations using a wide range of techniques appropriate to the discipline(s) and to his/her own research or advanced scholarship.	Should be able to autonomously synthesise information and ideas and propose new hypotheses, create original responses to problems that expand or redefine existing knowledge or develop new approaches to changing situations.	Should be able to independently evaluate current research, advanced scholarship and associated methodologies and appropriately justify the work of self and others.

GENERIC SKILLS	Needs Analysis	Performance Planning	Performance Management	Presentation & Evaluation
By the end of Level M the Learner:	Should be able to explore the demands of a task and formulate viable proposals for meeting these demands. In particular: ➢ establish the critical features of the task and clearly identify the outcomes required; ➢ select and effectively use a range of strategies and resources to explore problems, research different options and formulate viable proposals for managing the task and resolving problems; and ➢ assess accurately their own skill-development needs for meeting the demands of the task.	Should be able to plan the task, and meet their own skill-development needs, and gain the necessary commitment from others. In particular: ➢ gain commitment to proposals from relevant people and establish the expertise, resources, schedule and monitoring procedures needed to get results; ➢ plan how to meet their own skill-development needs, by setting realistic targets and negotiating effective ways of meeting these; and ➢ ensure that others are clear about their roles and responsibilities, and confirm working arrangements for achieving the quality of outcomes required.	Should be able to manage the task, adapting their strategy as necessary to achieve the quality of outcomes required. In particular: ➢ take a lead role in making things happen, sustaining motivation and effective working relationships, to meet their responsibilities; ➢ monitor progress, interpreting and evaluating information from a variety of sources, and critically reflect on and review their performance; and ➢ adapt their strategy, as necessary, to resolve problems, meet new demands and produce the quality of outcomes required.	Should be able to present the outcomes of the task in a manner appropriate to the intended audience(s) and evaluate their overall performance. In particular: ➢ synthesise information from relevant sources and select effective ways of structuring this information to suit their purpose, including use of images to clearly illustrate complex points; ➢ show assured, accurate and fluent use of language in presenting information, sustaining the interest of others and responding perceptively to their contributions; and ➢ evaluate their overall approach to the task and the effectiveness of their application of skills, establishing ways of enhancing their skills in the future.

Figure 2: University of Bedfordshire Descriptors

University of Bedfordshire

CRe8 – Stimulating Learning

Personalised learning	Curriculum	Realistic learning	Employability	Assessment
Personalised learning involves:	*Effective curriculum design and delivery involves:*	*The learning experience involves activities that are:*	*A curriculum which supports employability involves:*	*Effective assessment for learning involves:*
Students understanding themselves – who they are and who they want to be as exemplified by the SOAR approach.	**Understanding** where **students** are in their development and what they need to achieve.	**Meaningful** – students see personal, social, professional, intellectual and practical relevance in the curriculum.	Systematic **subject knowledge and understanding** underpinned by research, and designed to enhance creative, evaluative, analytical and critical skills.	Students developing **self-regulatory behaviours** through self-assessing and peer-assessing against criteria and being supported and encouraged to use feedback to develop their skills and improve performance, as in the SOAR approach.
Students improving their effectiveness as learners through exploring their learning approaches and increasing their self-efficacy.	An **open and transparent curriculum** with clearly aligned goals, learning outcomes and assessments.	**Active** – students are actively engaged in the learning process.	**Vocational relevance and applicability** that bridges the transition into employment and develops inter-personal and practical problem-solving skills.	**Assessment strategies** which focus on developing students' attributes and skills, as well as testing knowledge and understanding.
Accommodating students' **personal learning styles** and preferences by multiple teaching and assessment methods.	Supporting **key transition points** such as the start of each academic year and ensuring that early experiences set the tone for future activities.	**Challenging** – activities challenge students' existing constructs, knowledge and assumptions and offer opportunities for creative and enjoyable learning.	**Developing a career orientation** involving ambitious and realistic career aspirations and the career management skills to attain them as illustrated by the SOAR process.	Students having **detailed assessment briefs** which clearly articulate the task, the expectations and the relationship to past and future activities within or beyond the University.
Valuing and acknowledging the **diversity of students' experiences** and drawing on these in learning and teaching approaches and activities.	A **scaffolded curriculum** where students receive early support followed by structured opportunities requiring more independent responsibility and focussing on higher-order thinking and research skills such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation.	**Reflective** – students have structured opportunities for reflection within a process of development that allows students to internalise their experiences and make connections across boundaries, as in the SOAR approach.	**Personal skills, attributes and independence** providing the life-long learning skills required to sustain continuing development.	Students having **focussed, constructive and timely feedback** to support learning, build confidence and self-esteem, and encourage positive motivational beliefs.
Helping students to **make sense of their learning** in terms of the actions, behaviours and end-goals that are expected of them.	A focus on **learning as a process** as exemplified by the SOAR approach which makes explicit links between activities, units and levels.	**Collaborative** – students learn with and through peers, tutors and others creating and sustaining a learning community.	**Contextualisation** through relevant awareness of environmental, social and political issues associated with their subject.	Students and tutors **using the outcomes of assessment** to help shape future learning.
Students identifying their strengths (actual and potential) and understanding how these can develop and transfer to their chosen futures.	The considered **use of technology** to support learning and enhance skills development.		A **sound value-base** where students are expected to display the values and ethical expectations of their subject and function in context.	

For further details see **www.beds.ac.uk/learning/curriculum/structure/cre8**

Figure 3: CRe8 Summary showing the five strands

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Chapter 18

Supporting action research as a CPD process

Arti Kumar

Abstract

For the past two years I have been involved with action research at several levels (as a leader and participant on national, institutional, collaborative and individual projects). To fulfil my various responsibilities I convened the Action Research Consortium (ARC) at the University of Bedfordshire in June 2008 and have managed its functionality since then. Evaluating the effects of this action provided a research topic and the context for my own personal and professional development, which I present in this chapter as a reflective analysis. I focus on the main lessons learned and applied at a management level, through analysing the type of change ARC participants reported and I have discussed and observed. My insights and recommendations are broadly informed by theories related to action research, appreciative inquiry and positive psychological approaches.

I deduce and argue here that action research can generate evidence-based practice and continuous improvements in learning, teaching and assessment – but achieving this ideal for all staff crucially depends on cycles of action research operating in a productive dynamic with their personal and professional development (and this could extend to students). This will not happen by chance, and has not happened as extensively as expected, even though the opportunities offered through the ARC were motivating and beneficial for staff who engaged. As things stand, the value and potential impact of action research is not generally reflected in the experience of practitioner-researchers or the vision of universities. Positive conditions must be created to support research-active programmes and communities, underpinned by congruent protocols and values. The recommendations I make here can help to promote and sustain an integral research culture and are therefore relevant to managers as well as practitioners who are doing or thinking of embarking on action research.

Keywords

Introduction

If you are a reflective practitioner (Schön, 1991) you will no doubt be hooked into cycles of plan-do-review, and you may already be involved in a process of pedagogic action research without calling it by that name, or indeed realising its full potential for personal and professional development. Comments made by experienced practitioner-researchers during interviews conducted to explore their perspectives, as part of my research project, are illuminating in this respect:

> "We're doing it all the time really."

> "…there were things we would have done anyway, but not as a project."

> I see more benefit now than I did a few years ago. I know that we designed and introduced personal tutor groups from action research, even though we didn't call it that. But it is from action research that we introduced personal tutor groups because that's what the students wanted.

Such perspectives reflect my own past experience, when I evaluated and re-designed modules year after year, comparing students' feedback with theories, consulting with my team and external examiners – even writing a student text and eventually a book (Kumar, 2007), but not thinking that these cycles counted as action research. Three implications arise: (1) Many academics – especially traditional positivist researchers – would argue that cycles of plan-do-review should not count as research, however defined and whatever results they produce. (2) Clearly, however, even small-scale activity of this type can make a big difference. In some cases it has brought benefits to individual academic practice, in others it has influenced or changed whole-institution policy and practice. (3) Needed change is easier to implement when it builds on existing small-scale activity and taps into the real interests and values of practitioners rather than when it is imposed as large-scale, fundamental shifts in policy. With action research the possibilities are powerful because practitioners themselves put their research outcomes into practice.

Recognising the power and impact of a managed action research process is not usually reflected in the experience of practitioners or in the vision of HE institutions. Firstly, since perception is nine-tenths of reality (anon), staff in management positions need to value, attribute and reward what practitioners perceive they already do and develop. However this should go further: action research that is defined, supported and conducted as systematic, reflective (and preferably collaborative) enquiry made public has greater potential for turning the small-scale cycle of plan-do-review into an upward spiral of plan, design, propose a project plan, gain consent and ethics approval, collect data, reflect/evaluate/analyse, record/write/publish, disseminate, share, cascade. Literature searches and theoretical concepts add a robust dimension at any stage of the process. The power of action research lies in its generative capacity: to transform rather than simply inform; to accept the complexity of naturalistic settings rather than create controlled environments; and to seek understandings that will improve aspects of practice.

There is now an increasing body of literature on how to conduct action research, its influence on teaching, learning and assessment, etc. There seems to be far less research on the management frameworks which initiate and support those practitioners engaged in action research (Beard, 2009). Over the past two years the potential of a robust, structured and supported action research process has dawned on me through many muddled attempts to shape directions and destinations for and with ARC members. Through this experience I deduce and argue here that action research can create a different culture of continuous development – both for staff and (by extension) for students and institutions. However, for this type of potential to be realised, HE institutions need to develop a management framework underpinned by congruent protocols and values. It therefore seems worthwhile to write from a management perspective here; this will be relevant to managers as well as practitioners who are doing or thinking of embarking on action research.

What I set out to do

The action in my action research

The action in my action research came about partly as a result of my involvement in the collaborative NTFS National Action Research Network (NARN[11]) project at several levels, as a leader of its Midlands regional group and also as a participant researcher. (The NARN is researching and evaluating PDP and e-portfolio practice at 17 UK HEIs) I attempted to apply and cascade lessons learned from the NARN back at the University of Bedfordshire, where they gained synergy to some extent by seeding into the fruitful ground offered by the Bridges-CETL. The main aim of the CETL is to integrate PDP and employability into a revised institutional curriculum (CRe8) – a new delivery model which is essentially in need of evaluation to establish its effectiveness.

To fulfil my responsibilities both in respect of the NARN and as the CETL Associate Director, and in line with my personal interests, I convened the Action Research Consortium (ARC) in June 2008 at our university, and have facilitated its functionality since then. Investigating the effects of this action has been the subject of my research and the basis for my recommendations in this chapter. Again, as a requirement of the NARN and the CETL, I initially designed PDP-related research in 2008 and formulated my research questions accordingly: *Do ARC participants make changes to their (e)-PDP pedagogical approaches and interventions for students as a result of the action research process?* (And does this impact on students' perceptions of their skills-development was a further question I intended to tackle as a second cycle.) My earlier work in the field of personal and career development of students led me to hope we would identify collaboratively some key features of good practice in PDP and employability, and cascade the benefits to all students.

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[11] http://www.recordingachievement.org/research/narn-tree.html accessed 27 March 2010

I therefore convened the ARC in June 2008 by open invitation and promotion to all staff University-wide, offering opportunities for them to:

- undertake their own personal and professional development in a peer-supported community of practice
- explore and share with colleagues, evaluate and enhance ideas, practices and resources in (e)-PDP-related interventions at regular group meetings
- improve the learning experience of students
- understand action research and enhance research capacity, through learning by doing and reflecting, with support at all stages
- turn existing research ideas into project proposals and actionable plans
- claim expenses for project activities and training events
- disseminate research findings and get published
- obtain an honorarium: £500 for a case study of publishable quality.

My action: convening the Action Research Consortium (ARC) as a peer-supported community of practitioner-researchers

Convened by open invitation to academic and professional support staff across the University of Bedfordshire.

- Building capacity and capability in undertaking action research
- Evaluating, evidencing and improving practice to enable learning, development and employability
- Sharing ideas and issues
- Acting as constructive critical friends
- Providing research assistance
- Providing opportunities to disseminate and publish
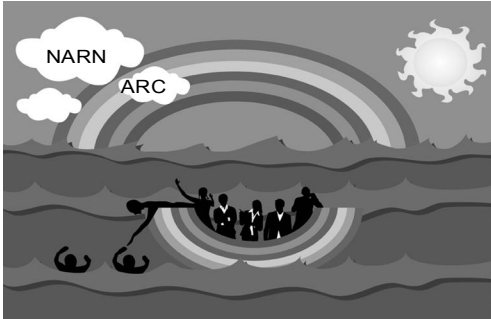
Respect and equity are key values

NARN
ARC

Figure 1: Underpinning values and explicit expectations for the ARC

Aspirations and values behind this research question

Appreciative Inquiry and a SOAR analysis

If we wish to improve our personal and organisational efficacy, I believe we need to create and manage programmes and communities of learning designed for good and lasting effect. In doing so we need to ask questions in such a way as to 'appreciate' (increase in value) our assets, much as a house or business appreciates in value. In my case I brought to the ARC much prior experience and interest in developing the wider attributes of students, using Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider, 2005) combined with self-assessment as an effective approach on career development and PDP modules when these existed in our curriculum between 1996 and 2007. There was considerable evidence from evaluations at the time that such positive psychology approaches enhanced student confidence and motivation. This gave me the impetus to develop the SOARing to Success framework and write about the conditions which can turn self-awareness into personal development plans and actions (Kumar, 2007, 2009a, 2009b see also page 82 this volume).

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) can fortify the "want-to" and "can-do" in the individual and the group to make a positive difference. A critical appreciation of the dynamic relationships between Self, Opportunities, Aspirations and Results could be applied to the ARC as well, in the sense that action research engages Self with Opportunities such as those offered by the ARC, to tap into the Aspirations of staff (aligned with those of the HEI), producing Results in relation to self-selected aims. Ethically also it was important in my ARC project to set at rest any concerns staff may have about discovering deficits and diagnosing problems. Appreciative Inquiry helps in this respect by replacing the usual SWOT analysis that often gets bogged down in negative considerations of weaknesses and threats with a SOAR analysis that seeks to discover and amplify what works well. With this approach one can also use what does not work simply as raw material for learning and future success.

Connecting Self with Opportunity and Aspirations

AI aligns with other values and beliefs implicit in my research:

- that most people are interested in and capable of self-actualisation, given the right type of encouragement and supportive environment (Maslow, 1970);
- that subjecting CRe8 curricula to action research would be desirable and justifiable as one way of realising the potential of (e)-PDP for students, as staff would try out approaches such as SOARing to Success (Kumar, 2007) and progressively adapt and refine them relative to their subject disciplines;

- that synergy would be generated through collaboration between peers.

The subjective nature of action research is inescapable as practitioners bring a set of personal values and expectations into the process at every stage. A key requirement for action research to be as ethical as possible is for practitioner-researchers to recognise and declare the reasons and values which prompt their research aims. Accordingly all ARC members were required to define the key terms and objectives of their projects, and were given opportunities in ARC meetings to refine these with peers acting as critical friends. Templates were designed to encourage reflection and ethical considerations so that participants would declare the values, interests and experience that lay behind their research ideas, identify practical opportunities and data collection methods they could use to answer their research questions, and clarify what results they aspired to achieve.

The open invitation to staff across the University was in this way based on a variety of positive psychology approaches associated with personal agency, goal setting, communities of learning (Senge & Scharmer, 2001), etc. The results I aspired to achieve were aligned with institutional aims – an expectation expressed in our University's Education Strategy (Atlay, 2008) that all staff will engage in evidence-based and research-informed teaching practice. The ARC was initially envisaged as a forum for creating shared understanding around (e)-PDP concepts and practices, through membership of a peer-supported, newly-formed community that would evaluate PDP innovations within their subject curricula.

The following guidelines were issued:

- Projects should be designed to investigate specific aspects of PDP and its implementation in undergraduate programmes, e.g. as embedded in units.
- The revised curriculum CRe8 provides a context of changes in the content and modes of implementation of new curricula and offers opportunities to investigate the effects of such changes – however, the focus should be on PDP.
- Action research as an approach should be used in a flexible way to investigate the processes and outcomes of interventions.
- We favour collaboration across areas on a particular topic: project teams can include other practitioners in academic and/or learning support areas, and students as partners in learning and research.
- Projects can generate and evaluate resources to support (e)-PDP processes.

Results - what actually happened

What worked well

The ARC offer generated 24 initial applications and considerable interest, sustained at first (but not later, as explained below) by values such as respect for everyone's professionalism despite diversity in the abilities, experience and disciplinary or practice backgrounds of ARC members. ARC projects have demonstrated equity and collaboration between academic staff and novice practitioner-researchers from the Centre for Personal and Career Development and the Learning Resources Centre. The core of 12 staff who persevered despite obstacles have reported considerable benefits at focus group and individual interviews. These include a renewed belief in and enthusiasm for action research, submitting articles to journals not considered before, disseminating at home and abroad, learning by doing and discussing with others – thereby enhancing research capability.

PDP is defined as "a structured and supported process…" (QAA, 2001, 2008), and the ARC set up both structure and support within a developmental set of opportunities designed to engage staff collectively and individually (Altrichter et al, 1993). Structure was provided through a shared work plan with a timeframe and collective goals, a series of organised semi-formal ARC seminars, a dedicated VLE repository for resources and informal peer support . Two part-time research assistants were appointed to help ARC participants with their individual proposals and plans, and especially with data collection and analysis.

The PDP principle of having a structured and supported process has been appreciated by ARC members – i.e. the structure provided by having timelines and seminar meetings within an overall workplan, although opinion has been divided on whether time spent in meetings could be better spent on actually doing the research. Support from the research assistants has been greatly valued – but not necessarily seen (or mentioned) as time-saving although this assistance was provided with the intention of saving time for busy staff.

An implicit value in the ARC is that be(com)ing a reflective practitioner within a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) can enhance one's personal and professional development. My data collection methods were designed to provide opportunities for participants to reflect and plan. Open questions on templates encouraged reflective narratives to capture interim progress, to record individual learning journeys at various stages and prompt further action. Staff could later select material from this record to use in dissemination and publication. This valuing of reflection in and on action resulted in one positive outcome: the inclusion of action research activity and assignments within the re-designed Postgraduate Certificate of Academic Practice (PgCAP) at our University. All PgCAP students were automatically enrolled into the second round of ARC projects. In the case of PgCAP students the reflective prompts

feed into final written assignments which require them to be analytical about their learning and development (Kramp et al, 1995).

Lessons learned from what did not work well

It is clear from evaluations that the ARC model is actually and potentially a powerful and motivating structured and supported process undertaken by individuals…(such as that envisaged and defined in the PDP agenda). Why then did it not achieve wider participation and better engagement, with more evidence of developmental outcomes? Between the first wave of enthusiasm and current project completion rates, the numbers steadily declined. As meetings progressed through the year, if engagement is judged by attendance, then both leave much to be desired. I will focus here on three factors that impacted considerably on the willingness and ability of staff to engage with ARC projects. The first is related to time and timing, the second is about the importance of congruent values and the third is about the ethics approval process.

Time and timing

Time constraints were mentioned by almost everyone in the ARC as a major reason for discontinuing projects or missing opportunities – it has been a perennial issue that the ARC could not include 36-hour wristwatches in its otherwise generous offer. My observations on time are two-fold: firstly we need a Self-MAP (Kumar, 2007), not a watch, to manage our time. The MAP (a grounded sense of one's Motivations, Abilities and Personal styles) serves the purpose of both map and compass, helping each individual to develop a sense of destination and direction, and navigate through the project's learning journey, as in the SOARing to Success approach. If we manage ourselves in this way we also get better at managing time and pressure through opportunities in learning and work.

Secondly however, the ideal of practitioners engaging in systematic inquiry made public is seriously at odds with the reality of life for staff whose activity is characterized by knee-deep marking piles and hundreds of reactive interactions with a diverse body of students in rapidly changing circumstances. They are caught up in what they must do rather than what they might also do. If we wish to create learning journeys in which PDP and CPD function as cycles of action research in a productive dynamic, then we must enable these journeys as the norm – just the way we do things around here.

Lack of time is similarly cited by many staff as a reason for not being able to take advantage of optional staff development workshops. Not only is there a manifest lack of engagement with such options, there is also plenty of research evidence to show that most traditional workshop methodologies fail to promote meaningful change in practice – e.g. Joyce and Showers (2002) show that fewer than 15% of teachers implement new ideas learned in workshops. The irony is that – for staff CPD to result in more effective performance – exactly the same conditions and approaches are

needed as for student PDP to be effective. If CPD sessions are part of a mandatory structured and supported process, their content can reinforce their relevance to professional practice, starting with end goals in mind and engaging each self with opportunities to try out and practice requisite skills according to aspirations and the results needed. Self-assessment, peer support and feedback are essential components in SOARing to Success approaches. If a PDP process is integral in this way within the curriculum for students at our university – why is PDP/CPD not integral in the normal professional life of staff?

If time is important, timing is equally so – a research design and timeline must fit with a congruent ethics approval process and exploit opportunities for collecting data, etc. This has also been an important lesson for staff that will feed into benefits for students. For example, an ARC member reported that she now appreciated how important it was to consider the time allocated for assignments, and timing of research activity she was setting for students. In fact my observations tell me that self-management, the drive for results, adaptability and using resources appropriately are key attributes in project completion – just as they are for students in coping with assignments.

The importance of congruent values

When obstacles arose some staff persevered, others found it too difficult or (unsurprisingly) prioritised what they saw as urgent and important work. The following extracts from evaluation of the Bridges-CETL indicate how contextual factors, views and values might have influenced the priorities and ability of the CETL and ARC to achieve their objectives:

> Some individual staff fully embraced Bridges' approach but getting widespread adoption of the more innovative aspects has proved more problematic. Conflicting interests and priorities get in the way. (T&L Director, Bridges CETL Final Report to HEFCE, March 2010)

> It has been really difficult to achieve shared understanding because there is no accepted structure or culture to achieve this. In academia we encourage 'critical thinking' about everything – to the extent that shared thinking encouraged by a central body such as the CETL, agreement on concepts and practices etc. is almost impossible to achieve. It has been especially hard to achieve this in an area such as PDP which was initially so controversial (and may still be in some quarters). This is also to do with the traditional hierarchy of values in which we place disciplinary research first, then academic/pedagogic research, action research, teaching and learning – while PDP is a poor relation to all these (CETL team member, taken from facilitate evaluation, January 2009).

Despite a subtle steer towards PDP, for a variety of reasons members of the ARC chose a diverse range of projects, not always focused on PDP. Added to this a decline in numbers of staff engaging overtly with the ARC left my initial research plan bereft of research participants (despite many having signed my consent forms). My data collection methods initially depended on staff attending meetings and completing

templates. I modified my expectations to the premise that the ARC could potentially benefit its members in a variety of ways. Staff could, for example:

- explore and evaluate a chosen aspect of their practice and pedagogy from different perspectives and experiences;
- replicate a PDP process in their own CPD, as they reflect and record their personal learning journeys;
- fulfil the University's expectations in respect of evidence-based practice, and its requirements as written into the Education Strategy and the Research Strategy.

In retrospect it has proved important to allow self-selection of project topics in this way, as evidenced by PgCAP students' comments, e.g.:

> "Enjoy doing research, especially as I can choose the topic so it's directly relevant to my practice, and will lead to changes/improvements."

> "I have found the process useful in evaluating and changing my practice."

My initial research question embodied a grand and ambitious idea of what I wanted to evaluate, and contained an implicit expectation that staff would use action research methodology to introduce and simultaneously evaluate PDP; that this would not only inform but transform their practice and – by extension – transform their students! I later discovered very few studies have established connections of this sort, and complex social and psychological variables make it very difficult to validly do so. For others too, in both the NARN and ARC, a significant learning point was that we had to scale back our initial grand designs to what was practicable within our circumstances and limited timeframes. We often started by describing wobbly interventions with fuzzy boundaries, which went through several iterations before becoming practically feasible and ethically sound. Learning by acting as critical friends to each other was effective and valued by all of us – we challenged each other to clarify and focus on more precise definitions, intentions and actionable research aims, designs and plans. Peer support and belonging to groups also sustained our commitment in the face of complex and changing realities.

I gained a related insight about the value of allowing 'marinating time' in this process – periods of muddling when nothing seems to be working or moving. It took almost the first year in many projects for feasible research questions to be framed and implemented. In my case I was naively looking for a change of culture – but this takes time and sustained effort. As Kotter and Lawrence (1974) found in their research in organisations, the more successful executives typically spent more than a year seeding and sounding out ideas with key stakeholders, gradually moving staff in a direction towards consensus in favour of a desired change. The same may be true for creating a new culture integrating action research, PDP and CPD in our university, and then evaluating the benefits of this.

Through my 'marinating time' I struggled to see how I might maintain any connection with PDP. The links between PDP for students and CPD for staff are now well established (CRA Annual Seminar 2009: Whither CPD?), but perceiving the common ground between PDP, CPD and action research has been one of my 'aha' moments of realisation. In fact the processes involved in 'doing, reflecting, conceptualising, evaluating, planning and improving' are common to development in general – whether these are staff or student actions and interactions. Eventually I realised that I was actually already applying PDP processes and values to the functionality of the ARC and that it would be a worthwhile project to explore the effects of this. I modified my aspirations and my research question thus: *Can a supported action research process act as an agent of change ? What type of change? Under what conditions? What works, what doesn't, and why?*

Ethics approval

At the time of writing there is still limited hard evidence of the type of change (development/transformation) that I was initially looking for, but much has been learned about the type of support that is needed in order to bring about the desired changes. One lesson shows that the importance of aligning espoused theories with theories-in-action (Argyris & Schön,1974) is not to be underestimated. The greatest obstacles and frustrations ARC members encountered was at the stage of seeking ethics approval, when the Education Strategy's espoused theories and expectations around action research were rendered impossible to implement by the oppositional theories-in-action of the Ethics Committee. The following comments illustrate this well:

> "Ethical approval in the Education research institute is really problematic and slow. It seems impossible to do any research even though this university is striving to do more research. This should be sorted as a matter of urgency. Also, by ethical committees not communicating properly they are not following the Respect bit in the ASPIRE. It makes practitioner researchers feel like they are being ignored because they are not 'proper academics' and therefore this is disrespectful as well as damaging to the community of practice." (ARC member)

Having promoted and encouraged action research through a range of positive values and approaches in the ARC, I was concerned and frustrated about the unsympathetic and over-rigorous analysis of our project proposals, which dampened the enthusiasm of many members to engage with research. I did my best to resolve the situation and an ARC member also represented our concerns to the Ethics Committee, but the problem persisted. The committee asked ARC members to put their issues in writing – this is one of the responses elicited via email:

> "(We) suffered terribly last year with our T&L project when we had to submit to the education ethics committee at late notice. They wanted us to revise the proposal after T&L/CETL had agreed it. The form filling was for PhD type activity and the length of time it took for them to agree imposed a long delay on data collection and frankly lost my interest in the whole thing. I don't think they really understood the

purpose of these small scale research projects and I think for new researchers it would scare them off the whole process which would have a detrimental effect on developing a bigger research culture in the university."

When ARC project applications and proposals were submitted in the second round (2009-10) we were hopeful that our efforts had generated a more sympathetic ethics approval system, and indeed this was negotiated for PgCAP students. For ARC members however the situation has not been resolved:

> "I was asked for a couple of clarifications to my proposal, which I gave, but I never heard back. Requesting a response through the proper project channels brought no response. So, after three months since my ethics application started, I had to abandon the project, as the action research intervention point had passed irrevocably. I'm really disappointed, as this was a flagship project for our institution, providing an excellent chance to show the importance of the student voice in planning and delivery; now it's just a lost opportunity."

Aligning aspirations to changing circumstances

As my project progressed (over the past two years) my original aims and design had to be modified still further due to changing circumstances, but that opened up new insights and led to the formulation of further questions at an institutional level:

Can support frameworks for action research model the protocols of PDP and CPD so that they stimulate a dynamic culture of evidence-based joint practice development? When undertaken collectively with peers acting as 'critical friends', can action research create communities of self-motivated practitioner-researchers who continuously effect improvements in their practice?

My findings from the ARC (limited though they are) indicate that the model itself is worthy of being sustained and enhanced – but in a different way. If we are to achieve personal engagement in CPD combined with institutional development in pedagogic practice, overcoming the barriers that were encountered by ARC members will be essential. I hope that readers will use the lessons learned section on 'what didn't work' to deal with such barriers, or preferably prevent them arising in the first place. On the other hand we can use 'what works well' in the spirit of Appreciative Inquiry. Combined with a cascading model, it can become the starting point of further cycles of action research.

The main recommendation is that managing an effective and collaborative action research process for staff is not far different from facilitating CPD or a PDP process for students. All such processes involve a number of complex social and psychological values as well as practical considerations. Conceptually, a joined-up approach between these factors can turn the simple cycle of plan-do-review into an upward spiral of plan, design, collect data, reflect/evaluate/analyse, record/write/publish, disseminate, share, cascade.

Flash forward to the future

If I were evaluating our University's achievements in 2015 I would like to be able to say that:

> "In the past five years the University's Action Research Programme, directed and supported by senior staff in T&L and HR, created an extensive research portfolio informing policy and practice across all subject areas. A university-wide programme has incrementally engaged staff by upscaling, enhancing and valuing small-scale, research-related activity so that it is now undertaken collaboratively as cycles and spirals of robust action research, creating a new culture of personal and professional development. The benefits and end-goals of action research concepts are explained in theory, but also promoted and demonstrated as normal, integral (and not optional) professional practice.

> Ethics committees meet frequently, not only to consider project proposals but to provide support and help to develop them in a way that is sympathetic to the particular conditions affecting action research. Staff are encouraged to learn by doing and reflecting, and to use peer support, coaching, feedback, individual and group guidance provided for action researchers – all in the spirit of Appreciative Inquiry. There is a recognition that the opportunities provided are differentially available and needed by individuals, and they are enabled to engage with them by identifying how their self-MAP maps onto the demands of action research. Since this process of self-mapping is also central within PDP, it is appropriately replicated for students.

> Working at several levels in a joined-up management framework, an integrated, structured and supported process of PDP, CPD and action research has created a professional community of joint practice development and a "practitioner research footprint" through dissemination, publication and cascading techniques – influencing PDP, CPD and pedagogy across the HE landscape."

About the author

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Chapter 19

Finding Flow in what you don't know… the time of the non-specialist?

Sam Elkington and Lesley Lawrence

Abstract

Non-specialist teaching is an important but as yet largely under-recognised, under-researched world. This chapter firstly focuses upon data collected in a study from one strand of a HEFCE-funded teaching and learning project. Generic problems, support issues and coping strategies associated with non-specialists teaching specialist subjects in HE were explored. This exploration of exactly what it is to be a non-specialist teacher provides important insights into the fundamental and broader complexities of non-specialist teaching in HE. A threefold categorisation of non-specialists was produced: the subject non-specialist; the teaching non-specialist; and the true non-specialist. The study has revealed that non-specialist teaching is not synonymous with new or novice teachers dealing with subject-matter for the first time, but can equally be applied to the experienced academic, though is not always prioritised in terms of supporting staff finding themselves in that position. A perceived deficit between an individual's subject-matter knowledge and teaching knowledge whatever their experience is likely to lead to concerns regarding their ability to teach a particular subject. The study has contributed to a better understanding of the limits of what can be expected from non-specialist teachers and the irrationality of the expectation that is sometimes placed upon them. It was concluded that institutional and/or departmental support strategies need to be sufficiently sensitive to the various types of non-specialist and the complexities of non-specialism in today's changing HE environment. With the very real need for 'personalised' academic support, the chapter goes on to suggest adopting or at least considering recent adaptations of Csikszentmihalyi's optimal 'Flow' framework, allow staff the opportunity to reappraise their approaches to teaching and learning and instilling the confidence and motivation to be creative within changing/new roles that would make their work more enjoyable and enable greater confidence.

Keywords

Introduction

> "Times are changing... the role of the academic is changing. No longer can you sit on your specialist subject alone, what with higher numbers of integrated courses and growing student expectation" (TS2[1]: Sport and Leisure).

Not that long ago, typically, the academic was accredited as a subject expert, taught students and was research-active (Briggs, 2005). The above roles are to be found in a generic role model Briggs developed, thus: the *Knowledge expert* (subject specialist/ acknowledged expert/ information shaper); *Teacher* (facilitator/ instructor/ assessor/ enabler/ reflector); and *Researcher* (investigator/reflector/creator/communicator) (Briggs, 2005: 264). Similarly, previously academic working lives and academic values were "centred in the discipline, whether individuals see themselves primarily as researchers, teachers, managers or a combination of more than one of these" (Henkel, 2002: 142). It is perhaps unsurprising that the discipline-specific context of teaching has been identified as a conditioning component, since academics identify most strongly with their own discipline (Neumann, 2001). This chapter explores the reality and implications of HE academics being increasingly expected to teach subjects and genres that are different from those subjects they have expertise in or are covered in their research (Berliner, 2001).

With the contemporary focus of HE falling on issues of widening participation and vocationalism, the role of universities are becoming more complex, encompassing both the transfer of subject-matter knowledge and the capability to apply skills in the context of specific fields and sectors (Briggs, 2005). In her study of the role of ideology in academics' conceptions of their discipline, Fanghanel (2009) found examples where the "discipline was not shown as the ultimate identificatory domain … it was clear that the disciplinary dimension could be 'back staged'" (p.575). Rather, for some the priorities were around vocational ideologies, broader understandings of the social world and generic skills development. At the same time, the discipline was found to be still at the forefront of academics' lives and in the teaching approaches for the majority. Pressure on traditional disciplinarity from for example, 'new kinds of student' was noted in a study (Brennan et al. 2010). It was concluded that whilst "subjects remain central to the identities and concerns of academic staff … subjects were in fact being 'messed with' to a greater or lesser extent" (p.87).

The chapter has been written during a time when academic life is becoming more complex (Clegg, 2008) and when academics have to operate effectively in a culture of what Kondakci and Van den Broeck (2009) refer to as 'continuous change'. Academics' lives are not helped by the reality of a reduction in the resource-base. Resources are scarcer than ever before, which brings its own stresses on academics

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[1] The teaching staff respondents are referred to as TS1-10 and the Head of Departments/course leaders who have timetabling allocation responsibilities as HoD or CL 1-4.

including coping with increased class sizes and pressures, e.g. Government funding per student has halved in real terms over the past fifteen years in England with academic salaries constituting a smaller proportion of institutional budgets than previously (Gibbs, 2006: 11). In terms of 'total staff costing as % of income', the University of Bedfordshire falls at the bottom of the league table for non-specialist institutions, thus with the lowest proportional staff costs (THE, 2010). Varied and increasing expectations and roles continue to be placed on academics. For example, Briggs' (2005) generic role model also contained five other core roles pointing to the increasing diffusion and complexity of the academic's role: *Team worker; Consultant; Designer/ Planner; Manager/ Administrator* (of learning process)'; and *Counsellor*. Time to cope with competing pressures is at a premium.

Academics are not only expected to operate effectively within this climate of complexity, change and diffuse expectations, but increasingly within the realm of non-specialist teaching. This trend is not just UK-specific; Huston (2009) for example, talks of college and university instructors across the US "regularly teaching beyond their skill set and beyond their comfort zone" (p. 5).

This chapter presents findings from a study of non-specialists teaching specialist subjects in HE, and critically considers the particular support issues and coping strategies associated with non-specialists, before situating these within an explanatory framework, namely that of Flow (Csikszentmihlayi, 2003) – an intrinsically rewarding and satisfying subjective state that results from the combination of high situational challenge and high perceived skill. According to Csikszentmihlayi (2003), in addition to increasing intrinsic task interest, the repeated experience of flow in a given context would have a pervasive effect on personal development. Consequently, job roles that repeatedly provide high but manageable challenges would come to have a major influence on an individual's professional development. The chapter considers how Csikszentmihalyi's Flow framework and subsequent adaptations (Elkington, 2010) can be used to unpack the world of the non-specialist teacher in HE and help to understand and place their concerns, tensions and support needs. We close by asserting that short-term support mechanisms fail to address the real issues academics face out there in the non-specialist teaching world. To do so, and as part of 'work-in-progress', it is proposed that the Flow Framework be extended beyond mere explanation and in itself can be a potential longer term solution to the non-specialist teaching dilemma. But first, we present some background on the notion of expertise and the nature of its development in the context of HE teaching.

Expertise and its development in higher education teaching

Much of the current research agenda on teaching expertise encompasses craft knowledge, practical knowledge, personal practical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge. All of these types of knowledge refer to teacher knowledge expressed in practice which is, above all, experiential and implicit (Eraut, 1998). The nature of expertise has been studied extensively and with this wealth of research has come an understanding that expertise (regardless of the specific domain) is an outcome of skill

and knowledge acquired after years of training and practice (Briggs, 2005). In summarising the key characteristics of teaching expertise, Berliner (1992: 228-245) considers accumulating knowledge as not enough; experts also have a deeper understanding than do non-experts. This research reveals a humanistic side to experts that is still to be demonstrated as clearly among non-expert or non-specialist teaching practice (Berliner, 2001), meaning, as yet, researchers still only minimally understand what it means to be a non-specialist teacher. Ferguson (1997) has commented on this limited understanding suggesting that non-speciality in teaching is conventionally contrasted with conceptions of 'specialist knowledge' – ' typically construed as knowledge of the subject matter of the discipline or profession being taught' (Ferguson, 1997: 80). In this sense, conceptions of non-specialist teachers seems to evolve around individuals who have expertise in more than one subject-area, though such a conception would appear to be a semantic deduction as opposed to being empirically derived in any way.

Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) referred to expertise when proposing a descriptive five-stage skill acquisition model outlining the developmental journey from novice to expert. They argue that the progression from novice to expert teacher is dependent on the individual's scope of perception and experience within the task-domain. Whilst not developed within the HE context, their 'novice to expert' model is one of many models documenting the teacher's journey and development to be found at all levels in education. Becoming an effective teacher is a long and complex process. Research has highlighted teaching's multi-dimensional, idiosyncratic and context-specific nature (Flores and Day, 2006), which entails an interplay between different, and sometimes conflicting, perspectives, beliefs, and practices, which are accompanied by the development of the teacher's self as they pass through certain career stages. Some of these models approach the issue from a more holistic perspective whilst others deal more specifically with the critical early years of development.

Lidstone and Hollingsworth (1992) examined the early years of in-service teaching and developed three stages of cognitive attention: 1) management-focused; 2) subject/pedagogy-focused; and 3) student learning focused (cited in Gould, 2004). Hall et al's (1977) Stages of Concern model outlines seven stages through which a teacher will pass: 1) Awareness; 2) Informational; 3) Personal; 4) Management; 5) Consequence; 6) Collaboration; and 7) Refocusing. In later work, Chung (2002) divided these seven stages into three categories, namely: Self, Task, and Impact. We return to Chung's model later when considering the respondents' experiences of teaching non-specialist subjects, arguing that some of these sorts of developmental models can equally be applied to the experience of non-specialist teaching. This is particularly pertinent with the experienced teacher who can suddenly be thrust into non-specialist teaching. Where HE models are concerned, examples include: 'focus on self to focus on student (as independent)' (Kugel 1993); 'imparting knowledge (teacher-centred/content-oriented) to conceptual change/ intellectual development (student-centred/learning-oriented)' (Kember 1997, cited in Akerlind 2003); and, 'development in terms of increasing comfort and confidence with teaching, teachers' skills, strategies and knowledge of area, and increasing student learning and development' (Akerlind, 2003, 2007)

The study: non-specialist teaching

Ten full-time HE teaching staff from the University of Bedfordshire (UoB) (n=8) and De Montfort University (n=2) with various levels of experience participated in a combination of group discussion sessions and individual interviews over a period of eight weeks in April to May 2008. Disciplines represented were: Dance; Music; Art and Design; Nursing; Education; Computing; Social Work; Sports Therapy; Sport and Leisure; and Business and Marketing. Two of the staff taught HE in FE. Four Course Leaders/Heads of Departments representing Psychology, Accounting and Finance, Creative Arts, and Sport and Leisure, all from UoB, participated in individual semi-structured interviews. All had responsibility for allocating teaching and staff timetables. The data were analysed through iterative cycles of content analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Before working collaboratively with respondents to construct a better understanding of the key defining structures of non-specialist teaching and related issues, respondents were asked to discuss their own understandings of non-specialist teaching and whether they themselves had had experience teaching subjects in which they were not specialists.

Respondents derived their definition of both the specialist and non-specialist teacher from (combinations of) the way they perceived themselves as having 'subject-matter knowledge' and 'teaching knowledge'. It was generally agreed that specialist teaching primarily required a deep and full understanding of the subject area, for example:

> "I think specialist knowledge is probably initially more important than teaching knowledge [...] because you can't effectively get students' attention if you don't know what you're talking about." (TS1: Nursing)

Respondents also identified four broader 'influencing factors' conditioning perceptions of these constructs: 1) the Discipline/field; 2) the Department; 3) the teaching-research balance; and 4) the Institutional context/setting.

All Heads and Course Leaders indicated that they preferred to rely on specialist teachers for the delivery of their courses and cited specialist subject knowledge as the principle criteria in the process of staff allocation.

> "Ideally you want to try and fit people to where they are best placed, so where they have expertise" (HoD1).

However, reality appears to paint quite a different picture. All respondents indicated that they had recently or were currently teaching a subject in which they were not a specialist and appeared to view this as a reality of the HE environment in which they were currently employed, a reality that is now explored in greater detail.

The reality of it all

An increasing tendency for staff to be expected to engage in non-specialist teaching was not only found to relate to new teachers but to experienced teachers who had been tasked with teaching as a non-specialist. This resonates with findings from Huston (2009) in a US study, namely "teaching what you don't know" … being a "common dilemma for faculty at all stages of their career" (p.7). For all our respondents, non-specialist teaching was recognised as an 'implicit expectation' of their role as a lecturer, and a consequence of broader, sector-wide changes in the role of the contemporary academic, reflecting a more subtle shift in institutional focus to issues of widening participation and vocationalism and learner-centred approaches to teaching and learning in HE.

Expectations of teaching as a non-specialist was also clearly recognised by the Heads and Course Leaders interviewed as being 'a sign of the times', reflecting a noticeable shift to more student-centred approaches to teaching and learning in HE:

> "I think today more than ever academics are expected to teach on a wider-range of subjects and this will sometimes mean teaching things you are not specialised in" (CL1: Sport and Leisure)

> "We do have general courses, and to some extent, everyone needs to muck in with something... which can mean that they will end up trying to teach something that they're not familiar with." (HoD1: Psychology)

Many respondents commented upon the complexities faced by academics in a changing environment with stretched resources. The emerging 'reality' of non-specialist teaching was also identified as a particular cause for tension even with regards to Heads' own workloads:

> "It's the reality of the current situation... In my division I tend to do a lot of stuff that other people don't want to do or don't have cover for, which can mean teaching outside my subject specialism" (HoD1: Psychology)

Captured in this comment is further evidence that non-specialist teaching is not synonymous with new or novice teachers and can be a cause for tension for more experienced HE professionals.

> "There's an expectation at the University that's not actually written down or well communicated, but there's the expectation that everyone gets stuck into all kinds of stuff" [TS4: Computing]

Unsurprisingly, the perceived need for specialist subject-matter knowledge seems to be related, in part, to the level and associated expectations of the students being taught.

"It's down to who the audience is. I would come across as a specialist to undergraduates at level one because I could talk very easily and very comfortably on that subject [...] but put me in a room with a group of post-grads and suddenly I'm out of my depth and nowhere near the level of specialism that they would require and expect, in terms of knowledge and in terms of teaching. I think the ability to teach is not just something you have, you have to acquire it, and I don't, in that respect feel qualified to teach at that level, as a non-specialist" (TS2: Sport Therapy).

By contrast, some respondents had found themselves teaching as a non-specialist at higher levels:

"Because of the realities, the cut-and-thrust of trying to run programmes without enough staff, I've ended up teaching media law. I've taught a third year core module in media law from the book with no input from others. In that case I was definitely a non-specialist. It was the stereotypical case of being one step ahead of the students." (TS7: Media Studies)

The traditional knowledge of subject matter was perceived as being the principle component of a teacher's professional knowledge base, but along with customary academic responsibilities such as designing and delivering learning material and assessing learning outcomes. Respondents acknowledged that this takes insufficient account of the complexity of teaching, and new role conceptions of the teacher as a facilitator of learning for a changing student profile.

"It comes back to expectation. The student expectation of HE is a lot higher than it was in the mid to late nineties, to the extent that there is now a need to do things differently to how we used to do it. You can no longer simply tell students, you must be student-focused and learn to be a facilitator of learning." (TS5: Business and Marketing)

These along with earlier comments reveal a genuine concern for responsible teaching inasmuch as respondents appear to have high self-respect and respect for students that they consider it markedly unprofessional to deliver a session without fully mastering the material to be taught. Relatedly, respondents referred more broadly to the importance of knowledge teachers have with respect to their own teaching practice in their ability to teach subjects in which they are not specialists. Practical teaching knowledge or 'craft knowledge' has been referred to as "the integrative knowledge which represents teachers' accumulated wisdom with respect to their teaching practice" (Van Driel et al. 1998: 674). The essence of craft knowledge, as referred to by respondents, pertained more to a 'teaching sensibility' than to knowledge of deeper propositions of a particular subject, for example:

"Subject knowledge is clearly important, but if you've also got experience of teaching methods, different ways of delivering material, or experience of group work and experience of team teaching within a subject area you've got an understanding

which could lead to better quality teaching and learning experiences." (TS5: Business and Marketing)

The ability to interpret and transform subject-matter knowledge in the context of facilitating effective student learning has been usefully called pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) (Shulman, 1986). When dealing with subject matter, teachers' actions will be determined to a large extent by their PCK, making PCK an essential component of craft knowledge and, more significantly for the current discussion, the marker for an individual's ability to teach a particular subject to the level expected. For instance, as one respondent noted:

> "How you define yourself comes down to a matter of perception. Do you see yourself as having the subject knowledge and the teaching expertise to deliver a particular session?" (TS1: Nursing)

The nature of the interplay between subject-matter knowledge and teaching knowledge emerging from the data provided a basis on which a framework differentiating between three categories of non-specialist was devised:

- The *subject* non-specialist who has teaching experience but little or no knowledge or experience of teaching the subject area.
- The *teaching* non-specialist who has subject-matter knowledge but no previous experience teaching it.
- The *'true'* non-specialist who has minimal or no subject-matter knowledge for teaching; more likely to be new or novice teachers – a non-specialist in the truest sense.

Non-specialism as developmental process

Emergent from analysis of respondents' comments was a clear developmental process which non-specialists pass through, highly similar to the various stages of teacher development models referred to earlier. For illustration purposes, we use Chung's (2002) model of teacher development.

The most intense and profound period in this developmental process was recognised by respondents as being the initial tension of dealing with teaching a subject that was unfamiliar to them:

> "I got thrown into the computer music, the multimedia side of music … that kind of went against the practical music stuff I'd done before that. I was completely out of my comfort-zone and really struggled to begin with. When you teach a topic that's not your area there's that initial period, that self-doubt, as you wrestle with and try and understand all this new information." (TS9: Music)

> "It makes me feel quite insecure really and almost, I feel almost like a bit of a fraud doing it." (TS3: Sport and Leisure)

According to Chung's model of teacher development, this initial period of concern occurs during the 'self-focus' stages when the non-specialist attempts to negotiate the change process, seeking out appropriate resources and managing new student cohorts. Respondents identified a second stage in this developmental process, wherein a balance is eventually struck and approaches established in order to deal with the circumstances of teaching as a non-specialist. As was noted earlier, there is a tendency for teachers to adopt a strategic approach in order to cope with the additional pressures of non-specialist teaching:

> "It might take some time but after a while you work out what works best for you and the students. You work out how best to go about preparing and delivering the material and you tend to stick with it, until that is something changes, which it will [...] by this time, however, you've already kind of got an idea of what it is you need to do, but there's still that confidence element, that nagging question – am I doing this right?" (TS5: Business and Marketing)

During this period, the non-specialist is what Chung (2002) terms 'task-focused', channelling their energy into the management of the task at hand. The individual has begun to develop an understanding of the subject-matter and how best to deliver it given the specific needs and expectations of the group being taught. Though, due to issues of ownership of the subject-matter, they still lack a degree of confidence in their ability to teach the subject effectively. This would contrast with their confidence when they were teaching a more familiar subject where they perceived themselves as a specialist.

After some time in a non-specialist role, just as in many of the teacher development models, respondents revealed how attention would shift more toward concerns for the quality of student learning. That is, as individuals become more familiar with teaching a particular subject, focus would turn from the self and the task, to the 'impact' (Chung, 2002) of their teaching and the learning process:

> "It's true that after a while you become more confident in your ability to internalise the subject-matter and deliver it appropriately, but then there is a tension as to whether your sessions are having an effect, the desired effect on student learning, so you've kind of come full-circle." (TS6: Social Work)

> "It has been my experience that familiarity with the teaching of a certain subject will, I think, automatically breed concerns over student learning. Before that you're so bogged down in understanding the subject-matter and putting together half-decent sessions that you simply can't comprehend the implications of your work for the learning process." (TS7: Media Studies)

Yet, there are still tensions for those who possess both familiarity and experience as echoed in the following response:

> "I should be bringing my interests that I have acquired out of the field and my passion and that's going to hopefully come through in the learning environment and I'm going to challenge them. I just couldn't do that by just reading a chapter and delivering it." (TS3: Sport and Leisure)

Thus, it would appear that both relatively new and experienced teachers pass through similar developmental stages as non-specialists. It is assumed however that an experienced teacher would do so at an accelerated rate due to previous experiences and teaching strategies whilst a new or 'true' non-specialist' would move comparably slower through these stages. Support mechanisms are needed whatever the experience of the non-specialist teacher.

Being a non-specialist: impacts and coping strategies

For the individual member of staff, teaching non-specialist areas resulted in a range of feelings. Frequently emerging were phrases such as: low confidence; insecurity; and being 'out of comfort zones' and a feeling of 'just coping'. Much of this was associated with the perceived (lack of) ownership of knowledge that comes with experience of teaching a particular subject, for example:

> "When you are confident you feel sort of knowledgeable, but when you get asked something by someone in a subject where it's not really your subject area you feel a bit like a fake." (TS9: Music)

To cope with the challenges that accompany teaching as a non-specialist, respondents revealed how they often developed strategies due to the unfamiliarity and unease, as illustrated below:

> "I've just taken on this Masters module, and I know nothing about any of the topics, so I have a guest lecturer spot most weeks because I could research the topics and babble something to the students, but I don't have that in-depth experience and knowledge to do it confidently." (TS1: Nursing)

> "I think there is a greater onus on you to prepare very thoroughly, over prepare. I know that's the case for me." (TS4: Computing)

Paradoxically, respondents acknowledged that adopting such strategic approaches when teaching as a non-specialist might impact negatively on the learning experience of students:

> "I feel really uncomfortable, I certainly don't enjoy doing it, though I feel I have to for the students' sake and it de-motivates me to be honest because I don't think I can achieve what I want to achieve as an educator" (TS3: Sport and Leisure).

> "The students do suffer because they don't get the full expertise of someone who does know the subject inside out" (TS9: Music).

Somewhat compensating for the lack of subject expertise for some of the respondents was the possession of wider professional knowledge of the subject-domain being taught, for example:

> "If you have worked professionally or commercially in an area then just by sheer dint of immersion in that area you have a natural understanding and again it's a bank of experience." (TS5: Business and Marketing)

It is clear from these, and earlier comments, that having to teach outside of their preferred subject-matter causes much concern and anxiety for staff. The source of such anxiety appears to be the interplay between the challenges posed by unfamiliar teaching situations and an individual's perceived ability to satisfactorily meet the demands of that situation. Before moving on to outline respondents' specific views on support needs for non-specialist teaching, and to better understand the nature of such anxieties so as to help place them in the broader context of individual 'academic' development, it is worth pausing to consider the impact of non-specialist teaching and the source of teaching induced anxiety. We do so using a theoretical lens relating to a particular type of 'optimal' experience that is dependent upon the same 'skill-challenge' balance, that of Flow.

Using Flow as an interpretative lens to explore non-specialist teaching in HE

According to Csikszentmihalyi's (2000) Flow theory, anxiety is most likely to occur when the challenges presented by situations or activities overmatch an individual's perceived ability to act effectively within that situation, and are typically experienced negatively. Alternatively, Flow places positive subjective experience, more specifically, the *flow experience,* at the centre of developmental processes. An "optimal" experience is seen as crucial for healthy development and effective learning for both staff and students (Britton, 2010). The term "*flow"* describes moments when a person is fully concentrated on the task at hand, relatively oblivious to the passage of time, and feeling clear about what needs to be done from one moment to the next. In Flow, people's awareness is intertwined with their action and they do not feel self-conscious. They are motivated to do the activity just for the sake of doing it, not because they have to or because they will be compensated in some way when they are done. Flow is 'autotelic' experience, or the sensation that comes with the enacting of intrinsically rewarding activity. All flow-producing activities contain this vital ingredient, that is, they are ends in themselves, and as such have as their primary function the provision of enjoyment

for those involved. Due to the manner in which they are entered into, such activities aid participants in achieving an ordered state of mind that is highly rewarding within and of itself.

Csikszentmihalyi's work unearthed a range of recurrent features present in peoples' descriptions of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996: 111-113). Certain conditions were found to be prerequisites for flow to occur and need to be intrinsic to the structuring of an activity:

- There are clear goals at every moment of the activity.
- There is immediate feedback to one's actions.
- There is a balance between challenges and skills.
- There is no worry of failure.

There are certain common shifts in perception (Britton, 2010) that people describe when recalling being in flow that include:

- A merging of action and awareness.
- Distractions are excluded from consciousness.
- Self-consciousness disappears.
- The sense of time becomes distorted.

Perhaps the most significant feature for the application of this work to the empirical findings surrounding non-specialist teaching is the 'balance between challenges and skills'. Built upon a person-environment dialectical model, flow is triggered by a 'good fit' between an individual's perceived *skill-level* in an activity and the perceived *challenges* afforded by that activity. The question of perception is central. In other words, flow always refers to a 'perceptual relationship' with the environment wherein a person is fully concentrated on some meaningful task. How an individual perceives the challenges of a task, and the skills required to meet them, are functions of that individual's thinking; namely, manifestations of the thought and perceptual paradigms through which they as educators encounter their own teaching assignments.

Flow can be seen to involve particular characteristics creating a very positive state of consciousness and leading to deeply enjoyable intrinsically motivating experience. Although such a depiction of flow, in terms of 'what it is', may seem straightforward, it is actually quite complex, for though any single activity might engender it, an activity cannot sustain it for long unless both challenges and skills become more complex. Such progressive complexity is key to every flow activity in that it provides a sense of discovery, pushing the individual to ever-higher levels of performance. The flow experience is thus seen to be a vehicle for personal creativity and growth through the development of competence within subjectively meaningful tasks/activities. The developmental significance of this inner-dynamic is central to flow, the features and operations of which are best captured in a simple "channel" model. The model

(outlined in Figure 1) uses the ratio of challenge to skill to predict four experiential states: Flow, Anxiety, Apathy and Boredom.
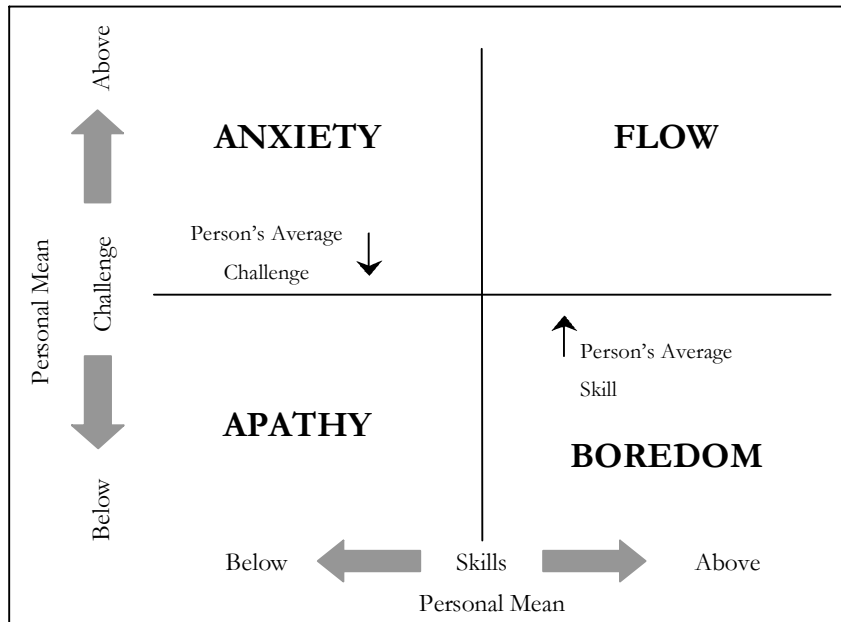
Figure 1: The Four-channel Flow Model (Elkington, 2010: 107)

This model is based upon the axiom that, at any moment in time, people are aware of a number of opportunities which challenge them to act (Elkington, 2010). At the same time, and as has been accentuated by comments from respondents in relation to non-specialist teaching, staff are acutely aware of their skills, that is, of their (in)capacity to cope with the demands of the imposing situation. A flow state is typically characterised by the matching of challenges and skills greater than the respondent's average; this balance, however, is intrinsically fragile. When challenges are perceived to be greater than a person's average with individual skill perceived as being less than is required, such has been found to be the case with non-specialist teaching, the individual will enter a state of 'Anxiety'.

In relation to the three categories of non-specialist teaching identified earlier in this chapter, the flow model can be used to place and thus better understand non-specialist teaching by unpacking the nature of teaching-induced anxieties associated with a role. A perceived deficit between an individual's subject-matter knowledge and teaching knowledge is likely to lead to anxiety on behalf of the teacher regarding their ability (*skill*) to teach a particular subject to the level required (*challenge*). It is the direction of this perceived deficit that determines the nature of a teacher's anxiety. For instance, a 'subject' non-specialist tends to have general teaching knowledge though has comparatively little or no knowledge or experience of teaching the subject area. It is on the basis of such anxiety, that each of the three categories of non-specialist teacher

(subject, teaching, and true) can be located within the upper-left quadrant of the graphic in Figure 2.
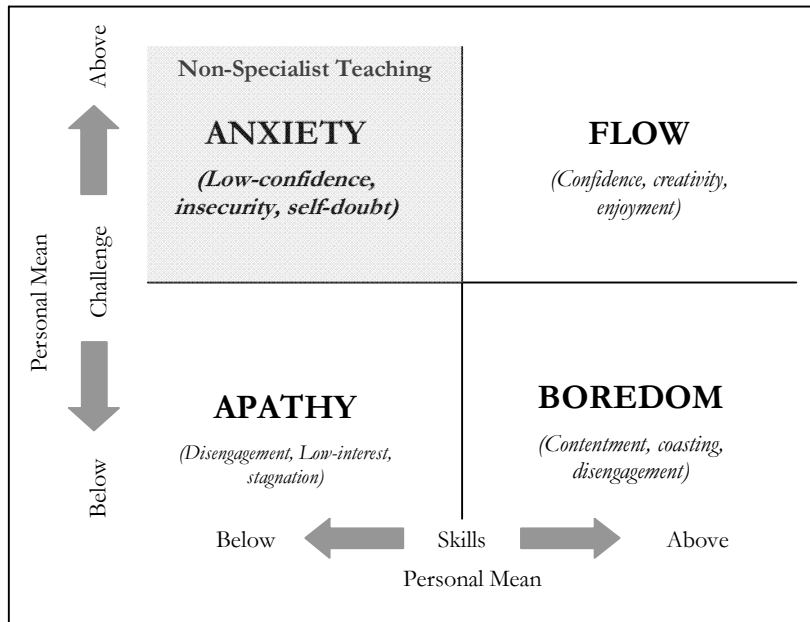
Figure 2: Charting non-specialist teaching (on to the four-channel-Flow Model)

According to the flow model in Figure 2, individuals who fall into the "non-specialist" quadrant are presented with two ways of proceeding; they can lower the perceived challenge of the activity, typically by adopting coping strategies. However, such an approach, if persisted with, runs the risk of cultivating the kind of insecurities that heighten task and role anxiety. The model outlines how such short-term coping strategies may develop over time, and through consistently low environmental challenge matched with low individual skill are likely to elicit a state of 'Apathy' and eventual stagnation. On the other hand, when challenges are perceived to be below average, with individual skill level perceived as greater than required, i.e. reducing task expectation or level of material being taught, individuals tend to enter a state of 'Boredom' and are prone to coasting in their work and becoming disengaged with the task.

The second, more developmentally beneficial strategy would be to find ways of raising skill levels so as to encourage the kind of deeply involving and enjoyable self-discovery that is characteristic of flow. This places particular emphasis on how non-specialist teachers are supported in the development of their teaching practice – a topic all too often neglected, as will now be discussed.

Support for non-specialism in HE

Heads and Course Leaders revealed that available support for non-specialist teaching was particularly limited and if any support did exist, it tended to be informal, and unstructured, often involving some form of mentoring. Compounding the situation for the non-specialist in today's HE climate, is the scarcity of time to even research a new subject let alone a new topic. Equally, reality suggests that when allocating staff to teaching duties, the priority for the institution and Heads and Course Leaders will continue to be the need to ensure when students turn up somebody is there to teach them! Ideally someone with subject expertise – yes, but as we have discovered earlier, this is not always the case.

Empirical findings from the study point to the need to seriously support teachers when they are tasked with teaching subjects unfamiliar to them. We must find ways of alleviating and reducing the concerns of teachers captured at each stage in this developmental process and leave the individual to develop sufficiently to progress to later, more advanced 'student/learning focused' stages of development within a shorter period of time. Respondents were also concerned about the instrumental nature of using pre-established, externally-available content as a way of coping with instances of non-specialist teaching. This provides further evidence of the importance of perceived ownership of subject-matter knowledge and the knowledge teachers have with respect to their own teaching practice if developing their ability to teach subjects in which they are not specialists. However, the essence of these concerns seems to move past the subject-matter knowledge itself and emphasise the need for subject-knowledge for teaching, or pedagogical content knowledge, that is, the ability to interpret subject-matter knowledge in facilitating valuable learning experiences for students. This considered in light of the above theoretical interpretation of non-specialist teaching from the perspective of flow, suggests that as well as the provision of instantly accessible short-term source material, there would appear to be a very real need for the structuring of developmentally appropriate or 'balanced' (in terms of skill and challenge), longer term support mechanisms.

We are suggesting here that adopting or at least considering flow in the context of non-specialist teaching support could be potentially beneficial to the lecturer, allowing them opportunity to review their personal approaches to teaching and learning and instilling the confidence and motivation to be creative with new ideas that would make their work more enjoyable in what can be a relatively high pressure culture. Whilst it is clear that the attitude of the individual lecturer is instrumental in this, flow teaches us that enjoyment is never far away (Elkington, 2010). The general principles of Flow, namely, clarifying goals, providing feedback, matching challenges and skills, avoiding the kinds of distractions that interfere with concentration and involvement, and finding ways to expand control and freedom, along with concurrent processes of planning and reflection need to be integrated to encourage greater self-awareness, deeper involvement with material and a greater sense of ownership of knowledge.

Concluding remarks and future directions

In this chapter, we have seen from our study of non-specialists teaching specialist subjects in HE that staff are expected to engage in non-specialist teaching, whatever their experience, and that they use a range of coping strategies. We have considered how Csikszentmihalyi's Flow framework and subsequent adaptations (Elkington, 2010) can assist us in unpacking the world of the non-specialist teacher in HE and help us understand and place their concerns, tensions and support needs. Not only do support mechanisms need to take sufficient account of the inherent complexities of teaching as a non-specialist but they also need to be sufficiently sensitive to the various types of non-specialist and the complexities of non-specialism in today's changing environment. A temporary, quick fix solution is not the answer, nor is it the preferred solution of non-specialists. With the very real need for 'personalised' academic support, we end with the proposition of not only adopting Flow as an explanatory theoretical framework for understanding non-specialist teaching but advancing this to address a possible support solution.

Csikszentmihalyi's flow framework can, for instance, be used to focus attention on to high levels of involvement in teaching and learning activities (e.g. lectures, assessments etc.) and the identification and exploration of the conditions and features of related activities more broadly (e.g. unit and course design) to shape and develop associated teaching and learning practice in relation to the principles of flow theory. This can encourage the kind of deeply involving self-discovery that would allow staff and students to more regularly experience enjoyment and positive feelings about themselves and their teaching practice. But this optimal educational environment requires constant maintenance. Support strategies need to be sufficiently sensitive to the various types of non-specialist and the complexities of non-specialism evident in today's changing academic environment. Flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) is thus a potentially beneficial way of allowing staff the opportunity to reappraise their approaches to teaching and learning and instilling the confidence and motivation to be creative within changing/new roles that would make their work more enjoyable.

Work currently being undertaken by Elkington (forthcoming) aims to advance Flow theory through the development of an experiential framework of engaging staff in effective teaching and learning. The developing framework for optimal staff and student engagement in learning (FOSSEL) encourages educators to think differently about what is meant by engagement in learning, starting with their teaching practice and its perceived impact on their own as well as their students' engagement in the learning process. Though intended predominantly as a framework for engagement in general teaching and learning practice in HE, the emerging FOSSEL holds definite potential for the designing and implementation of non-specialist teaching support strategies, moving away from traditional time-on-task conceptualisations of engagement, shifting focus instead on to the cognitive, motivational, and emotional processes that foster instances of 'optimal' engagement for staff and student learning and development. It is our intention to explore the practical scope of this emergent framework in collaboration with teaching staff at the University. We would look to design personalised support mechanisms, whilst at the same time being cognisant of the resource constraints under

which we operate in HE. It is through striving to continuously expand and hone teaching practice in relation to the principles of optimal engagement where true enjoyment is to be found and with it the achievement of the confidence and motivation to be creative within changing/new roles and the kind of passion for learning. Shouldn't this be the goal of all good teaching?

About the authors

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Chapter 20

Ingredients of change: pursuing and sustaining an educational development initiative

Petia Petrova

This chapter is being submitted to an external journal so only the abstract can be published here for copyright reasons. For further information, please contact the author.

Abstract

The paper offers a model for implementing HE policy interventions, based on out experiences of pursuing enhancement in the area of research informed teaching through a structured and multilayered approach, including strategic alignment of institutional priorities and the ethos of those involved. At the centre of this model is the role of the educational developer, providing a scaffold and a drive for the policy implementation. It is hoped that the understanding gleaned from our experiences can be applied in the future when implementing new teaching and learning strategies and interventions.

Keywords

Educational development; research informed teaching; higher education, policy implementation

About the author

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Chapter 21

Creating a community of scholars of teaching and learning: what role can writing retreats play?

Annika Coughlin and Petia Petrova

Abstract

Researching, writing and publishing are an important part of being a legitimate member of the academic community. Yet often, little is done to support early career academics, and those with practitioner/professional backgrounds to develop their writing and publication skills. This chapter describes the role of two University of Bedfordshire writing retreats as interventions to provide such support.

Many of the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) and Teaching and Learning Directorate (TLD) projects at the University, involved engaging in research to improve and enhance teaching and learning. We wanted to recognise these colleagues for their hard work and provide them with the time, space and support to write about their projects, so that these can be shared with the wider University community.

The evaluation of the two writing retreats pointed at the importance for setting aside the time and space for writing. Participants also highlighted the significance of peer support and feedback. The retreat was seen as a positive and productive intervention that proved to be a confidence booster, that made participants feel valued and their hard work acknowledged. The retreats also provided a space for participants to engage with and become part of the community of scholars in teaching and learning. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the empowering potential of writing retreats for those who may feel at the periphery of the academic community.

Keywords

Scholarship of teaching and learning; communities of practice; writing retreats

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Introduction

Writing for publication is an important activity for academics. Motivation to publish traditionally came from scholarly, scientific and ethical philosophies regarding the dissemination of knowledge. In the modern university, academics are increasingly under external pressure to publish. Publication rates are used as a performance indicator (both individual and institutional), and is one criterion in gaining external funding (McGrail et al 2006).

However, despite this trend, studies identified by McGrail et al (2006) in their systematic literature review of writing interventions have shown that the publication rate for academics is low. This can be explained with a number of reasons. Early career academics tend to feel a lack of confidence in their ability (Berger, 1990; Baldwin & Chandler, 2002). Other studies have shown that writers experience fear of rejection, feel that their ideas are not worthy of publication or that their writing ability is not good enough (Hale & Pruitt, 1989; Grant & Knowles, 2000). Writing retreats have been used as an intervention to address some of these and related issues and to create communities of writers (Murray and Moore 2006; Grant and Knowles 2000; Moore, 2003).

This chapter describes the role two writing retreats, organised by the University of Bedfordshire Teaching and Learning Directorate (TLD) and the Bridges-Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), have had in creating a community of scholars of teaching and learning. Firstly, the definition of the scholarship of teaching and learning will be explored. Secondly, we outline the structure and purpose of our latest writing retreat. Thirdly, we discuss the outcomes of the retreat from the perspective of the participants. This chapter seeks to highlight the empowering potential of writing retreats to staff occupying marginal positions in the Higher Education community (e.g. early career academics, teaching only staff, professional support staff and educational developers) (Boyer, 1990, Bolande Laksov, 2008; Sparrow 2009).

The University of Bedfordshire writing retreats

In 2009 and again in 2010 the University of Bedfordshire's Teaching and Learning Directorate (TLD) with the Bridges-CETL organised two cross-disciplinary and multi-departmental writing retreats. The invitation to attend was sent out to staff across the University – from academic through to support staff – so long as their proposed papers had a focus on the University's revised curriculum (CRe8) and/or teaching and learning issues. This reflected the emphasis of the work of the CETL and TLD on increasing staff's scholarship of teaching and learning.

The scholarship of teaching and learning can include a number of areas:

- knowing the literature on teaching by collecting and reading that literature
- improving teaching by growing one's expertise in teaching
- improving student learning by investigating the learning of one's own students and one's own teaching
- improving one's own students' learning by knowing and relating the literature on teaching and learning to discipline specific literature and knowledge
- improving student learning within the discipline generally by collecting and communicating results of one's own work on teaching and learning within the discipline (Trigwell et al., 2000: 159 replicated in Prosser 2008: 1).

The scholarship of teaching and learning has increased in importance in the UK Higher Education (HE) sector as signified by the setting up of Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning and the Higher Education Academy (HEA) Professional Standards Framework. The HEA framework outlines standards expected of a competent teacher in HE as well as examples of areas of activity, core knowledge and professional values expected:

> The framework recognizes that the scholarly nature of subject inquiry and knowledge creation and a scholarly approach to pedagogy, combine to represent a unique feature of support for student learning in higher education institutions. (HEA Professional Standards Framework[1]).

This Framework is linked to the HEA National Accreditation Scheme, which provides individuals the opportunity to gain recognition as an Associate, Fellow and Senior Fellow – creating a professional identity as a scholar of teaching and learning. Fellowship of the HEA is strongly encouraged by the University:

> It is University policy that new academic staff are expected to be (or to become within their probationary period) at least Associate Fellows of the HE Academy, with an expectation if appropriate, that they go on to seek recognition as a Fellow (Teaching and Learning Directorate, 2009: 10).

Despite these developments at National level and within the University of Bedfordshire, research activity within one's own subject area is still considered to be key to academic's career progression and status (Mintrom, 2008). Indeed the scholarship of teaching and learning and the awards that go with it, can be seen as a 'fallback route to promotion for those with patchy research records' (Boshier, 2009:1). This view highlights the fact that the old teaching/research divide hasn't gone away (Boyer, 1990) with teaching still positioned as having lower status and even as

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[1] www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/supportingindividuals/professionalrecognition (accessed June 2010)

punishment (Tennant et al 2010). However, engaging in the scholarship of teaching and learning can enable participation in the community of researchers (Thompson et al 2010). Scholars of teaching and learning engage with research in teaching and learning, their research seeks to gain the knowledge, evidence and confidence to question current practice and contribute to positive changes in the workplace (Bolande Laksov 2008).

Many CETL and TLD projects at the University, involved engaging in research to improve and enhance teaching and learning (see Arti Kumar's Chapter 18). Researching, writing and publishing are an important part of being a legitimate member of the higher education community (Archer, 2008). Thus engaging in scholarship of teaching and learning can result in growing one's research activity and in doing so breaking down research hierarchies. Writing retreats can help support the legitimization process. We wanted to recognise these colleagues for their hard work and provide them with the time and space to write about their teaching and learning projects and activities, so that this can be shared with the wider University community.

Before discussing the outcomes and benefits of writing retreats as experienced by the participants in the University 2010 writing retreat, we will outline some of the practical details about the writing retreat. These will provide the setting for our discussion, as well as a point of reference to readers interested in organising their own retreats.

Practical considerations

The chosen venue was a rural conference hotel in Northamptonshire, an hour drive away from Luton. It was a far enough distance away to allow participants to focus on their work without to the distractions the office or home environments, but near enough so that people didn't feel too tired after a long journey. Car pooling was organised and the venue was accessible by public transport. It was important that the venue:

- had spaces within the venue for people to work either in groups or alone (e.g. a conservatory, lounge areas etc)
- had comfortable, well lit rooms with a writing desk
- allowed us to bring our own laser printer as we needed to print multiple copies of all chapters submitted during the retreat
- one group conference room so that we could meet up for activities during the retreat and have a meeting point
- open spaces to walk in
- opportunities for social activities
- communal dining with good quality food - as it helped to forge a sense of community and time to get to know each other on a social rather than work level.

The 2010 retreat was spread over 4 days just after the Easter holiday. The retreat offered a supportive environment for developing writing skills and work towards a

publishable paper. However the retreat also had a clear focus on having a tangible output. Each participant chose to either submit their paper for external publication, or to have their paper published in the form of a book chapter in a University publication[2]. Table 1 shows the timetable the organising and editorial team kept to in order to produce the internal publication.

Jan 22nd	Writing retreat advertised on the staff notice-board	Inviting all colleagues, engaged in teaching and learning scholarly activities.
Feb 8th	Deadline for submission of outline proposals (500 words)	This was to capture the level of interest and to ensure that the submitted papers were relevant to teaching and learning.
Feb 15th	Initial selection and all successful applicants going forward to are notified	They are provided with further details and instructions of what is expected. Including biographical pieces of fellow participants so they could see who else was coming.
March 23rd	Submission of first draft manuscript (typically 5000 words)	A rough draft was acceptable. However all data collection was expected to be completed and key literature sources identified.
March 26th	Receiving drafts for feedback and groups allocated	Participants were grouped into teams of 3-4. Team members review each other papers in order to provide feedback.
April 6-9	Residential writing retreat	At the end of the retreat a final copy of the paper was submitted.
April 19th	Submission of paper	Colleagues were given an opportunity to make final touches and resubmit.
May 27th	Final deadline of papers after they had been edited and sent back to authors.	Following comments from the editorial team, final papers were resubmitted
June	Proof-reading, formatting, cover design etc.	Conducted by the editorial team
July 15th	Book published and given out to authors and other interested parties.	Final product is disseminated to key stakeholders

Table 1: Writing retreat organisation timeline

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[2] The first writing retreat book was titled "Creating Bridges". It consisted of 15 full chapters and an abstract of an externally published paper.

Time	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9:00		Writing time	Reading time	Writing time
9:30				
10:00				
10:30				
11:00			11:00- 12:30pm 2nd round of feedback	
11:30		12:00 Help! I need somebody Speed dating style exercise. Everyone think of a question they need help with regarding their paper or their writing. Find someone to talk to for 1 min. Do this 4 times with 4 different people.		
12:00				12:00 – 1pm Where does my chapter fit in? Sectioning and ordering of the book activity.
12:30	Arrive. Expectations, hopes and fears for the week. Written on post-it-notes with fears on one side of the room and hopes on the other.			
1:00 – 2pm	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
2:00	2-3:00	Writing time	Writing time	Submission of final paper Round up of the event. Evaluation +ve aspects of the event, things that could be improved on post-it notes.
2:30	Everyone to convey the key messages of their chapter on flipchart paper. Exercise on giving and receiving feedback.			
3:00	3-3:30 Tea in communal room			3pm End
3:30	3:30 – 5			
4:00	First round of feedback.	Submission of paper		
4:30		Formatting and referencing guidance.		
5:00				
5:30	Check in	Papers will be printed and given out to groups after dinner and second groups allocated.		
6:00				
6:30				
7:00	Meet at bar	Meet at bar	Meet at bar	
7:30	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	

Figure 1: The structure of the retreat 2010

Awareness about the retreat had increased in the University since the first one in September 2009. Individual staff members who had no prior connection to the TLD or Bridges-CETL applied, whereas at the first writing retreat, those who were involved with Bridges-CETL made up the majority of participants. This time staff in the University's smaller campuses applied – indicating that the retreat wasn't just viewed as a main campus activity. In some instances Heads of Departments identified staff members, who they thought could benefit from this event, encouraging those who otherwise wouldn't have submitted a proposal. Many of those who attended last year were keen to do so again. Twenty four people in total attended the retreat (compared to 17 in 2009). This was an optimum number in order to get a diverse range of experiences and to broaden perspectives by having a variety of papers to read, but small enough for everyone to get to know each other.

The four days of the writing retreat were structured as seen in Figure 1. There were blocks of time dedicated to writing, two slots for formal feedback in groups of 3-4, whole group activities plus time to get help with formatting and references. There were also two deadlines, which were helpful in focussing the mind and creating a shared goal – to produce an internal publication. Day 1 involved setting the scene – purpose, outline and expectations of the retreat, followed by a feedback session. On Day 2 participants were expected to have improved their papers in light of the feedback received the previous day and ready for further feedback the following day. This day had the first deadline. Day 3 included another round of feedback, followed by writing. The final Day 4 was when finished or near finished papers were submitted.

Evaluating the retreat

The authors of this chapter were part of the organising team along with Mark Atlay the Director of Teaching and Learning. Feedback was sought throughout the event formally and informally.

The formal feedback was gathered at two points of the retreat: at the very beginning of Day 1, capturing participants' hopes and fears about the retreat, and at the end of the retreat, capturing the positive and negative experiences of the event. We also collected data in the form of a questionnaire on the last day which asked a variety of questions on a Likert scale relating to giving and receiving feedback, the venue, the structure of the retreat and confidence in writing.

Since it was known that we were evaluating the retreat, participants often sought us out to share their experiences of writing, their experiences of the retreat and to make suggestions for improvements. This contributed to the cooperative community feel as participants had input to the flexible structure of the week[3]. Since we, the organisers were also writing a paper, we were participants in the event too. We experienced the same learning journey as the rest of the group in terms of struggling with writing,

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[3] Credit goes to Eileen Scott for suggesting the 'speed-dating' activity on day 2.

having to meet the deadlines, giving and receiving feedback and so on. We shared these experiences with participants, meaning that there wasn't a divide between the organisers and the writers. We perceive our subjectivity as advantageous and desirable, following the view of Oakley (1981: 58) who argues that 'personal involvement is more than dangerous bias – it is the condition under which people come to know each other and admit others into their lives.' This contributed to the community feel and a sense of a shared learning experience as well as revealing what we believe to be authentic accounts of participants' experiences in the natural situation (Brewer 2003).

Similarly to Murray and Moore (2006), Grant and Knowles (2000), and Moore (2003), participants in the University retreat reported that their writing retreats resulted in the following[4]:

- Providing the time, space and peer support for writing "Writing time out of Uni." "Making time to write."
- Peer review opportunities "Feedback from people was excellent."
- Increased productivity and motivation "The positive and productive atmosphere – it has been confidence boosting regarding writing."
- Increased self-identify as a writer "I've remembered that I enjoy writing."
- Creation of a community of writers – either as a one off at the retreat or continuing after the retreat "Group togetherness and getting on – good mix (talking to those never see usually)." "Making connections. I'm going to discuss with [another participant] how we can work together [back at University]."

In addition to the above list, our writing retreat also resulted in the following three outcomes:

- Teaching and learning interventions have been captured by producing two internal publications
- Making staff feel valued by providing the opportunity for them to participate in this developmental[5]
- Provided networking opportunities

In the next section, we touch upon the above points using data from our evaluation activities, focussing on how being part of this positive social learning experience can contribute to the creation of a community of scholars of teaching and learning. We discuss three areas before offering our conclusions:

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[4] As expressed during the two post-it-notes evaluation exercises.

[5] Also reflected in the work of Murray and Moore (2006)

- Feedback

- Commitment to practice

- Creating an academic identity

Giving and receiving feedback

The opportunity to give and receive feedback is a key feature of our writing retreats. Feedback group consisted of groups of 3 or 4. There were two feedback sessions at the writing retreat. For the first one, groups were organised by common themes found in their papers. The second feedback group was organised based on participants' preference about which paper they wanted to read or which person they wanted to get feedback from. However, we ensured that people read papers they hadn't as of yet seen. Delegates were aware of the retreat schedule and the two feedback sessions. When asked how we could improve the event in the future, some people would have liked a round of feedback before the retreat so that they could have the opportunity for three rounds of feedback. Others would have liked to have feedback from the same people the second time round as they could comment on how the paper was progressing, so is something to bear in mind for the future.

In the beginning of the retreat, delegates expressed fears that they wouldn't be capable of giving good feedback. For many this was a cause of anxiety:

> "I will be over critical and upset someone."
> "I won't be able to give good feedback."

Fears about feedback were also prominent at the first writing retreat where we evaluated participants' experiences via an online questionnaire where 37.5% of participants found it difficult to give feedback. However, as some of the participants in the second retreat took part in our first retreat, many knew what to expect. Furthermore, the organising team took steps to address these fears early on by providing guidance and materials in advance of the retreat. Murray and Moore (2006: 50-51) list the types of feedback one could request was provided in the materials given to delegates in their pre-retreat information packs. The proportion of those finding it difficult to get feedback in the second writing retreat dropped to only 9%.

In contrast to feedback being feared or seen as a source or anxiety, many were looking forward to receiving constructive comments on their work as these quotes illustrate:

> "I'm looking forward to fresh eyes and new perspectives."
> "I expect the feedback to take the paper forward."

The feedback sessions were beneficial in many ways, firstly in sharing of expertise (getting help with an education theory that is new to you for example) but also in other

less subject specific ways. Showing others your rough drafts resulted in a certain degree of vulnerability and risk to self-presentation (Becker 1986). By counteracting self-censorship (Moore 2003) the process of writing was demystified:

> "I learned about how my own writing is perceived by others (both style and content)."
> "Positives: Learning about writing and writing process – how we do things differently."

The feedback experience of delegates was varied. For another participant, the feedback led her on a journey that she describes was rather like the Kubler-Ross Transition Curve. She experienced denial about the readiness of her paper "I'm OK!", through to fear and anger after the first round of feedback to bargaining "what shall I do?" to a touch of depression after the second round of feedback, but after a game of croquet developed a "win mentality" so accepted the paper needed radical changes and put this into action and completed her paper on time and was pleased with the end result.

The mixed ability groups were unable to provide the depth of critique on the content of the paper, as some authors would have liked:

> "Levels of feedback need to be more critical in order to raise levels of writing to external levels (how to do this?)"

Also, the more expert people in the group were also more senior members of staff with a couple of the participants at the retreat being line managers of other participants. One participant said:

> "There's still a niggling doubt about how honest the feedback was."

To what extent can you critique the work of your boss? We took this question and followed it up with conversations during the retreat with participants, asking if they felt inhibited giving feedback to someone who is in a more senior position to them. The general view was that they didn't feel inhibited by this. Rather, the feeling was that they felt unable to comment on the content of someone's chapter, as they didn't have the subject expertise. However, participants did comment that the handout from Murray and Moore (2006) helped because it meant you could focus your feedback on other areas not just content. For example by being a devil's advocate or asking for elaboration on particular aspects of their writing. Everyone could contribute something even if they were new to the subject area.

Feedback was not always formal, for example on the second day in a 'speed dating' style activity was introduced. The idea was that everyone thought of one or two problems, such as problems with their paper, motivation, or some other aspect of their writing. Delegates went into pairs to ask each other a question for two minutes each. After the allocated time, the pairs changed. This happened for four changes, by which point, the

questions had been answered. This activity reinforced the idea that everyone had something to contribute as well as allowing increased opportunities to use the expertise in the room.

All these activities; reading the papers of 4 to 6 participants; engaging in peer feedback and review; in the structured group activities (as seen from the programme), were designed to enable participants to engage and become part of the community of scholars in teaching and learning. According to Wenger (2000), members of a community are bound together by a collective understanding of what their community is about; they hold each other accountable to this joint enterprise. In our case, the rules for respectful feedback were established on the first day. Wenger argues that it is important to have a relationship of mutuality. At the feedback session, it was the responsibility of every group member to ensure these rules were followed and that the feedback was sensitively given, received with an open mind and that ultimately, the author retained control of their work. Because of this, feedback was viewed by the majority as "empowering rather than alarming" with 100% of participants stating they found the feedback helpful on the questionnaire.

The notion of a safe environment was also important when encountering someone who had an opposing ontological standpoint. An academic specialising in qualitative, highly theoretical social science research debated with another participant who had a background in quantitative, natural science research. She said about the retreat a couple of months later:

> "A high point for me was touching minds with colleagues who maybe wouldn't normally understand where I am coming from philosophically and theoretically. We managed to reach some common understanding."

This finding of common ground is one of the factors on which communities of practice depend. Not only to ensure everyone feels safe and supported in having differing opinions, but also in constructing new and evolving knowledge. This ability to be able to add to existing knowledge keeps the subject area fresh and open to innovation, which in turn maintains its energy (Wenger 2000). Creating an internal publication was intended to offer an output for this new knowledge.

Commitment to practice

The primary focus was on the internal publication (although as noted above participants were free to pursue external publication). We wanted to capture the work of University of Bedfordshire practitioners, and to be able to share and disseminate this work across campuses and levels of the University. We wanted to produce an internal publication, which captures the teaching and learning innovations occurring at the University. Sharing of expertise didn't just happen amongst the group who attended the retreat, the resultant chapters in the books are intended to be used to be accessible to

and considered by the wider University community. For example, one delegate in a conversation states;

> "My paper topic came about because I wanted to bridge and make connections between some CETL work I was doing and other work interests. I wanted to tie up loose ends and make some connections that I could see, and that wouldn't be written about otherwise. It gave me the opportunity to make these connections, make practical recommendations and models to be used in the university going forward. It is an exploratory think piece that can be translated into practice."

The participants of the retreat shared an ethos of commitment to teaching and learning, and hoped that their papers would help others improve their practice;

> "I hope the chapters will help others in the future."
> "I hope to produce a useful piece of work."

This fits in with the ethos behind the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning which is about having an evidenced informed approach to improving teaching and learning (Trigwell et al 2000).

Creating an academic identity

Engaging in the scholarship of teaching and learning provides opportunities to move from the periphery to the centre of the academic community, by providing opportunities to publish – in subject journals as well as in teaching and learning journals. The following quote summarises the key benefits of the writing retreat as has been discussed in this chapter.

> "If it wasn't for the writing retreat, I wouldn't have approached JISC about my assessment development and submitted a paper to a learning conference in Vancouver. I now feel more like a bona fide academic which has given me confidence. Previously I hadn't felt like a true academic, as I've always identified myself as a practitioner. Like many people making the transition from their industry specialism to academia I was really nervous about my work, particularly about submitting a proposal for the writing retreat. I was convinced they'd consider my work insubstantial and uncover me as a fake academic!"

This is a quote from a member of staff about 8 months after attending the first writing retreat. This staff member never felt fully like a legitimate academic. She has reasserted her academic identify through the engagement in the writing retreat:

> "Identity is built around social engagement and is constantly being renegotiated as individuals move through different forms of participation" (Jawitz 2009: 243)

It shows the power of the writing retreat to gain a sense of identity, feel as a part of the academic community rather than a peripheral member and participate in scholarly activities. She is becoming a scholar of teaching and learning.

Another group of participants in the retreat at the periphery of the academic community included colleagues in support roles. Their engagement in the retreat, reasserted to them the importance of writing and "in getting their ideas out there" for their current roles, but also for the future, should they move into an academic role. A participant stated at the end of the second retreat:

> "I may have an academic contract one day, so this [writing] is part of my future identity which will require me to publish."

Writing and publishing were not the only ways of reasserting one's identity, for some simply being invited to participate in the writing retreat signified being valued as a member of the community:

> "I personally feel valued, things like this don't happen enough, asking how things can be done better in the future. Thanks for inviting me."

The retreat has provided the much needed confidence and encouragement to new staff;

> "As a new member of staff, this event has made me feel part of the University of Bedfordshire community. It has been confidence boosting to get encouragement from experienced people."

Conclusion

It is common in recent years with the increasing importance of the Research Assessment Exercise/Research Excellence Framework, for academics to be under a constant pressure to write and to publish. Rarely are academics new to research, to writing, or to teaching, offered a structured and supported environment to develop their writing skills. Murray and Newton argue that 'since publishing is a mainstream academic activity, it makes sense to mainstream this intervention in academic careers' (2009: 541). If publishing is central, then writing retreats or similar support interventions shouldn't be just an occasional, special event. It should be integrated into the activities and priorities expressed in and pursued though the University's Education and Research strategies. Additionally, the cost of the retreat per person need not be too high, in our case it was around the price of a residential conference.

When designed with care and consideration a writing retreat can provide such an intervention that results in a tangible output (such as publication), as well as in enhancing the confidence, competence and motivation of those involved. The

following quote comes from an early career academic summarises the value of the retreat;

> "Participating in the writing retreat enabled me to develop my writing skills in a supportive and experienced environment which was a huge privilege and vital to someone at such an early stage in their research career. The feedback from experienced academics was valuable as was the opportunity to write in an uninterrupted and ideal environment. It is also as a result of the writing retreat that I wrote my first paper for internal publication through CETL. This has given me the confidence and desire to aspire to write a paper for external publication in the future. It has also been a valuable experience in allowing me to make an impact on the division and prove my worth as an academic and member of staff. I was conscious of a limited research portfolio in comparison to my colleagues and this project has enabled me to establish myself amongst my peers."

In this chapter, we have offered a brief overview of the benefits of writing retreats although we are aware that the extent to which the momentum of the retreat has been carried forward needs to be measured in order to fully assess the value of the writing retreat in the longer term. However, McGrail et al (2006) do conclude from their systematic review of interventions used to increase publication rates, that writing groups and writing courses all lead to an increase in average publication rates for the participants.

As a result of the success of our two writing retreats, many departments across the University are considering and/or in the planning process of their own writing retreats this includes Departments of Human Resource Management, Marketing, Acute Care and Community Services, among others. Still, it is hoped that the cross disciplinary writing retreat, with a focus on enhancing staff scholarship of teaching and learning, continues as a yearly feature, as it offers an opportunity to bring together fresh ideas and networking across departments with a focus on teaching and learning.

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