

Compass: The Journal of Learning and Teaching at the University of Greenwich



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Issue 1, 2009–10

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Aims

- To provide a forum for pedagogic debate amongst all staff and students
- Promote an inclusive approach to student support (papers are welcome from academic support staff)
- Act as a 'staging post' to test out ideas for further publication
- Disseminate work in the Schools/subject disciplines to colleagues and to an external audience
- Present new ideas informed by research
- Provide a natural progression route for colleagues presenting at Greenwich Learning & Teaching and e-Learning conferences.

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Editors' introduction

We are pleased to present the first edition of *Compass: The Journal of Learning and Teaching at the University of Greenwich*. It intends to champion ideas and practices about learning and teaching within the university and its partner colleges and, through sharing, to promote debate.

Like other higher education institutions in the UK, staff at Greenwich have to deal with incompatible demands on their time, teaching and administration, developing scholarly communities, engagement in consultation, research and publication. Furthermore, the combination of national and local funding policy in the context of the credit crunch, the anticipated research excellence framework, the widespread use of new social networking software like Facebook and Twitter, to name but a few factors, now permeate our teaching and learning environments.

Our learning and teaching strategy is informed by a pedagogical philosophy that embodies a particular conception of the academic and professional development of students. Our vision for developing 'the Greenwich graduate' is to design curricula and pedagogies through which students are able to feel they are participants in a scholarly community of enquiry, supported by staff working together in a community of practice. The development of such curricula and pedagogies will support the drive towards greater student engagement and afford the possibility of moving towards the co-creation of knowledge with students.

Fostering students' excitement about, and commitment to, scholarship, provides an integrated means of developing the necessary academic literacy (including information literacy) and communication skills and all of the associated skills of research and critical enquiry. Our long-term aim is to build the confidence of students in their growing capabilities as emergent professionals, who can go on to secure employment or move comfortably into further study and research.

The tension between our perceptions of the university as an environment to support learning, on the one hand, and as a place for research on the other, is felt, and resolved by academics and academic support staff every day. As a 'research-informed' university, which derives 90 per cent of its income from teaching, we hope that *Compass* will help to inform our thinking about, and build more integrated relationships between research and scholarship, teaching and learning.

The mixture of short thought-provoking pieces, longer academic articles, case studies and, in subsequent editions, letters, represent viewpoints about many of these relationships from different Schools and university services. There are significant differences in the pedagogic stances adopted by different disciplines, but, as a learning organisation, we can learn much from one another. We hope this first edition provides a forum for debate by staff and students to encourage reflection upon their practice and to stimulate innovation and new ideas.

Simon Walker, Patrick Ainley, Ian McNay, Wendy Cealey Harrison
University of Greenwich

'I prefer research to feed my teaching, not lead it'

Ian McNay

School of Education & Training

I do get irritated by senior academics from some universities who proclaim an institutional policy of research-led-teaching in a tone which implies that such an approach is an axiomatic good, universally applicable, to which there is no legitimate alternative and, which cannot be questioned. Let me question this unthinking approach.

I did a research-led degree, in English, in the 1960s. What I got, then, was a fragmented programme with no internal coherence. It seemed that staff pursued individual research interests and did not talk with one another about the programme as a whole, or about the student experience. The Council for National Academic Awards did much to improve that in the 1970s and 1980s for the newly emergent challengers to tradition; I do not want to regress. I was interested when one of my students on the Greenwich course for new academics, in an assignment on the research-teaching nexus, argued that he could not use his research in teaching since the gap between what he was researching and where his students currently were situated in the discipline, would take considerable time and effort to bridge, reducing time for other more relevant and accessible material and risking deterring students.

From that individual experience, let me move to the institutional level. *Times Higher Education* has regular reports of courses, or even whole teaching departments being closed, not because of lack of student demand or poor quality ratings for teaching, but because of research assessment exercise results. The issue of 24 September, 2009 reports (p. 11), the proposed closure of sociology at Birmingham and the decision by Stirling to move to a staff:student ratio of 1:30 and, an end to appointing teaching fellows in favour of rising research stars, because the balance between teaching and research staff is not appropriate in a research-led institution. So, decisions on teaching provision are being made on the basis of judgements on a different activity. Jon Adams and his colleagues at Evidence Ltd., which spun off from the University of Leeds, have shown that the aggregated consequence of such decisions is that some regions of the country may have no courses in some key subjects within easy reach. That runs counter to policy on access, where geography is a prime factor in student decision-making. Part-time students will be particularly disadvantaged. Since statistics from the Higher Education Statistics Agency on graduate employment show that full-time graduates tend to seek jobs in the locality of their university, there are also implications for the supply of people with key skills in certain regions – not helpful to re-generation (another policy priority).

The paradox is that the policy does not operate in universities where the claim is made. My research on research quality assessment led to a conference session where I asked participants whether

'I prefer research to feed my teaching, not lead it'

research policy was linked to teaching policy. Nobody said 'yes' out of more than 50 people. There were very few policy linkages to anything - even enterprise, when the two activities may be located in the same unit. Research stood by itself, a discrete entity, somewhat apart from other elements of the university. That confirms the HEFCE review of strategic plans, which found fragmentation into silos. My experience of research into top teams in universities underlines that: PVCs in many places have an implicit norm of not commenting on others' portfolios in return for not having them comment on their own. That is not good.

The National Science Foundation in the USA has a criterion for approving research bids, which is that there must be evidence that outcomes will feed into learning. In the Netherlands, quality in research and teaching is assessed by the same agency, often together. In Hong Kong, the University Grants Commission uses all four of the Carnegie Scholarships in its RAE, so discovery, teaching/ dissemination, application and integration form a synoptic framework. None of that is evident in the UK. Here, even 'impact' has not meant impact as the lay person would understand it - changing people's lives, but influence on other academics in a closed world, assessed by a citation count of journal articles written by a coterie in an exclusive club. When I ask research staff in places proclaiming research-led-teaching whether internal approval of a research bid requires evidence of how it will lead teaching, I often get blank or even scornful looks. When I ask people in teaching and learning offices whether validation processes seek to identify how research has an impact on teaching, the same blankness spreads across their faces. It is not a requirement for approval; it is not audited for re-approval. It is not explored by QAA in England as a quality criterion - though the Scots do.

The final negative is: if research leads teaching, teaching must follow research, and not, by implication, the needs of students nor the expectations of employers. However, the role of universities has gone beyond preparing the teachers and professors of the future to feed only themselves. That was true in the 1960s, but the rise of new graduate professions and the massification of provision mean that it is true no longer. Many academic staff now gain their authority from recent and relevant experience in the field for which they are helping students to prepare, whether in acting, architecture or archaeology. The reflective professional is as valid a source of expertise as the researcher academic. Employers comment on graduate skills and lack of preparedness; bodies representing research users criticise the nature of the discourse in publications, which deters those beyond the ivory towers and prevents learning, or knowledge transfer as we now call it.

So, the claim to an essential, universal link between research and teaching is dangerous rhetoric.

Of course, I do not want to deny a rich potential symbiosis between research and teaching. I use my own research in my teaching, and many of my students provide data that feeds into my understanding of my research fields. Note that: 'feeds', not 'leads', a key difference in the nature of the articulation.

At its extreme, a research-led-teaching policy would mean teaching staff only teaching topics where they are engaged in research and can provide primary data. An obvious nonsense. We cannot cover the whole field and have to rely on secondary data from others. The scholarship of bringing a critical perspective to differing views on a topic is key to developing such skills in students. It is the

approach of the researcher, seeking to test a claim, a hypothesis, an assertion, a policy statement from a politician claiming to pursue evidence based policy (another fiction). Equally, I encourage students to pursue a topic by a critical literature review, so that research processes are part of what I teach. That develops a skill for lifelong learning, based on critical enquiry and healthy scepticism.

Let me offer one example of a researcher approach to such student approaches. I was observing a session by a new tutor – young, male – who was covering work on child development, drawing on work by the Newsomes in Nottingham. One student – mid-30s, female – commented that two of her three children fell closely into the Newsomes' typology; the third did not. She suggested reasons for this. The tutor response was to say 'Oh, that is just an anecdote; the Newsomes were presenting research'. I spoke to him afterwards about acknowledging student contributions positively, acknowledging other forms of learning and pointing out that the Newsomes' 'research' was based on a (largish) sample of 'anecdotes' of the kind he had just dismissed.

Of course, despite their rhetoric, many employers do not want challenging employees who use such skills of enquiry, critique and challenge. I once surveyed students on a postgraduate Diploma in Management Studies, sponsored in a regular block-booking by an employer with awards for employee development support – an Investor in People. I asked how far they could implement the learning from the course. Not at all, was the modal reply: there was a resistance to new, disruptive ideas. 'No new paradigms here'. So money was spent on training and development, but it was a wasted investment. The pity is that this applies to universities, too. When I explore how far they are learning organisations, staff do not score them highly – usually below the 40 per cent pass mark they apply to learners. So, research-led teaching is a dangerous myth; research fed teaching will be good. So will research-led policy... on research and teaching and assessment.

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Biography

Ian McNay is Professor Emeritus, Higher Education and Management in the School of Education & Training.

Student incentives: More than a free condom

Ben Wraith

Students' Union University of Greenwich

The University of Greenwich used to charge a £50 fine if a student failed to register before a certain deadline. Would this £50 'fine' for late registration be more effective if it was changed to a £50 'bonus' for early registration? Besides a possible increase in efficiency, could this small change bring about increased happiness both for staff, who become bonus-givers rather than fine-imposers, and students, who are confronted with pleasing bonuses rather than fines and harsh language? Simply, by reframing the proposition, we may get a very different response, as argued by Thaler and Sunstein (2008).

There are questions to be asked in other areas of the university too. Could publishing all essays raise standards? If every student was aware that their peers could browse their work, would they put extra effort in? Would this also raise standards each subsequent year, as each cohort studies the work of their predecessors and seeks to improve on it? We already seem to do this by releasing copies of previous good examples of essays and dissertations, in order to give an indication of what current students should be aiming for. In addition, perhaps it would also put an end to any accusations of favouritism aimed at lecturers.

With social norms being proven to be stronger than market norms (Ariely and Heyman, 2004), the above idea becomes more attractive. We should also consider whether some otherwise sound ideas have unintentional negative outcomes. Does the anonymous nature of electronic coursework submission hide a multitude of sins? Many companies have found that by asking employees to put their name to their work, they can swiftly raise standards. However, short of reverting to students handing work in physically to their tutors, what can we do, when electronic submission brings about so many other advantages, including protecting anonymity for marking? To simulate the act of 'signing off' the work, could we present students with a page (one step prior to upload) featuring their photo and a statement along the lines, 'I, Ben Wraith, am proud of this work, which is all my own, furthermore, I am delighted for this work to be circulated far and wide'?

Personalising a problem often helps people to empathise, a tactic used successfully in direct mail campaigns by many major charities. So, say there is an issue with students not returning library books promptly after a request by another student, would sending the borrower a photo (with permission of the requester) and a few words, a plea perhaps, boost the speed of return?

A similarly creative approach could also have been applied to tuition fees. Greenwich used to charge an amount lower than the maximum allowed. This offered possibilities; could we have rolled the

cost of freshers' week, a laptop, graduation and other things into a top-up pack? Mobile phone companies have been offering 'bolt-ons' and 'extras' for many years. Students could have added this top-up pack to their annual fee and, although they would have ended up paying the maximum fee, they would have cut down on their upfront costs whilst studying. Rolling up the cost into the fee loan would have meant lower interest rates and repayments based on the ability to pay for most students. Surely better than putting it all on a credit card? The university could have considered it a higher education version of a loss leader. By ensuring that many costs were rolled up early in the academic year, the effect could have been that fewer students experienced financial difficulties later in the year. By reducing this often negative impact on academic performance, the cost of setting up the scheme could have been attractive? i.e. fewer students dropping out and/or improved results.

Also of interest in the above scenario is how relativity (in a marketing sense) would impact on prospective students. The mere presence of a higher priced option (tuition fee plus top-up) could make the lower price option (tuition fee, no top-up or cheaper top-up) more attractive. In the same way, restaurants often use a higher price starter to encourage patrons to purchase the second highest priced dish – and often the dish with the highest profit margin (Ariely, 2008).

The important thing to recognise is that we can alter some of the more traditional methods of higher education to improve them. By borrowing the underlying principles of clever ideas from restaurants, smoothie makers, charities etc. we can improve on sector-based benchmarking, by comparing our problems and solutions to more than just fellow higher education institutions. Some may find any moves to ape the commercial world worrying in a climate of commercialising education, but it is the techniques that we should borrow and not the underlying aim. If our purpose is to expand opportunities for students to access and gain a high-quality education, then we should have nothing to fear when borrowing the tools we need to achieve it.

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Biography

Ben Wraith is Activities & Welfare Manager for the Students' Union University of Greenwich (SUUG).

Tribute to triplets: A model for successful group work

Noel-Ann Bradshaw

School of Computing & Mathematical Sciences

Mention group work to a class of students and an audible groan ripples around the room. Nevertheless, according to Johnson and Johnson (1989) ‘learning to work together in a group will influence one’s employability, productivity and career success’; students learn the importance of communication, collaboration, cooperation, and compromise (Katzenbach, 1997); and we prefer to mark twelve assignments rather than seventy. However, what of the downsides; the groups that fall apart, the students that complain bitterly about their peers, those who don’t participate? The list could go on and on, and I am sure the students could add far more to the negatives than to the positives.

Key factors influencing the failure or success of a group assignment are the group dynamics and the initial group allocation. As a student myself, I experienced various models but none of them appeared to work particularly well, at least not in terms of student satisfaction. Sometimes students are encouraged to choose their own groups but that may leave a significant few without a group – maybe those who have had personal problems and most need support, or those who might be perceived as hard to work with. The result is that these individuals find themselves in the same group and, without strong leadership, this group achieves little. An alternative is for the lecturer to assign groups randomly (Hernandez, 2002). This does not go down well with students, especially if they have a choice of topics to select from; ‘I can’t work with them. I want to do a statistics project but they want to do programming’. In all cases, students feel that group allocation advantages some and disadvantages others. What does the lecturer do in the face of this opposition, especially when research offers little by way of guidance as to a preferred method to adopt (Chapman *et al.*, 2006)?

Having experienced these models as a student, and having complained bitterly about them at the time, I was keen to do better when my own chance came to design a new course with a substantial group project element. I wanted my students’ experience to be positive and different and for them to work effectively as groups. Above all, I wanted the group work to be fair to the students regardless of background, whilst providing them with a valuable lesson about working with others. Employers want graduates that are good team players, have excellent communication skills and work well as a group (CBI, 2008). Apparently, this is particularly the case for maths graduates who have a reputation for lacking these skills – although I can’t imagine why!

My course assignment required groups to choose a mathematical area such as history of mathematics, quantum mechanics or financial mathematics, to research and then produce a written report and give a group presentation. We had a class of 80 first-year maths students from

varied backgrounds. Once the students realised group work was on the agenda, they pestered me frequently, asking who would be in their groups and saying things like; 'I don't want anyone in my group who won't pull their weight'. The pressure was on.

After the statutory sleepless nights, I came up with what I thought, and still think, was an excellent solution. I asked the students to form groups of three. Each of these triplets was required to decide on an area of maths they wanted to study and send me an e-mail with their names and a choice of three topics. One problem was that, although I had explained this in some detail in class, on the university student intranet and by e-mail, some students did not seem to use any of these forms of communication. However, the majority of students successfully followed the instructions. To each threesome, I then added three more who were either themselves a threesome or who hadn't responded. This was done with respect to ability, friendship groups and preferred topics. This method is similar to one proposed by Mahenthiran and Rouse (2000), who found that student satisfaction and grades improved when students were paired before being allocated to groups.

I appointed one member of each group to act as the contact person with whom I communicated. I chose this person purely on the basis of whether they were reliable at answering e-mails and were generally good communicators, as I felt this was essential for group cohesion. I gave this person a list of their group with their university e-mail addresses. The idea was that now each group of six would come up with a working title for their group, assign the work to each group member and just get on with it. Perfect! There were enough committed people in each group to make it work and so the members would only need to chase a couple of students. In the case where groups were unable to resolve differences, these would then be referred to me.

So did it work? At the time of writing initial indications and feedback are very positive. Those group presentations I have seen have been excellent and these were not only from the groups that I expected to do well. A major benefit has been that students who were less engaged in their studies have been placed in groups with motivated peers, who encourage them to perform. Previously, these students might have ended up in a group on their own and achieved very little, but now they are being challenged and stretched. Another benefit is that some students, who might have been intolerant of other students' weaknesses, are now in a better position to understand that others have genuine difficulties and are legitimately not always able to attend class.

Did anything go wrong? I have to admit that one group came unstuck, but this was due to unforeseeable, personal problems affecting all but one of the core people in the group. However, on the positive side, several groups contained students who hadn't spoken to each other before, and this has been very beneficial in helping the group dynamics of the cohort as a whole, without them feeling that the process was unfair. The inevitable problems that arose were overcome largely without the need for my intervention and will provide valuable experience for students to talk about at job interviews. Students' feedback has suggested that, unusually for group work, the allocation of members to groups was seen as fair to all in the class. Most of these students will have to do a significant piece of group work in their final year. This, I hope, will have been a good preparation for them.

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Biography

Noel-Ann Bradshaw is a lecturer in mathematics in the School of Computing & Mathematical Sciences.

The Parrot Brief: A drawing guide for first-year architecture students

Adriana Cobo

School of Architecture & Construction

Description

The Parrot Brief is an audio drawing guide for first-year architecture students, devised in MP3 format, which received university learning and teaching innovation funding. It is downloadable from the School of Architecture's digital studio, and also available for loan in the Avery Hill library. The guide can be played over and over again, repeating the same text as many times as the user requests, hence the name the Parrot Brief.

Taking advantage of the fact that the students of today are used to carrying portable, personal electronic devices (iPods and sophisticated mobile phones with various sound and image applications), the drawing guide is intended to be a personal companion. The Parrot Brief allows students to replay the content as many times as needed, anytime, anyplace; it complements printed studio briefs (environmentally unfriendly and frequently lost) and studio tutorial sessions. Aimed at improving stage one architecture students' observational drawing skills through sketching, the Parrot Brief is intended to enhance teaching and support the design process through formative sketchbook work. It focuses on enabling students to produce successful year one architectural drawings.

Teaching context

Within the teaching and learning context of the classroom or design studio, observational drawing is usually left to field trips or dedicated, outdoor drawing sessions. These need to be carefully scheduled with students working together in a group, usually with one tutor and 10 to 20 students. With an MP3 audio guide, observational drawing can be taught outside the classroom. The personal aspects of drawing are supported – students decide themselves when and where to go, and how to use the guide – leading to a higher degree of commitment and concentration.

There are, however, difficulties in teaching using recorded, standardised instructions and guiding someone through a highly, personal, individual task such as drawing. When drawing we aim to communicate our individual expression or style and this can be difficult to achieve if the instructions are too prescribed. As opposed to one-to-one tutorials, where the tutor is giving comments to several students and therefore spending only a few minutes with each person, the audio guide's tutoring voice accompanies the user throughout the whole process of making a drawing. The vocal delivery of the recorded instructions is therefore important, with a playful approach easing the tension for the student, between following instructions and drawing freely.

In their book *Drawing for the Artistically Undiscovered*, Quentin Blake and John Cassidy (1999) state that the intention of the book is to provide readers with the tools for expressing originally and uniquely their 'you-ness'. They propose celebrating mistakes (often feared by a person who wants to start drawing) and provide pencils without erasers to accompany the book. It is important to consider some differences between drawing in architecture (the Parrot Brief is specifically about drawing buildings) and art, the subject of Blake and Cassidy's book. When drawing architecture, there are specific factors to consider, size, proportion, context and fixedness. Drawing people, animals or nature (some of the subjects from Blake and Cassidy's book) calls for a different approach. Capturing the 'soul' of a building or place through drawing may be a harder task than doing the same with animated subjects. If one looks at an architect's sketchbooks and drawings, such as Aldo Rossi's, one discovers powerful renderings of cities and buildings, which reflect personal beliefs and memories. Rossi believed cities were accumulations of personal stories, structures made through fragmented memories and unpredictable events, and this is what he drew throughout his life. Rossi mixed childhood images and personal objects with existing buildings and projects, re-interpreting real views of buildings, places and cities while transforming them into half-fictional, half-real images. His projects, both constructed and not, reflect this combination.

I believe achieving a balance between 'fun' learning experiences, while delivering lasting, essential skills, is at the core of any teaching methodology (and of any tutor's thoughts) and is a difficult task to achieve. I consider this audio guide to be one step on my own journey as a tutor, exploring new techniques and enhancing both my teaching and my students' learning.

Making the guide: Analysis of the process

I started by doing four drawings myself in order to decode the techniques that I use when drawing. These internal reflections formed the basis of a script for the audio guide which then takes students through the same four drawings. Decoding my own drawing and sketching techniques proved a challenging experience, since it involved me recording a step-by-step process describing the way that I draw (a process that by now has become mostly automatic). However, this was essential in designing a guide that could be used without the direct assistance of a tutor.

Usually, drawing subjects involves a great deal of direct tutoring. It includes monitoring students while they are drawing and commenting on their results right after their drawings are finished. Sometimes students are asked to sketch a view or make drawings of specific subjects as homework and feedback is given through tutorials, with the purpose of developing subsequent drawings. All these techniques involve a learning process based on trial and error, where the students themselves discover techniques, as they practice drawing at home or during monitored, drawing sessions. These teaching methods effectively promote 'individual expression' and result in unique drawings. As with any audio guide, the tutor is 'replaced' by a recorded voice so her/his role as a witness of a student's drawing process is removed. Therefore, a prescribed set of instructions to be used by anyone in exactly the same way could conflict with students developing their own style. The advantage however, is that the guide represents a half-hour monitored process for each drawing with each student, something which is almost impossible when working with tutorial groups larger than twelve students (equating to six hours of tutorial time per drawing).

Feedback

The guide was made during the academic year and two of the exercises were tested at the end of it by a group of five people, including students and practitioners. The students who tested the guide were already at the end of the first year of their BA programme so its effectiveness for new students, with little experience of drawing architecture, is difficult to assess. Most of the volunteers commented on the guide being prescriptive and said that it prevented them from doing 'their own drawing'. Interestingly enough, when looking at the results, each drawing was very different from any other, even drawings of the same view. All of the drawings showed fine proportions, good size and scale. This proved that it is possible to use the guide as personal tool without producing standardized results. The feedback that I obtained from the volunteers was more useful for adjusting the tone of the guide than for the content on drawing techniques.

The feedback also touched on questions of whether digital briefs could replace traditional tutoring, or act as a useful complement for direct contact time. A combination of both teaching methodologies is the ideal and I believe that the guide is a tool that enhances face-to-face tutorials.

Sample drawings

London is an endless architectural resource. The guide uses some of the city's iconic locations to take students through the joy of drawing, some results of which are presented here.

These drawings are reproduced with special thanks to my colleagues Elinor Stewart and Alys Williams, and first-year students Ahammed Hussein and Neal Fairman, who volunteered their time and valuable feedback after testing the guide.

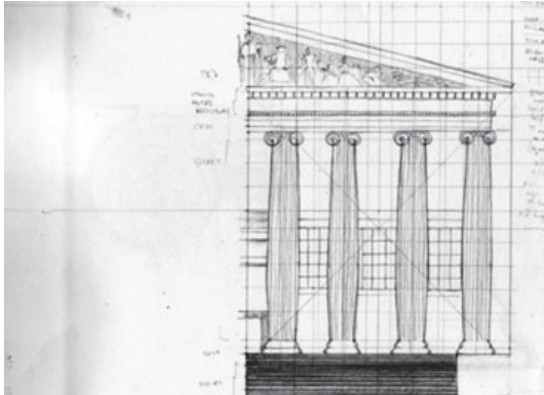
The British Museum, South Portico



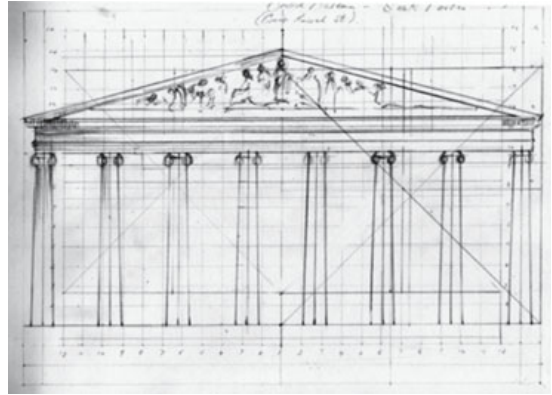
By Adriana Cobo



By Alys Williams

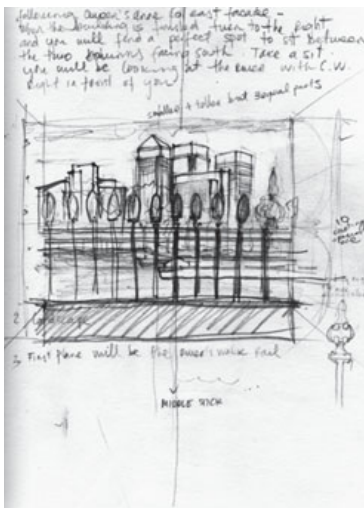


By Ahammed Hussein

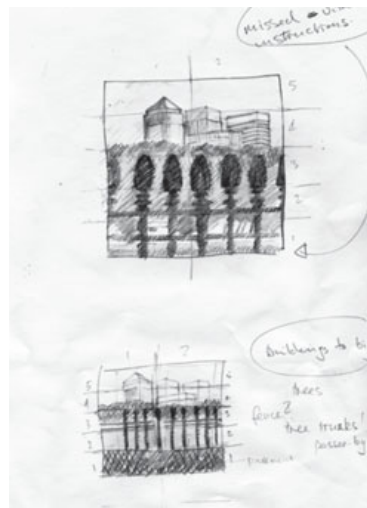


By Neal Fairman

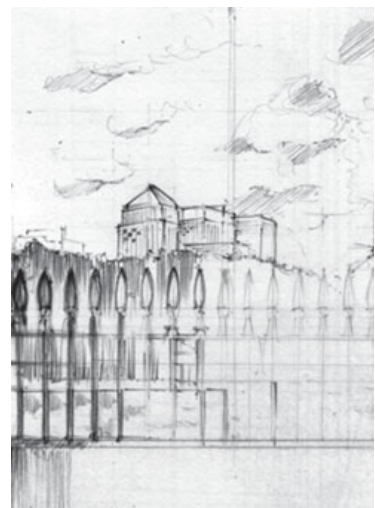
The Canary Wharf skyline



By Adriana Cobo



By Elinor Stewart



By Neal Fairman

Conclusions

Drawing is the architect's main tool for representing ideas and as such is a key skill to develop from the beginning of an architecture degree. Architects design through drawing. All buildings and projects start as sketches. Learning how to draw requires ongoing practice and a great deal of time. New students need to be taught how to represent what they see. To observe space, buildings and objects is the first step towards learning how to draw. Looking at things with an 'architect's eye' is key for achieving representational skills. Guided observation and constant repetition are important tutoring tools, especially throughout the first stages of the learning process.

Tutorial time is never sufficient, particularly when it comes to teaching drawing, so the guide is intended to contribute additional tutorial time for observational drawing and is to be used freely by students. Drawing is equally a skill that can be taught, but is also an individual discovery. The Parrot Brief addresses both.

General reflections on methodology

The introduction of new ways of teaching using blended forms of learning does cause some concerns:

- Does basing the guide on a set of prescribed, precise instructions from a single tutor work against individual expression?
- Does the more traditional ‘trial and error’ methodology, based on a high level of tutor contact time, achieve better results in the long run?
- Are these questions relevant to other professional disciplines which are not design-related?

When presenting the guide at last year’s Engaging Students Annual Learning and Teaching Conference 2009 at the University of Greenwich, to a group of colleagues from different Schools, I discovered similarities with staff teaching first-year undergraduates in law. In the case of law, steps for analysing a law case are given to students in the form of printed briefs. Using these, students develop their own views. This was a pleasant surprise and it raised the possibility of employing an audio guide as a teaching methodology for non-design related disciplines. In the case of law, some essential steps for analysing a law case are given to students in the form of printed briefs. Using these, students develop their own views. Similarly, podcasting for understanding and decoding a poem could become a tool for teaching English, basic steps for studying body structures could become a tool for teaching forensic science or anatomy, and so on...

In general, although my background is in a discipline which incentivises individual creativity, I have seen how a prescribed structure for performing a task yields interesting results, especially in the early stages of learning.

Where to find the guide

Please visit www.digitalstudio.gre.ac.uk. Or go to the Avery Hill library and ask for the Parrot Brief.

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Biography

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Teaching information skills for legal method

Sarah Crofts

Information & Library Services

I have been involved with teaching information skills as part of the Law Department's 1st year Legal Method course since 2000. These sessions have developed from a set of half hour sessions offered on a drop-in basis in 2000, to the current format of four seminars of an hour each. The four seminars deal with searching the library catalogue; searching the law databases for cases and statutes; searching for journal articles; and finding and evaluating material for law on the free internet.

There are 10 seminar groups for Legal Method so each library seminar is delivered 10 times in the week. The aim of this article is to provide a snapshot of the seminars on journals from January 2009, which I hope will prove interesting to colleagues as an example of services provided by the academic services librarians.

Resources used

I have been using WebCT to provide blended learning since 2005 and for workshops I tend to use a mix of PowerPoint presentation, WebCT tools such as quizzes, self-tests and discussion lists, as well as discussion and hands-on searching. I also include material in the WebCT Legal Method course to which students can return later if they wish.

One advantage of using the WebCT tools is that students are more easily engaged by activities such as the quizzes. The main disadvantage is in the reliability of the system, which is why I find it invaluable to have a PowerPoint presentation ready to use in the event of the internet being unavailable. The first seminar group is at 9am on a Monday morning and occasionally the internet, portal and WebCT have not been available.

Programme for the Journals Seminar

The programme consisted of the following:

What are journals?

This was a short discussion in which I asked students for their ideas as to why journals might be useful in addition to books. Although some groups were more forthcoming than others, most came up with at least two key reasons for using journals, such as currency and their importance as a means of disseminating research. After the seminars, I summarised these contributions and added them to WebCT for the students to refer to again if they wished.

Understanding citations and legal abbreviations

This was an explanation of how citations are formulated with some examples of different styles. Law students face the additional challenge of having to decipher legal abbreviations so that they can search for the item. Some of these abbreviations are very similar and therefore, a perennial cause of confusion, for example: 'Med LR' is the *Medical Law Reports* but 'Med.LRev.' is the *Medical Law Review*. Most students find this aspect of legal research rather boring, but I hoped that the online test would help make the topic more interesting, as well as providing an opportunity to practice searching for abbreviations. For this quiz, I used a WebCT 'short answer' self-test with unlimited duration together with the Cardiff University's Cardiff index to abbreviations tool, available at www.legalabbrevs.cardiff.ac.uk.

Searching for journals and journal articles

During this part of the session, I reminded students how to search for journals on the library catalogue, as this is an area which often causes confusion – students often try to search by *article* title rather than by *journal* title. Another online quiz followed to test the students' understanding for which I used a WebCT 'fill in the blank' self-test.

Planning the search

During this part of the seminar, I gave students hints for planning their search. This covered concepts such as: analysing the question or topic to pick out key words, how to broaden or narrow the search, using connectors. Most students use search engines such as Google where any type of search will produce results; the library databases to which we have access require a structured approach and it can be quite challenging explaining the significance of this to students (see 'Challenges and problems').

Practical search

For the final part of the seminar students had the opportunity to search for an article for their English legal system seminar the following week. The students had to choose an article from a legal academic journal on one of the following topics: religious freedom, the Denbigh High School case or the issue of qualified rights under the European Convention of Human Rights. Having found a suitable article, the rest of the task (to be completed after the seminar) was to prepare a presentation setting out the following:

- The name of the article, the author and the citation
- A summary of the content of the article
- An explanation of the viewpoint of the author
- Whether the student agreed or disagreed with the author and the reason
- The reason why the student found the article interesting.

Despite my emphasis on the importance of using keywords and not just cutting and pasting the essay title into the database, nearly everyone did just that, so there is more work to do here! In addition to improving their search skills, this task tested the students' ability to identify articles from **academic** journals, something which we touched on in the initial 'What are journals?' discussion.

I had also prepared a third activity 'Finding an article from a reference', using the WebCT 'short answer' format. There was not enough time to include this, but it would have tested students' ability to find an article on a database given the citation.

Challenges and problems

This was the third in the series of library seminars and the size of the groups was becoming less of a problem, as the student numbers had dwindled since the previous seminars. One of the seminar groups started off at the beginning of the year with 30 plus students, but by the January seminar this had fallen to 18 students. There is room for 20 students in the room and I find that optimum group size is around 15. Students' behaviour was a problem in only one of the groups with some students who talked throughout.

As always, there were quite a range of abilities with some racing ahead on the self tests while others could not work out what to do.

Despite testing the activities beforehand, there were the inevitable few minor errors in the self-tests which I put right as the week progressed. However, as one of the tutors observed, there might well be errors in real life examples of citations.

One of the biggest challenges concerns the students' 'digital literacy'. I imagine that students' unquestioning use of Google is a challenge faced throughout the university. Although many students do not appear to have the skills to evaluate the sources retrieved from Google, it is perhaps understandable that they prefer the Google interface to many library databases and catalogues. It is beautifully simple and always provides results. A British Library/Centre for Information Behaviour and the Evaluation of Research (CIBER) report (2008) noted that many students do not find library databases easy to use and prefer the familiarity of Google.

This question of students' lack of effective search skills is an issue faced in many Schools. I wonder if there are ways in which the university community could integrate an approach that could improve students' performance of this key research skill. One approach includes the Progression in Information Skills online learning skills modules, which are available to all students and staff of the university, as well as the recently developed Progression for All, for anyone without a university user name and password, available at www.gre.ac.uk/offices/ils/ls/projects/progression.

In addition, the university has been participating in a Higher Education Change Academy project, *Developing an institutional model for embedding academic and transferable skills*, which began in April 2009. During this, a cross-university team investigated the concept of embedding these skills in university curricula. One of the benefits to students would be the development of information literacy, which provides them with the means to make appropriate judgements about the value and potential uses of different types of material and media, visit www.heacademy.ac.uk/changeacademy.

Finally, there is the issue of 'user-friendliness'. Although I have been using WebCT for some years, it now seems rather cumbersome compared with other tools and Web 2.0 resources which have appeared over the years. Students are so familiar with the look of resources such as Facebook and other social media that WebCT probably looks rather old fashioned in comparison.

Assessment

The legal method library seminars include assessments which form part of the students' overall assessment for the course. I use a mixture of WebCT multiple choice question assessments with a deadline as well as other types of assessment.

We are lucky enough to have the services of a Lexis Student Associate and a Westlaw student representative both trained and paid by LexisNexis Butterworths and Westlaw.

The Westlaw student representative offered an alternative assessment, in the form of a Westlaw session to which students were asked to sign up. WebCT does not seem to provide a tool for this, so I used the free 'We join in' tool, available at www.wejoinin.com.

Feedback

The students' learning logs included some very positive comments about the seminar as follows:

'The use of the journals that we were able to select in the class was useful as I have not seen a law journal before. I really enjoyed going through citations. It was very useful, as the citations for bibliographies and journals are completely different.'

'Before this seminar I had no clear understanding how to read a journal, to look up a journal on LexisNexis or the other websites stated in the seminar. So I felt this seminar really helped me as it has also helped me with the research for the current essay I am writing now for Foundations of Criminology.'

'I was impressed by how easy it was to find relevant sources and think that this is going to assist my studies considerably'

'This seminar was in the library as we learnt how to find journals and abbreviations, etc. It was very useful as we needed it in order to do our work for ELS'

'I find the library seminars useful. This is because we are shown how to use the online sources in order to find cases and journals. Cases and journals are essential for the other courses that we are attending. Also, when I am at home and I am unable to reach a library I feel at ease to know that I can use the online sources. Another thing that I find useful is that we are shown the correct way to input cases and how to abbreviate statutes and so on.'

Conclusion

The work I do with students is made more effective through close collaboration with, and support by, colleagues in the Law Department, who assist by suggesting topics that they will be covering in the students' other courses such as English Legal System. This ensures that the students recognise a relevance to the seminars which I hope makes it more meaningful for them.

I think it would be useful to learn more about how colleagues in other Schools integrate with their library services, and if there is scope for a cross-disciplinary approach to some of the common challenges students face in terms of information literacy. Even within Information & Library Services it can be difficult to share good practice with colleagues who are engaged in teaching students and this may also be the case for academic colleagues. A recent JISC report (2009) notes that, although

they found much good practice amongst academic and library and computing staff, 'staff are still operating in relative isolation from one another, in many cases, even within their own departments'. I have offered this case study in the hope that it might channel some discussion and debate in the university, and to start the process of sharing information beyond the 'bubble' in which we tend to operate academically.

Note

This is an example of just one information skills seminar for law. If you would like to find out more or make contact with your academic services librarian, please visit www.gre.ac.uk/offices/ils/ls/services/asl.

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Biography

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Reflective practice: The enduring influence of Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory

Paul Dennison
Business School

Since 1984 David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) has been a leading influence in the development of learner-centred pedagogy in management and business. It forms the basis of Kolb's own Learning Styles' Inventory and those of other authors including Honey and Mumford (2000). It also provides powerful underpinning for the emphasis, nay insistence, on reflection as a way of learning and the use of reflective practice in the preparation of students for business and management and other professions. In this paper, we confirm that Kolb's ELT is still the most commonly cited source used in relation to reflective practice. Kolb himself continues to propound its relevance to teaching and learning in general. However, we also review some of the criticisms that ELT has attracted over the years and advance new criticisms that challenge its relevance to higher education and its validity as a model for formal, intentional learning.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory

Kolb's ELT first appeared in his book *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (1984). This now familiar diagram (Figure 1), owes much to Lewin's 1951 model for experiential learning (Figure 2). Kolb's model captured the mood of innovation in the 1980s in management development and training and was an instant success.

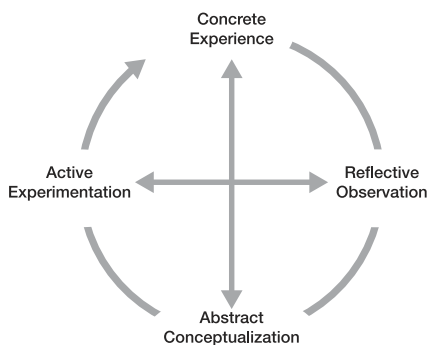


Figure 1: Kolb's ELT (1984).

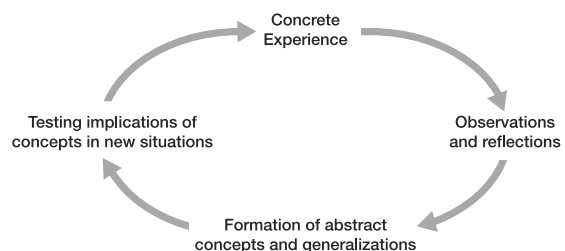


Figure 2: Lewin's Experiential Learning Model (1951).

Some of the reasons for this are:

- It appeared to be grounded in reality – it was vocational – and denied the ‘artificiality of the classroom’.
- It focused on the learner – it was learner-centred (which in 1984, made it ‘cutting-edge’).
- It advocated learning from ‘experience’ and learning by doing.
- It appeared to empower the learner, who could dispense with ‘tutor control’.
- Its model for learning mimicked true discovery, which at a stroke removed the ‘artificial’ distinction between research and learning.

That it is still widely used was, perhaps, the most striking result of the small-scale study that was one of the starting points for this paper.

The study and its findings

A pilot study of ten interviews was conducted among lecturers from three departments in the Business School, addressing the following broad areas of enquiry:

- To what extent and in which courses were students required to demonstrate reflective practice?
- Whether lecturers undertook or had undertaken written reflection themselves?
- How did students approach reflective practice? How seriously did they take it? What criteria did lecturers use to assess their reflections?
- Which authors/theories did lecturers offer students as underpinning the value of reflective practice to the practitioner?

Table 1: How students were required to demonstrate reflective practice.

Course	Programme/ stage	Referent	Guide length (words)	Weighting
Continuing Professional Development	CIPD	CPD Learning Log	4000	100%
Personal & Professional Development 2	SMS Year 2	Pieces of reflection	3 x 2000	100%
Professional Update & Development	MBA	Reflective Portfolio	8 x 500	100%
Personal & Professional Development 2	Man Year 2	Learning Journal	800	15%
Strategy	MA	Reflective Report	250	10%
Management Information Systems	Year 2	Reflective Report	500	10%
Process Control Management	Year 2	Critical Reflection	500	5%
Strat Financial Management	Year 3	Reflection on presentations	300	Part of 15%

Table 1 illustrates the degree to which reflective practice is employed in courses. Table 1 identifies two configurations: For a few courses, reflective practice formed 100 per cent of the assessment; for a larger group, it formed a minority element – less than 20 per cent.

Lecturers' own experience and use of reflective practice

Only 2 out of 10 lecturers actually undertook *written* reflective practice, although all pointed out that they were reflective in their work – and were required to be. Most had engaged in written reflective practice in their own educational history. There was an appreciation of the difficulty in assessing reflective practice; assessment was somewhat incongruous for an activity that was essentially a form of self-assessment or self-explanation. Reflective practice by its nature is personal, rather than public, and to intrude upon it for the purpose of assessment is unwelcome. On the other hand, remodelling reflective practice as 'public' for the purposes of assessment was invalid and probably self-defeating. Other authors had commented on this (Macfarlane and Gourlay, 2009).

Lecturers were in favour of retaining it, however, because they saw reflective practice as being at the heart of the concept of professionalism, which depends on 're-assessing oneself and one's work continually, habitually'.

How seriously did students take it?

Lecturers reported great variation in the way students approached the reflective task. On the CIPD programme, with its emphasis on a reflective culture, students took it very seriously indeed, but elsewhere only a minority (<10 per cent) of students did more than follow instructions in a formulaic way. Students from other cultures found it very difficult to understand.

Criteria for assessment

There was a corresponding divergence in grading criteria: reflective practice was often linked to other skills development and reflection was expected to focus on the developmental process. Lecturers looked for openness – admission of error, doubt or difficulty – self-awareness, insight into others – group dynamics and interactions – authenticity. Some lecturers had more developed expectations: One looked for 'enthusiasm, opinions and openness – the triangulation between these'; another identified a three stage model – 1. Simple description, 2. Relating present experience to previous experiences, 3. Identifying learning and how to use it in the future.

Authors cited in support of reflective practice

The most commonly cited author on reflective practice was David A. Kolb (1984), whose Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), was mentioned by 6 out of 10 of respondents, followed by Donald A. Schön's Reflective Practitioner (1983) with 4 out of 10. Other sources were much less well known (Cowan, 1998; Lewin, 1951) and the Johari Window (Luft and Ingham, 1955). Some textbooks treated reflective practice seriously (Cottrell, Megginson and Whitaker, 2007) and at least one internet site was used (Institute of Reflective Practice, 2003).

Kolb's relevance today

Twenty-five years later, my small-scale study reveals that Kolb's ELT is still regarded as relevant and influential by a substantial number – perhaps even the majority – of lecturers in business and management. His influence lives on and, although his exposition of ELT has migrated somewhat

from the original experiential purity of 1984, he is still adding to the literature surrounding the model (Kolb and Kolb, 1999; 2005; 2008; Kolb and Boyatzis, 2000). Indeed there is something of an industry built around the concepts of ELT – the International Consortium for Experiential Learning lists 19 other organisations – available at www.icel.org.uk.

ELT has not gone unchallenged over those twenty-five years. Several authors, including Kolb himself (1999), have published compilations of criticisms (see <http://reviewing.co.uk/research/experiential.learning.htm#21>).

Smith, for instance, (2001) grouped critiques of Kolb's ELT under six key issues:

1. It pays insufficient attention to the process of reflection (see Boud *et al.*, 1985).
2. The claims made for the four different learning styles are extravagant (Jarvis 1987; Tennant, 1997).
3. The model takes very little account of different cultural experiences/conditions (Anderson, 1988).
4. The idea of stages or steps does not sit well with the reality of thinking. There is a problem here – that of sequence. As Dewey (1933) has said in relation to reflection, a number of processes can occur at once, stages can be jumped. This way of presenting things is rather too neat and is simplistic.
5. Empirical support for the model is weak (Jarvis, 1987; Tennant, 1997). The initial research base was small, and there have only been a limited number of studies that have sought to test or explore the model (such as Jarvis, 1987).
6. The relationship of learning processes to knowledge is problematic (Jarvis, 1987).

Coffield *et al.*, (2004, p. 69), in their authoritative, critical review of learning styles and pedagogy in post-16 learning, dismissed ELT as the theoretical underpinning for Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory (LSI) with the remark 'the notion of a learning cycle may be seriously flawed'.

New criticisms of ELT

The context that suggests itself as one in which experiential learning is most likely to thrive is that of sport. Here is an arena where learning by doing is the norm, where the 'artificiality' of the classroom is acknowledged, where learning is learner-centred. It is also an arena where success in learning is instantly recognisable by success in competition; there is no need for assessment and evaluation of methods – the results of competition speak for themselves.

When this specific context is examined, what do we find? Serious sporting development is dominated by trainers – teachers. No serious sportsperson would begin development without one.

One role of the sports trainer is to provide informed feedback – the external view – to the sportsperson, so necessary if they are to improve. A yet more crucial role is the setting of a training agenda – showing the sportsperson what is involved in the process of learning to win. Both these roles are completely ignored by ELT, where presumably the trainer is merely part of the learning environment. ELT appears to advocate learner-centred sporting development by 'trial-and-error', which is slow and inefficient.

Dick Fosbury won the gold medal for high jump in the Olympics of 1968. It was the triumphant culmination of years of struggle to invent, perfect and get his 'Fosbury flop' technique accepted. That process was one of true discovery – difficult, lonely, uncertain. Today's high-jumper learns the Fosbury Flop much more quickly – it is neither difficult, nor lonely, nor uncertain. Their learning process is a pale shadow of the process of true discovery that Dick Fosbury went through. Now, it may well be that Dick Fosbury 'learned' – that is to say invented – his new technique by following something like ELT. The high jumpers that follow him do not.

Might it not be that Kolb's ELT is describing not learning but discovery? By designing learning situations with only the assumptions of a discovery situation, we are ignoring the advantages to the learning situation supplied by the teacher or trainer, those of:

- Setting the learning agenda
- Providing efficient feedback to the learner
- Giving an expert perspective on the learning situation.

These three advantages are crucial to success in 'formal intended learning situations' (Jarvis, 2004), the kind we commonly refer to collectively as higher education.

Conclusions

David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory survives as a powerful influence in business and management, despite years of criticism and, among other things, is still the most commonly cited source justifying the use of reflective practice. Consideration of how learning takes place in the sporting arena – in particular the importance of a trainer/coach and crucial difference between learning and true discovery – suggests that ELT is not a useful model for higher education, that its attractions (learner-centredness, grounded in 'reality', the need for a teacher down-graded) are partly illusory. Learning is and needs to be, far more efficient than true discovery. The person of a teacher/trainer is central to this gain in efficiency by providing the agenda, the feedback and guidance, and another perspective to the learning situation.

The use of reflective practice for the purposes of assessment is widespread in business and management courses, but this brings problems. Lecturers find it difficult to assess and students find it difficult to undertake in an assessed context. Despite this, reflective practice is felt to be valuable because of the professionalism it instils. In the current culture, it is argued that the only way to 'drive' reflective practice is to assess it; if so, then perhaps there is something amiss in the current culture.

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Biography

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Higher than what?

Patrick Ainley

School of Education & Training

Introduction

With its world heritage site Greenwich can potentially create a university that combines the best of the old with something new. That this does not happen automatically shows that the French sociologist of education, Pierre Bourdieu, was wrong in his contention that higher education is all form and no substance. But what is the substance of 'higher' learning? *Higher than what? Further than where?* as Sir Toby Weaver, author of our 1965 Woolwich Polytechnic speech, asked.

Some would answer that higher education's (HE) 'higherness' comes from specialisation but this is also the case in further education (FE). Others would assert academic freedom allows HE teachers to set their own courses linked to their research interests. However, although there is not (yet) a National Curriculum for HE, many programmes of study have long been agreed with professional bodies. And in an institution where the main activity of most staff is teaching or supporting teaching, research and scholarship exist, we admit, only in 'pockets'. So this is not distinctive either. Therefore, when we are pushed to characterise 'higherness', we fall back on what we often look for in student assignments: A critical analysis of the information required. This is seen as 'deep' rather than 'surface' knowledge. Yet these tacit notions are often confused so that we know them when we see them but find them hard to justify explicitly. This contribution to Greenwich's new pedagogic journal seeks to do this as simply as possible in the interests of stimulating debate and innovation.

Academic higher education

Academics typically elicit metaphors of an ideal HE, 'above' or 'higher' but definitely 'apart from' the rest of society. This provides an independent space in which ideas can be tested in argument and by experiment. For its student apprentices, HE is seen to provide the conceptual tools to question received ideas and test their own claims to truth against the relevant criteria of their particular subject, whether through scientific experiment, logical proof, scholarly or more directly social research, technical practice or artistic creation.

Students then graduate to mastery of their respective disciplines, or to areas of practice in which they are able to defend, in the wider world, the conclusions they have arrived at in discussion with the community of scholars that includes their teachers. Such discussion is encouraged by teachers, who themselves learn from representing their understandings based upon research in the subject community to which they belong.

Many programmes of study in HE are based on this implicit model. Students are presented with the received ideas of the canon as conceptual tools with which to order the information base of their subject discipline or area of practice. They are, thus, not in a position to produce academically

acceptable work until they have 'received' the knowledge of the masters. This is not knowledge of everything, but of the rules by which everything that is known about a given field can be acquired and ordered. This 'key knowledge' (not 'skills') is what Cardinal Newman called 'knowledge of the relative disposition of things', the lack of which, he wrote, 'is the state of slaves and children' (1943, p. 113).

Newman could have added women and the working class of his day to those lacking this knowledge, even though they might have seen things differently. The class division between the professions associated with HE and the trades associated with FE is one of the many things that have changed in modern society. The idea that universities prepare an educated elite for leadership is no longer sustainable. Yet, competition in the examination of levels of literacy as proxies for what Bourdieu called 'cultural capital' (itself a proxy for money capital) has become intense. Competition starts earlier and goes on longer, with the result that the traditional selectivity of English education now stretches from primary to postgraduate schools. In this selective system, the majority are failed at every fence and made to feel they are failures.

As Michael Young predicted in his 1958 satire on the 11+ 'IQ' test, the result is:

'there has never been such gross over-simplification as in modern Britain. Since the country is dedicated to the one over-riding purpose of economic expansion, people are judged according to the single test of how much they increase production, or the knowledge that will, directly or indirectly, lead to that consummation... The ability to raise production, directly or indirectly, is known as 'intelligence': This iron measure is the judgement of society upon its members.' (pp. 134–5).

A footnote reveals Young's real view:

'that it is the very complication of modern society which demands the sort of basic intelligence that can speedily relate one part of a complex whole to another.' (p. 160).

Alternatives to academicism

Alternatives to traditional disciplinary academic specialisation, which is paradoxically supposed to provide generalised managerial knowledge, have been extinguished with the dominance of a subject-centred National Curriculum in schools and the imitation of the pre-existing university model by renamed polytechnics. Nevertheless, teachers in all HE institutions continue their mission impossible to widen participation whilst maintaining quality on a reduced unit of resource.

So, rather than seeking to perpetuate traditional academic approaches, why do we not try to do something different? As Dame Ruth Silver, ex-principal of one of our partner colleges, Lewisham, suggested five years ago, at the same time as Greenwich and Goldsmiths' students 'aim higher', why should they not also go further by attending their universities' partner colleges to acquire the practical competences employers always complain are missing in graduates who have only theoretical 'book knowledge' without practical application. This would combine 'higher' with 'further', education with training and 'deep' with 'surface' learning, or theory with practice. What Silver called 'thick HE' would thus unite practical competence with generalised knowledge. Unfortunately the idea never caught on!

However, this is the way to think about 'employability', for instance. Students outwith the charmed circle of the magic five top universities to which the big banks now reportedly restrict their choice of recruits, have to convince remaining employers that, while their abstract 'book knowledge' may not be expressed with the elegance of technical and largely literary exercises of the traditional type, their practical experience has given them the 'nous' to put that theory into practice. In the long term however, the crisis of legitimacy for a competitive education system undermined by recession, calls into question the continuing separation of the academic from the vocational (as in the latest diploma qualifications, for instance) and demands the integration of generalised knowledge with skill and competence.

One response might be a foundation year for all undergraduates as in Scotland, were it not for the fact that rising fees mean more expense for students. As Graff writes of the USA, "“first year experience” courses... need to go beyond teaching study skills, time-management, using computers, and test-taking to give students more help in entering the academic culture of arguments and ideas." (2003, p.12) Why not use the anticipated fee revision to admit that most of our nominally full-time students are actually part-time and provide part-time courses costed and paced accordingly?

Living at home whilst studying also reduces the intensity of traditionally compressed 3-year subject degree courses. Alongside 'standards-based' vocational courses on which skill is confined to competence and knowledge to information, this all makes large parts of HE more like FE. This is not to disparage FE, but to take the opportunity to complement academic courses with practical placements and training in the poly-technical generic competences required across the range of available employment (so-called 'personal and transferable skills'). It also recognises that you cannot have education without training (though you can have training without education). Real craft and professional skills can be cultivated in FE and HE, alongside the generalised knowledge imparted by HE no longer restricted to its academic (largely literary) form.

Above all, educational community should be preserved in the dialogue of teachers with students. We also need dialogue and debate amongst staff across disciplines, while being open to revision of our preconceptions and practices – just as the traditional notion of HE expects students to be (above). Then we would not accept at face value such current pedagogical fads as 'learning styles' and 'emotional intelligence'. Hopefully this journal will contribute to this process.

No magic bullets

There has already been too great an expectation that the expansion of HE can change society on its own. So, while not abandoning the transformative aspiration of education, we have to be realistic about its prospects at the close of the economic period in which most of our students grew up. Between 1986 'Big Bang' and 2008's 'Big Crunch', several things happened at once and these need to be appreciated to set the framework for discussion:

- **A reformation of social class** to which expanded education and training has contributed. Until the late 1970s, many left school at 15/16 followed by apprenticeships for some (mainly young men). This may have represented 'jobs without education' but associated cultural conceptions of skill have been largely lost in what has become life-long learning (instead of lifelong earning, again for men at least). The division of labour and knowledge between working-class manual and

middle-class mental labour has been eroded by the growth of services and the application of new technology, which has been used to automate and outsource formerly skilled work, while the 'unskilled' or 'rough' section of the traditionally manually working class has been relegated to so-called 'underclass' status. Meanwhile, processes of deskilling formerly applied to skilled manual workers are now reaching up the new 'respectable' working-middle of society to reduce many former-professions to the level of waged labour. Thus, for example, widening participation to higher education has been presented as the professionalisation of the proletariat while arguably disguising an actual proletarianisation of the professions, including notably the academic profession. There is an important gender dimension to this complicated situation.

- **A new competitive state has replaced the old welfare state.** In the administration of this 'post-welfare state', power contracts to the centre as responsibility is contracted out to individual agents (institutions or individuals) for delivery. In education, this has turned a national system locally administered into a national system nationally administered. Despite recent calls for international Keynesianism, the new competitive system remains in place so that its individually competing institutions – such as schools, colleges and universities – still depend upon centralised contract funding in the new marketplace for students and research. This has fuelled increasing student numbers without always enabling sufficient support for it.
- **Young people are over-schooled and under-educated,** well described by a University of Greenwich Education Studies undergraduate in his final year inquiry project in 2004:

'Students learn to connect their self esteem and what they may achieve in later life to their exam results... Over-assessment has made subject knowledge and understanding a thing of the past as students are put through a routine year after year, practising what exactly to write and where in preparation for exams'.
- **The application of new ICT to education has facilitated a culture of cutting, pasting and plagiarising.** Despite the access to information which this has afforded, in many cases, as Wolf writes: 'These students are not illiterate but they may never become true expert readers' and their 'false sense of knowing may distract them from a deeper development of their intellectual potential.' (2008, 225 and 226; see also CIBER, 2008) **The massification of popular culture** has added to the overwhelming of intellect by information.

Conclusion

To indicate the wider context of so-called 'dumbing down' above goes beyond the knee-jerk academic reaction of more selective examination. Instead, FE and HE together give those failed by over-schooling an entitlement to overcome their under-education. But we cannot do so by offering more of the same. More means different, as used to be said. Just how different is a matter for debate in the pages of this journal and elsewhere on a campus which can live up to its heritage status by creating a community of students and teachers aiming higher whilst going further.

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Biography

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The Gonzo lecture: Counterculture in the classroom

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Abstract

This paper argues that certain university teachers consciously struggle against authoritarian oppression in their jobs and that the emergence of a countercultural teaching communication, in the form of a 'gonzo' style, is one inevitable development. The author proposes 'The Gonzo Lecture' in the light of this style's reported origins, etymology, development and diverse, present-day expressions. Suggestions are made for its potential research and operationalisation.

Introduction

Gonzo journalism was conceived by Hunter S. Thompson and its style was subsequently developed into a form of counter-culture by him and his companion, Oscar Zeta Acosta. Since then, gonzo has emerged as a style of creative expression in many diverse media. However, though the university lecture would seem highly suitable for the adaptation of this style, there has been no clear academic construct yet proposed. To further complicate this task, various adaptations called 'gonzo', which often promote aspects of counter-culture, do not otherwise clearly resemble this form of new journalism's characteristics and objectives.

The aim of this paper is to propose the elements of a gonzo style of education in the context of the supporting theoretical literature. In order that a gonzo style as applied to education might be measured and evaluated, it is proposed that it is first clearly defined, with reference to its likely origins, literary style and philosophy. Its proposed application as a communication style and a tool of critical pedagogy can then be outlined. This also requires the demystification of some of the main misconceptions of the style in the light of recent, supporting literature.

Origins and definition of gonzo

Hirst (2004) observed that though the first use of the term 'gonzo' is clear, its origin and precise meaning is not. Bill Cardoso first used the term to describe Hunter S. Thompson's style of journalism. Though Hirst cited Filatreau's (1975) rather obvious definition that gonzo simply referred to the journalistic style of Hunter S. Thompson, he also added that 'gonzo' was a term used among the Boston Irish to describe the last man standing after a drinking session. The author finally concurs with Thorne's suggestion that:

'The word itself is an adjective meaning crazy or extremist and derives from a Hipster expression made up of 'gone' (as in ecstatic, uncontrolled) and an '-o' suffix (with the 'z' for

ease of pronunciation), or directly from the Italian gonzo, meaning a buffoon or simpleton (Thorne, 1994, pp. 97-98; cited by Hirst, 2004, p. 6).'

Thompson's first reference to gonzo was related to his Chicano lawyer, modelled on his real-life companion Oscar Zeta-Acosta, Dr. Gonzo in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1972). The term 'gonzo' according to Carroll (1993; cited in Hirst, 2004) was first found in a letter by journalist Bill Cardoso as the first, formal recognition of Thompson's journalistic style, which used the first person narrative to convey factual information, and included the writer as the central actor in the piece. The result was a style of writing which could not be clearly categorised as either fiction or non fiction, but like new journalism in general, was more engaging for the reader than the objective, third-person perspective found in traditional media. This was developed over time by Thompson and also Acosta to incorporate other features also considered uncommon in the journalism of the time, which included profanity, humour, exaggeration and embellishments of the facts. Whilst Thompson's gonzo style was fuelled throughout by drug and alcohol use and abuse, Acosta's approach in *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* (1972) and *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* (1989), was characterised more by a rebellion against conformity to what he perceived to be an unjust political and social system. In both cases, gonzo journalism was a chaotic counter to a perceived hegemony which had resulted from a corruption of the American dream (Jiron-King, 2008).

Development of the gonzo style

Since its conception, the gonzo style has been adopted in a variety of different applications which include fiction (e.g. Acosta, 1972; 1989), marketing (Locke, 2001), sport (e.g. Merrifield, 1991), pornography (Weasels, 2008), documentary (e.g. Moore, 2002) and even theology (e.g. Goldstein, 2006). 'Gonzo pornography' according to Hirst (2004) has become the largest-selling segment of the adult entertainment industry. Despite the sub-genre's clear popularity to related fields such as marketing (Locke, 2001), there has been no specific reference made to the application of the gonzo style to education.

General characteristics of the gonzo style

Students of the gonzo journalism style generally concur that it is enigmatic, poetic, raw, and unedited. As an extreme version of new journalism style, it is journalism that can be read like a novel. Hirst (2004) used the following quote to sum up the written style:

'Gonzo can only be defined as what Hunter Thompson does...It generally consists of the fusion of reality and stark fantasy in a way that amuses the author and outrages his audience. It is point of view run wild.' (Filiatreau, 1975, cited by McKeen).

Wolfe suggested that the style came into being mainly as a product of panic, due to Thompson's renowned tendency for meeting deadlines last minute, leading often to his hurriedly compiled manuscripts being sent to his editor too late for proper review and rewriting to be effectively performed. The gonzo style is foremost recognised as being funny and popular. Thompson's writings were idiosyncratically subjective, engaging, crazy and extremist, focusing on the feelings of the writer, rather than the facts of the incident being reported. The incidents portrayed were described by Hirst as the 'legendary rendering of key moments,' (Hirst, 2004) with sharp insights and bizarre subject matter which incorporated sex and violence and satirical, wild, dark humour.

In addition to the recognition he received for his more popular, 'non-fiction' works, Thompson was also known as an outlaw journalist who, as an unconventional, confrontational hell-raiser with an addiction to danger, pursued a thrill-seeking, death-defying legacy against a corrupt system. In his best known works such as *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1972) the personal and involved accounts of the 'fictionalised' accounts of incidents that reportedly happened, were used to create a counter-culture, which was designed to overthrow not only the oppressive, established culture, but also the counter-culture initially brought in to replace it. Jiron-King also recognises that Thompson with Acosta claimed that the initial counter-culture had developed its own form of corruption and their writings were a protest against this.

The application of the gonzo style to university education

There are various lines of educational enquiry related to education communication that include the use of humour, first person narrative, storytelling, language as well as the general concept of the teacher as performer. Whilst these elements certainly apply to the gonzo university lecture, there has not yet been a clear investigation into the use of the gonzo style in an educational context. This is therefore worthy of such investigation in an attempt to answer a number of key research questions, which shall be proposed later as part of this discussion.

In the light of this review of gonzo, it would be a shallow interpretation to consider the aim of the gonzo lecture to be a merely a humorous and entertaining educational presentation, or to 'beef-up' boring delivery. It would also be an error to suggest that Thompson and Acosta merely meant to promote drug and alcohol use as a method of escape from a corrupted society. Educators such as Leary (1999), though not associated with gonzo, have promoted drugs' culture to their professional detriment.

The gonzo style as a tool of critical pedagogy

The fight against 'hegemony' the dominance of one social group over others is well documented (Gramsci, 1957; 1973). Such writings maintain that a dominant class asserts its beliefs over those of others, who accept them as common sense, in return for certain benefits from the ruling class. Thus the compliance of those being ruled is essential to the relationship. Hegemony continues through ongoing struggle due to the 'common sense' of the masses being in constant flux, preventing eventual revolution by the oppressed against the oppressors. The oppressed class, subject to this social conditioning, are incapable of realising their oppression.

Government funding of British universities continues to emphasise student recruitment and course completion as a basis for awards rather than student attendance. Financial and social pressures continue to weigh heavily on students' time, availability and motivation to engage with educational processes. Educators are continually seeking new ways to engage students with subject knowledge and classroom activities. A common complaint by many academics has been that institutions recruit too many students/customers to programmes that are under resourced. To many, the resulting emphasis on quality standards, league tables and methods which have been more common in product manufacturing and consumer service industries, such as benchmarking and service blueprinting, have detracted from teachers' focus on the profession of learning and teaching. Additionally, complaints are also made regarding inadequate student engagement, lack of basic study skills and lower attendance rates.

However, students are often found to be increasingly experienced in media-awareness and consumerism, demanding greater levels of sophistication from the designed, lecture experience. Often, outdated content and an unsophisticated delivery style by lecturers, has resulted in students evaluating their overall educational experience negatively, or avoiding much of it altogether. However, often students identify with popular gonzo role models, such as the controversial television chef Gordon Ramsay, the business tycoon Alan Sugar, the cult entertainment 'guru' Simon Cowell and crazy science shows, such as Brainiac or those involving stunt performers such as 'Jackass'.

Gonzo education as experience immersion

Whilst traditional lectures involve mainly the transfer of knowledge, gonzo lectures mainly involve the transfer of experiences. This is particularly true of vocational degrees, which rely on sharing the lecturer's industrial practice as much as they do on the related underpinning theories. The gonzo lecturer as performer uses a variety of techniques to support their oratory. Whilst theoretical content is the focal point, the lecturer is constantly a part of each experiential account. An attempt is made throughout to take widely-accepted, academic underpinning theory and the actual facts of a true industry experience and embellish them with humour and exaggeration in order to convert them into an engaging experience. This is performed using personal narrative combined with a storytelling style.

Conclusion

Hunter S. Thompson once said, "when it stops being fun, then it's just wrong". However, it would be a mistake to characterise gonzo simply as funny, rather than an artistic, education, communication technique, belonging to a counterculture intended to liberate teachers from the confines of oppressive, institutional hegemony and students from a dry, often un-engaging educational communication style. A future research focus is required in order to deconstruct the gonzo experience in education, with a view to its operationalisation as a more effective teaching communication style used to promote learner engagement.

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When the shift hits the critical fan: A Foucauldian analysis

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Introduction

In the past 15 years in the UK, the state has acquired powers, which mark a qualitative shift in its relationship to higher education. Since the introduction and implementation of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998 and the Higher Education Act 2004, a whole raft of changes have occurred which include the following: Widening participation; the development of interdisciplinary, experiential and workplace-based learning focused on a theory-practice dialogue; quality assurance; and new funding models which encompass public and private partnerships. The transformation of higher education can be placed in the context of New Labour's overall strategies for overarching reform of public services, as set out in the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit's discussion paper *The UK Government's Approach to Public Service Reform* (2006).

An optimistic view of changes to higher education is that they simultaneously obey democratic and economic imperatives. There is an avowed commitment through the widening participation agenda to social inclusion and citizenship, and to providing the changing skills base necessary for the global economy. A more cynical view is that, when put under critical scrutiny, as well as being emancipatory, in some senses these changes can be seen to mobilise regulatory and disciplinary practices. This paper reflects on what kinds of teaching and learning are promoted by the new relationship between the state and the university. It argues that, whilst governmental directives for innovations and transformations in teaching and learning allegedly empower students and put their interests at the centre, reforms can also be seen to consist of supervisory and controlling mechanisms with regard both to our own practices as teachers and the knowledge/ learning we provide for the students.

Higher education as the object of government control

The Further and Higher Education Act 1992 marked a qualitative shift in the state's relationship with higher education. Writing in the immediate aftermath of the Act, Salter and Tapper (1994) point out that the accumulated powers of the state did not arrive 'out of the blue' in 1992, but emerged after the Second World War out of the ideological struggles between the economic view of higher education and the traditional, liberal ideal of the university as academically autonomous and as a site for critical thought. This conflict over the purpose and function of the university was played out over two political periods: that of the welfare state up to the 1970s and that of the Thatcher era.

Whereas the university had previously been understood as relatively autonomous, since 1992 it has been tied to the state across a whole range of issues, which ultimately involve its accountability to

the needs of the economy. As such, unlike any other historical period, the state has effected change on a vast scale and in a manner that determines the everyday practices of the academy, including teaching and learning. In describing the powers of the state, Salter and Tapper (1994) problematise simplistic conceptions of the state and argue that it does not designate a single identity, but numerous and complex organisations and institutions that make up the state apparatus. The state does not have 'a single, homogenous identity in terms of either organisation or values' (1994, p. 19). The unifying ideology of the purpose of higher education is mobilised by numerous components of the state apparatus according to the 'ability of the dominant bureaucracy... to orchestrate the actions of its different parts' (1994, p. 19).

Olssen, Codd and O'Neill (2004) extend analysis of the powers of the state to include the last decade of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, a period that witnessed the formulation and implementation of the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998 and the Higher Education Act 2004. These theorists characterise the New Labour government as neo-liberal, and as such, rather than constituting a radical shift from the previous governmental administration, the current government extends the political project of the New Right. Olssen *et al.* (2004) take up the theoretical premise elaborated above, that the state exercises an unprecedented control over the contemporary university. However, they shift the debate onto a discussion that involves political motivation for control of the university beyond the requirements of the economic and onto the governmental need for social control *per se*.

They analyse this phenomenon through the conceptual tools made available by the philosopher/social theorist Michel Foucault (1927–1984), in particular Foucault's concept of 'governmentality'. This, they argue, provides a powerful tool for understanding how higher education is tied to both politics and economics in Western liberal democratic societies, and how this is accomplished through the production of self-governing subjects who tailor their educational and life aspirations and desires to the requirements of the state.

Foucault and governmentality: The liberal democratic state

Foucault (1991) developed the neologism 'governmentality' to describe the structures of power in liberal democracies by which the conduct of individuals is orchestrated through mobilising their self-organising capacities so that individual subjects align their needs, aspirations, and hopes to the needs of the state. His aim was not to ascertain the legitimacy or illegitimacy of state power, but to understand the nature of governmental power in modern liberal democracies since the 19th century as specific forms of state 'reason', linked to technologies that exercise collective power over individuals as 'free' subjects.

In earlier work Foucault argued social control in liberal democracy takes effect through the production of individual, subjective identity around an axis of normal/abnormalcy. To be governed in a liberal democracy is to be subjected, i.e. to be turned by the apparatuses of state (and the power and knowledge relations deployed) into a particular form of subject, who imagines her/himself to be free. Foucault's argument is that we are extremely normatively disciplined in every area of existence, including our thoughts, passions and desires. This condition of normalcy is reproduced through institutions such as schools, prisons and hospitals and feels to individual subjects as natural and inevitable. In Foucault's view, subjects are never 'free' in the sense in which we understand freedom in liberal democracy, namely that as subjects we exist as autonomous individuals prior to or anterior

to the power which is exercised over us. The subject is brought into being through power relations, and the knowledges (psychology, sociology, anthropology, and economics) that are attached to them.

The later development of the concept of governmentality allowed Foucault to shift analysis from the micro-practices of education, the prison system and the health services that produce us as specific subjects, to the collective dimensions of governmental power as manifested by the modern, liberal, democratic state. As such, he provides a form of analysis that demonstrates the exercise of power within liberal democracies and allows us to see that educational and economic practices mutually condition and adapt to each other in ways that regularise and normalise individuals. This analysis is fruitful because it does not represent such processes, as in Marxist discourses, as the outcome of a necessary determination by the economic base, or describe the 'fit' between state power and the individual subject solely in terms of her/his oppression by a power imposed from 'above'.

Foucault argues that governmentality, since the growth of nascent, liberal democracies in the late 18th and 19th centuries, has involved the complex calculations, programmes, strategies, reflections and tactics by which government attempts to 'conduct the conduct' of individuals and groups of individuals in order to achieve certain ends. Increasingly, those ends are 'not just to control, subdue, discipline, normalise, or reform them, but also to make them more intelligent, wise, happy, virtuous, productive, docile, enterprising, fulfilled, self-esteeming, empowered or whatever' (Rose, 1988, p. 12).

Governmentality is not simply about control in its negative sense, but in its positive sense, in its contribution to the security and well-being of the population. Foucault poses the question of the how of liberal government – 'how to govern oneself, how to be governed, how to govern others, by whom the people will accept being governed'. Governmentality is not one homogenous or blanket mode of liberal democratic government, although it has the central, component elements described above, since it shifts according to historical and political circumstances. Olssen *et al.* (2004), argue that neo-liberalism is a reason of state that emerged in the 1980s out of an ideological and economic reaction to the welfare state and its perceived deficiencies. As such it traverses the New Right and New Labour. In the neo-liberal view, the welfare state played too great a role in relation to economic management, restricting the operations of the market and creating unnecessary inefficiencies as a result of a 'top-heavy' and cumbersome bureaucracies. It also produced individuals who were difficult to govern, ranging from those who did not take individual responsibility and were welfare dependent, through to those who were rebellious and transgressive, such as students and academics.

The state has developed a new approach to managing the economy and to the ordering of population, through the following strategies: Reformation of public administration and reduction of the size and operations of the state; governing 'from a distance' through concepts of choice, freedom, empowerment, and autonomy; inducing individuals to take responsibility for themselves at the sites of the family, education, health provision, pensions and so on. This mode of governing can be exemplified by New Labour's approach to public service reform:

'Since 1997 the government has substantially increased investment in public services... But increased spending is not enough on its own to ensure improvements. Reform is needed to improve efficiency, quality of service and the fairness of provision. The UK government's current approach to public service reform combines pressure from government (top down

performance management); pressure from citizens (choice and voice), competitive provision; and measures to build the capability and capacity of civil and public servants and central and local government.’ (Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit, 2006, p. 3).

From a Foucauldian view, the ‘empowerment’ of citizens does not make individuals free from power, but induces individuals to turn themselves into the kinds of subjects necessary for government. Thus, rather than represent a withdrawal of state power, neo-liberal strategies of government deploy a power which is increasingly pervasive since it functions to simultaneously centralise and individualise. I explore below the inherent dangers of higher education being harnessed to the interests of neo-liberal reason through the state’s re-configuration of learners, the learning environment and teachers in higher education.

Higher education: The politics of new modes of learning and the de-professionalisation of academics

Widening participation is popularly understood as greater participation in, access to and equity in the liberal democratic political framework. The distinction made between education and training in European universities (in contrast to universities in the United States of America) is now beginning to disappear. A new model of higher education knowledge is emerging: employability skills-based training; new qualification frameworks with ‘flexible pathways’ and credit transfer which provide a ‘seamlessness’ between work and education; and a push for on-going improvement of outcomes as measured by student access, participation and retention, etc.

As a result of this new configuration of the university, knowledge is increasingly evaluated for its pragmatic, utilitarian value rather than as an end in itself. Competency-based approaches to curriculum delivery and learning are driven by strong, externally defined standards that treat learning as a set of discrete outcomes which are not multi-dimensional. Changes to knowledge are driven, in part, by the needs of trans-national companies and related knowledge-based industries: Partnerships between universities and industries are being formed and carefully nurtured; the boundaries between the academy, government and business have been loosened and re-formulated; and corporate interests play a more powerful role in determining the purpose of higher education.

Greater co-ordination and co-operation between public and private institutions has resulted in new funding models for higher education and, although it is still largely dependent on state funding, the university is expected to meet the requirements of the private sector economy. There are multiple linkages between the university and the different stakeholders in the economy and since universities are framed as a source of labour market training they are being increasingly encouraged to work with industry and commerce to generate knowledge, wealth and regional and national economies.

Olssen *et al.* (2004) agree and point out that in higher education, as in the workforce more generally, neo-liberal reason involves new forms of managing students and staff. With regard to students, notions such as ‘flexibility’ are integral to neo-liberal work and management relations, and require malleable individuals who continually train and re-train to meet the continuing changes of the economic process. The notion of ‘flexibility’ redesigns skills and human capital as the personal responsibility of the individual worker, enabling the structures of both the economy and state maximum ability to accommodate change’ (2004, p. 189). Power ‘is concentrated, focused and

implemented while not appearing to be centralised. In Foucauldian terms, flexibility represents a micro-technology of power that sustains relations of governmentality' (ibid).

With regard to staff, neo-liberal governmental technologies comprise a new form of power which systematically undoes and reconstructs the practices of professionalism in higher education. Academic identity is no longer linked to one's academic discipline, but to league-table scores, quality assurance and managerialism. The irony is that whilst academics are increasingly expected to operate managerially (re-professionalisation), they are also expected to consent to being led (de-professionalisation). There are two salient features to de-professionalisation: The beginnings of removal of discretionary power with regard to pedagogy; constraints imposed on teaching practice by having to meet bureaucratic criteria imposed by quality assurance agencies such as the QAA. Whilst the rationale for externality is that it enhances quality and professionalism, the fact remains that quality assurance is the authoritative construction of norms, with limited opportunities for individuals to question their legitimacy and move beyond conventionally justified beliefs and values. Academics no longer legislate for what is correct knowledge, 'they are more likely to be interpreters of the workplace or consultants to knowledge workers such as teachers, etc' (Morely, 2003, p. 92).

Conclusion

My own view is that in the UK, there is a culture of compliance to the policy discourses of higher education, which means that I am required, like countless colleagues, to perform within regulatory frameworks. The contractual basis upon which academics are employed is premised on a need for compliance, monitoring and accountability, organised through a new form of managerialism and established through measurable outputs. Does this broaden or narrow education? Without coming to a conclusion about this, I want to shift the terms of the debate. One can see that, within the university, there is an inter-locking of the 'tutor-subject' and 'student-subject' as a local enacting of policy discourse which shifts the purpose of learning onto a different terrain than that of critical thought, which was the dominant discourse of adult education throughout most of the 20th century. Critical thinking is usually characterised as 'the process of unearthing and then researching, the assumptions one is operating under, primarily by taking different perspectives on familiar, taken-for-granted beliefs and behaviours' (Brookfield, 2005: vii-viii). Critical thinking is thus an inherently political process, one that is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain in higher education, both in oneself and in one's students.

True freedom, in the Foucauldian view, can never exist outside of power but exists in our ability as subjects to comprehend how we have been 'put together' by discursive practices, namely systems of thought to which practices are attached, so that we can resist and challenge them. The real task of scholarly critique is thus to examine those aspects of educational institutions that appear to be both neutral and independent, and to do so in such a manner that the powers that are exercised obscurely are unmasked so that we are in a position to resist them if we so choose. The freedom to resist, unlike a traditional Marxist position, does not involve globalising visions of overthrowing power, since this would be impossible, but the analysis of the micro-politics of power and how these induce us to become particular kinds of tutor-subjects and student-subjects.

As a teacher of the theory and practice of education (within schools, and further and higher education), I am placed within the governmental changes to higher education which I have to

operate and mobilise. However, I also attempt to maintain a critical distance to ensure that I am not incorporated into practices and ideologies that are in fundamental opposition to my own beliefs about the nature of scholarship and of best practice. In other words, in my teaching and in my research I take the 'new' modes of teaching and learning as an object of enquiry rather than an internalised *modus operandi*.¹

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Biography

Dr. Heather Brunskell-Evans is a senior lecturer in the Department of Education and Community Studies. She teaches on three programmes: The Doctorate in Education; Education Studies; and Childhood Studies. Her current teaching subject areas are the philosophy and sociology of education, social science research methodologies and poststructuralist theory.

¹ I am indebted to Louise Morley for drawing out similar distinctions between her own need as an academic manager and scholar for compliance with discourses of quality assurance and to take them as the object of her own, feminist theoretical enquiry. She describes her position in academia as one of 'hybridity' (2003: x).

Towards a culture of learning: A European policy perspective

Edwin Webb

School of Education & Training

Preliminary note

Two of the most important education and training policies developed (and still being developed) by the European Commission (EC) are those of the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning and a Learning Outcomes approach to the specification of learning. Both of these policies are intended to contribute to the achievement of a Lifelong Learning culture within the community. This short article is based upon a half-day training session delivered to officers of the EC (Brussels, October, 2008) and the follow-up summary paper.

Introduction

The essential context for this seminar, and the themes explored, were provided by the EC Communication, *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning* (November, 2001). Achieving the objectives of a lifelong learning policy requires the creation of 'a culture of learning' in which all forms of learning are valued:

'Creating a culture of learning requires that the question of how to value learning in formal, non-formal and informal settings, must be addressed in a coherent way. Enabling citizens to combine and build on learning from school, university, training bodies, work, leisure time and family activities presupposes that all forms of learning can be identified, assessed and recognised.'

The same EC document defines the three forms of learning in the following terms:

- Formal learning is typically provided by education or training institutions, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and leading to certification. Formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective.
- Non-formal learning is not provided by an education or training institution and typically it does not lead to certification. However, it is structured, in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view.
- Informal learning results from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured in terms of learning objectives, learning time and/or learning support. Informal learning may be intentional but in most cases, it is non-intentional (or incidental/random).

Informal learning may be more familiar to some as 'experiential learning' – learning through and from experience. The EC definitions, though, rest upon discrimination between the 'settings' within

which learning takes place, and in given instances such distinctions are arguably nominal rather than absolute. Nonetheless, the EC recognition of non-formal/informal learning, in addition to traditional formal statements of learning attainments, represented a significant policy shift in the potential value of all forms of learning. This value was further strengthened with the European Council Draft Conclusions on non-formal and informal learning (May, 2004) which set out Common European Principles 'to encourage and guide the development of high quality, trustworthy approaches and systems for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning.'

In brief, the attempt to develop a culture of learning is seen as incomplete without the acknowledgement of the value of learning derived from other than formal processes of traditional education and training. Emerging as the principal means of identifying and recognising such learning is the development of a learning outcomes approach. Here, the recent shift of language (and conception) from 'learning objectives' to 'learning outcomes' is significant. An objective indicates the point to which learning is directed; an outcome details the result of a learning process – whether or not defined in advance. The development of a learning outcomes approach to the recognition (and assessment) of learning has become seen as the answer to 'the question of how to value learning in formal, non-formal and informal settings... in a coherent way' (EC, 2001).

The recognition of non-formal/informal learning via a learning outcomes approach, if applied in practice, has considerable potential to change national approaches to education and training. Both policies take further the principled statements relating to the entitlement of the individual to engage in lifelong learning in order to pursue the objectives of 'active citizenship, personal fulfilment and social inclusion as well as employment-related aspects' (EC, 2001).

The notion of life-wide learning (EC, 2001) proposes that learning, in general terms and in vocationally-relevant ways, may result from all forms of learning (formal, non-formal, informal) – including learning embedded in social, personal, and vocational experience. The promotion of life-wide learning forms an essential drive within the practical development of lifelong learning. The recognition (which may include certification) of non-formal and informal learning is a critical process towards the implementation of life-wide learning policies. The latest Council of the European Union and Commission joint progress report (Brussels, January 2008, Annex 1) shows that the UK, whilst in the process of 'developing' such systems, does not yet have in place strategies, frameworks, validation systems or national targets for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Non-formal/informal learning

The recognition of non-formal/informal learning can serve a variety of purposes, including:

- To provide a 'second-chance' to achieve qualifications via an alternative route
- To supply a means of addressing skills shortages
- To update vocational/professional needs
- To provide qualifications in their own right or as units towards or exemptions from recognised qualifications
- To promote lifelong/life-wide learning
- To address social factors (disadvantaged/excluded, unemployed, older citizens...).

Validation of non-formal/informal learning

Whilst nomenclature varies across national systems and, indeed different meanings can attach to the use of the same term, validation is best and most simply understood as the inclusive term for these three processes:

- Identification of learning ('what has been learned')
- Assessment and/or testing of learning
- Recognition (or results) of various kinds.

Identification makes visible and records the individual's learning outcomes or achievements. A range of methods may be used to identify learning which is often tacit. Such methods include structured interviews, direct observation of the individual's competences, the mapping of personal learning needs. Emerging as one of the most widespread practices is the creation, by the individual, of a portfolio or dossier of various materials targeted at demonstrating specified knowledge, skills, and competences.

Assessment of non-formal/informal learning is essential if recognition is to take the form of certification. It is also a key means by which comparability with similar national awards gained through formal learning can be established.

Recognition, following that assessment, can take various forms, including, among others: certification/part-certification, exemption from part or parts of an educational or vocational qualification, appointment or promotion to a given post.

Some points for discussion

1. The EC document (2001) 'presupposes that all forms of learning can be identified, assessed and recognised.' It also states that 'a comprehensive new approach to valuing learning is needed to build bridges between different learning contexts and learning forms ...' What measures have to be put in place, within systems, in pursuit of these principles?
2. How do you counter the argument that validation of non-formal/informal learning does not lead to 'proper' qualifications? – that is, certificates of the same value as those gained exclusively through formal learning. And in the particular case where the same awards can be gained either through formal or non-formal/informal means, how do you achieve parity of esteem between these routes?
3. The EC document also states that 'a comprehensive approach to valuing learning is needed to facilitate individual pathways of learning' (EC, 2001). What changes are required, and what are the difficulties posed, in order to enable learners to develop and pursue such individual approaches to learning – especially in the case of awards currently available only through formal patterns of learning?

Learning outcomes

The development of a learning outcomes approach to education and training is not new; it has existed in some national systems for some years. But the potential of a learning outcomes approach, in relation to developing lifelong/life-wide learning and providing a surer basis for the validation of non-formal/informal learning, is generally of more recent recognition.

Questions of definition

At its simplest, a learning outcome is a definition or description of learning either achieved or to be achieved, stated variously in terms of knowledge, understanding, skills, competences – or in combinations of these. Again, there is variation from system to system: what, for example, is taken to be a competence in one system may be regarded as a skill (or set of skills) in another. Connected with learning outcomes are related matters of levels (of achievement) and standards (e.g. vocational competence to practice). The essential value of a learning outcome, however, is that it provides an explicit and external statement of learning. In so doing it provides a reference point to which all learning (formal, non-formal/informal) can be directed.

Applications of learning outcomes

Learning outcomes can be applied at any level as descriptors of learning. They can be used:

- To define, in general terms, a framework for the overall learning achievements for national qualifications (certificates, diplomas, degrees, vocational/professional awards)
- To define the learning to be achieved in a formal programme (or course or unit) of study or training
- To provide statements of knowledge/understanding/skills/competences against which non-formal/informal learning can be assessed
- To make transparent, to both learner and teacher/trainer/assessor, what is to be tested
- To provide means of creating assessment activities *derived* from statements of learning outcomes for the purposes of testing and/or assessing – so that methods of testing can be seen as both relevant and appropriate.

Additionally, the adoption of learning outcomes can be used to structure each teaching/training session as statements of the learning to be achieved within or by the end of each session (known as specific learning outcomes).

A paradigm shift?

The adoption of a learning outcomes approach, depending on the point of view generated from within a given European national system, may be simply evolutionary or radically revolutionary. For some, the adoption provides opportunities to apply its principles more widely across all forms of learning; to others it inverts the traditional (didactic) view of teaching and learning, substituting a different, and more profound, model. In all cases, however, the adoption of a learning outcomes approach:

- Shifts attention to the **individual** learner
- Makes specific the learning requirements **to the learner**
- Can make learning visible and allow for a broader range of learning to be recognised
- Facilitates access/transfer to further study/training
- Can create more open and more active learning
- Challenges teachers/trainers to review methods of teaching
- Poses questions about how learning is assessed
- May require traditional programmes/courses of study/training to become more flexible.

In larger terms, learning outcomes can assist in the development of a European credit transfer system for vocational education and training (VET); can provide the basis for developing National Qualifications Frameworks; and form the basis for the European Qualifications Framework as a 'neutral' reference system.

Points for discussion

- Will the adoption of a learning outcomes approach actually lead to the valuing of learning? Or will it simply lead to the adoption of a 'new' language?
- Will learning outcomes really make any difference to the ways in which teachers and trainers teach and train?
- By specifying learning in explicit terms, will the adoption of learning outcomes result in more testing to see if the prescribed learning has been achieved? Could there be more and more testing but less and less active learning?
- Could the adoption of a learning outcomes approach actually stop experimentation and innovation in teaching/training practices, because the learning outcomes themselves are designed, policed, and statutorily enforced by regional/national agencies and governments?

Summary

In a very real sense, the validation of non-formal/informal learning and the adoption of a learning outcomes approach are two policy developments which serve each other. In the context of lifelong learning (pursued through the recognition of life-wide learning opportunities), they are interdependent. The recognition of non-formal/informal learning is, to a large extent, made a practical possibility and achievement through statements of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes identify the learning to be made visible and to be assessed. The adoption of a learning outcomes approach, by focusing on learning itself (achieved or to be achieved), accommodates all forms of learning without discriminating among its different forms.

Some of the points for discussion present challenges to the uncritical application of these policies – because there are dangers. Yet there is also genuine potential offered in both developments. Interplay between these two developments could promote genuine opportunities for both personal and vocational/professional growth and help considerably to realise in practice the principles of lifelong and life-wide learning. In the specific context of vocational education and training (VET), there is the possibility, for example, of developing a portfolio of awards that could encourage the professional progression of vocational teachers and trainers, given that within the UK, there is no established policy for such professional and career development of those teachers and trainers.

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Biography

Edwin Webb is Emeritus Reader in the School of Education & Training. His books and articles address a range of educational and literary themes and his award of a Founding Fellowship from the English Association recognised his “distinguished contribution to English in education.”

Getting the best out of your students through cultural appreciation – multiculturalism in a ‘British’ university business classroom setting

Jon A. Wilson

Business School

Introduction

The following is a conceptual paper, reflecting on the author’s own experiences whilst lecturing in marketing at London universities and, as a marketing professional. In addition, it provides current, supporting academic literature with the aim of stimulating further thinking and discussion. Finally, the paper offers suggestions for future activities that could be implemented in order to further address some of the issues raised.

There is an assertion that whilst multiculturalism has been embraced by British academic institutions and is actively encouraged, many of the day-to-day practices leave room for improvement. Within both education and industry, there appears to be a gap, whereby a potentially passive and sporadic transmission of multicultural values to the respective parties exists. This has led to a sub-optimisation of various learning experiences which have, in some instances, contributed towards a breakdown in communication; or, at their worst, resulted in a loss of confidence. It appears that this gap is more prevalent when interacting with individuals across cultures or in culturally diverse settings.

The position held is that an appreciation and active encouragement towards embracing multiculturalism, by both students and lecturers, is critical to the future long-term success of business education. The suggestion therefore is that lecturers should increase their efforts towards championing multiculturalism and embedding it within the formative aspects of their roles. A useful analogy would be one of a lecturer being like a conductor of an orchestra. To this end, it is hoped that this paper will be useful in its contribution towards a platform for both future empirical research and educational activities.

Culture appears to play a formative role in the educational process. However, the way in which culture impacts on a classroom setting, across nationalities, appears to differ. In support of this, Charlesworth (2008) asserts the following:

‘If one accepts that culture is “a certain commonality of meaning, customs and rules (not a homogeneous entity) shared by a certain group of people and setting a complex

framework for learning and development” (Trommsdorf and Dasen, 2001, p. 3004) then one cannot deny the connection between culture and learning...Furthermore systematic differences found in the way in which classrooms function in different parts of the world can be largely linked to cultural differences’ (Crahay, 1996).

Having established this, there appear inherent differences and difficulties encountered when individuals from more than one culture enter the same educational setting. This paper attempts to reflect on these perceived gaps by reviewing existing literature and drawing from the author’s own, personal experiences.

Background

Before writing this article, I sat down and collated a list of the various student nationalities that I could remember teaching last year. Normally at the start of a new course, as part of an ice breaker, I ask students to tell one another something about themselves. The reason offered being, that getting to know each other better, will benefit the whole class. After their name, the next piece of information usually provided is nationality or cultural ethnicity. Culture within the classroom is perceived by students as being:

- Appropriate to disclose
- Relevant to the course
- A significant defining factor of their own identity
- Something which would be of interest to the rest of the class.

Upon reviewing my notes, I was amazed by the fact that I had managed to reach a grand total of eighty separate or combined nationalities. It also became apparent that I could easily expect to encounter up to thirty different nationalities in any one class. In addition, within each country there are regional differences, mixed parentage family units, a host of different religious denominations and many other significant differentiating factors. These cultural phenomena are further compounded by the fact that we, as individuals, are increasingly complex in defining our own cultural identities as a result of our various interactions. Reflecting on these facts, my initial feelings were those of pride, quickly followed by a flood of questions:

- How did we all get along?
- Were the students as impressed by this fact as me?
- Did cultural ethnicity have any effect on the way in which we all interacted – and was it seen as a valuable experience by all, or a hindrance?
- How have we as lecturers changed, if at all, how we handle these situations?
- What could I do in the future to take advantage of these opportunities, both academically and commercially to the benefit the university?
- Is this cultural diversity so complex that it would be better to ignore it altogether in the classroom?

Corporate culture and multiculturalism within business

Taking my cue from industry, my feeling is that cultural diversity has to be both examined and actively used for competitive advantages no matter how difficult this is. The adage often quoted in business in connection with globalisation is, 'ignore it at your peril'. This caveat seems to suggest that managing culture, at the very least, could point towards it being a 'hygiene' factor – in that an improvement would remove dissatisfaction, but would not elicit positive motivation in itself (Hertzberg *et al.*, 1959).

Before moving into education, my career had been in advertising. This grounding was one which seemed to revolve around the following mantras:

- Confidence is key and is built on good preparation and sound knowledge
- If you don't believe it, they won't!
- Communicate as often as you can, in as many ways as possible; but make sure you let them speak!
- Find a way to gather as much information as you can. No fact is too trivial!
- Build rapport and build up goodwill
- Handle objections and manage expectations at the earliest opportunity
- Do the simple things well, and then deliver the added value.
- Not everything that you hear is what they think
- Even a complaint can be converted into a buying signal and a happy customer
- Everything that you do has to have a gain, which is clear to all involved
- Make notes on everything!

Within this context, culture was generally restricted in its definition to being a management component, which both assumed and encouraged participants to create a universally, tenable, working environment. This being the case, cultural ethnicity seemed only to become of significance either if problems arose or if it presented a commercial gain. From this perspective, it could be argued that any explicitly derived knowledge and understanding may tend towards being superficial, sporadic, or at its worst exploitative. As a result, there tended to be individuals who championed cultural ethnicity and those who did not. In accepting this, it appeared to present uncoordinated or short-term benefits to only select parties. These thoughts brought my attention back to the starting point of this discussion. Namely, culture seems to be increasingly more significant and what can be done to address this issue?

Further to this, the most incisive and meaningful components of culture appear to be rooted in largely implicit drivers which can lead to complications. The utilisation of these truly valuable cultural traits, also hinges on the successful acquisition of tacit knowledge. Therefore a critical success factor rests in managing the transfer of this knowledge. Nonaka (1991), when looking at how tacit knowledge can be converted into the explicit, suggested that it is a process of 'finding a way to express the inexpressible', concluding that:

'Unfortunately, one of the most powerful management tools for doing so is frequently overlooked: the store of figurative language and symbolism that managers can draw

from to articulate their intuitions and insight. At Japanese companies, this evocative and sometimes extremely poetic language figures especially prominently in product development.’

Multiculturalism within business education

As education draws upon both language and symbolism, it is felt that these sentiments can be carried through and applied to great effect. In addition, this would appear to be especially worthwhile when trying to decipher and cater for a diverse group of stakeholders in the interests of unification.

As a result of his analysis of Egyptian and UK senior managers in education, Humphreys (1996) suggested that systems from the Western world ‘may need to be modified and adapted in order to fit the value, culture, expectations and practices of other, particularly developing countries.’ As he said, ‘It is perhaps a reflection of the possible complexity of such a task that produces the pragmatic but erroneous view that management principles are universal and therefore directly transferable to overseas projects.’

Whilst most students within university are not senior managers, they can be seen to have comparable traits. They have to undertake decision making and critical thinking as both individuals and in groups, which carry with them accountability and a formal assessment of their achievements. It would be reasonable therefore to assume that a significant proportion of students coming to the UK are likely to be unable to:

- Completely adapt, or suppress their preference for an educational environment similar to their host culture’s, at least in part
- Fully take advantage of a British learning style without both willingness on their part and continual explicit support.

I have tried to draw from these collective experiences in my approach to education, in an attempt to formulate a unique selling point and measurable critical success factor.

Cultural acclimatisation and orientation at university

Whilst cultural diversity is reflected within student cohorts and academic material, a gap, or - at the very least - a difference of opinion, seems to exist in how affairs should be conducted within the classroom. A strong culture appears to prevail that, a British institution should pride itself on delivering a ‘British’ approach to education, providing a unique selling point. In addition, one could argue that we are in Britain and that is what students expect and desire (or at least should do?). Following this, a lecturer may find himself asking:

- How does this experience map to the consumer, in our case, the student?
- Can we do anything better?
- What needs to happen in the future?

I have had discussions and encountered points of view which have suggested that in countries like Italy, China and Saudi Arabia, amongst others, their styles tend towards ‘rote learning’ and compliance from students. This then begs the question, how do you guide someone through

an alternative process, which rewards constructive debate, difference of opinion and honest, documented reflection - in a manner that has been termed as being distinctly British? And following this, once someone from another cultural frame of reference has become involved in this process, do they still feel at ease with, or even wish for, this type of environment?

On paper, all students have successfully satisfied the entrance requirements for a course and so, in theory, should be well equipped to succeed equally. However, in practice, research, personal experiences and conversations with colleagues would suggest that there still appear to be noticeable differences, often sweepingly attributed to 'cultural differences'. What are the practical implications of all of this? After all, it seems that the wider public is engrossed in trying to answer the same underlying principles when looking to forge increased community cohesion. Following the same train of thought as stated by Nonaka (1991) previously, which points towards British culture, like any other, usually relying upon the implicit, tacit and inductive transition of the most valuable aspects of its cultural norms:

- What cultural aspects are significant in an educational setting?
- Which *should* be of significance?
- How does their implicit transmission occur?
- What remains tacit and who is party to this?
- Can these processes be improved and enjoyed by more?
- Can they be converted into more explicit methods?

These challenges seem to be compounded by the fact that at university, we trust that students have already acquired many of the softer skills associated with these processes. In addition, with such limited contact time, there are limitations on how much time can be devoted to these aspects. Therefore the onus lies on students to undertake much of this evaluation themselves. This requires self-regulation on their part, embarking on a journey of self-diagnosis, with taking the initiative to seek help when needed.

The challenge of a 360° appraisal of university culture

Within business, companies are able to evaluate culture through audits. They attempt to draw from a mixture of hard and soft factors, which range from: a demonstration of associated financial gains, or cost saving, investors in people status, compliance with equality and diversity legislation, and stakeholder satisfaction, amongst others. However when it comes to evaluating the student experience, in connection with culture and ethnicity in education, there appear to be added challenges. There is not always a clear method by which its importance can be picked up, positioned or assessed. This could be due to the following factors:

- Human resources and marketing functions are largely involved in this process
- Human resources only cater for employees. Therefore, as students are not employees, they fall outside of their remit
- Marketing has little contact with students, once they have enrolled
- It becomes difficult to position students within this existing framework. Whilst students are perceived as being customers, their duty of care mainly transfers to lecturers; who are not involved in any formal cultural audit processes.

- The championing of cultural diversity is perhaps seen as being self-evident, in the reflection of the diverse backgrounds the students present.

One might also ask how is it possible to evaluate, not to mention reward, participants' championing of culture. After all, the same objectives could be met, without addressing these issues. Namely, the same course material is transmitted and students endeavour to attain the grades on offer. The initial terms of engagement focus on a university providing a degree course and a student meeting its various, academic requirements. Ownership of cultural ethnicity seems to remain the property of the individual and is secondary to subject content. The arguments posed in response to this are that cultural appreciation is:

- A 'hygiene factor' at the very least
- Or, more than a 'hygiene factor' - and therefore able to enrich the classroom environment
- Beneficial in having long term strategic gains
- Potentially able to reduce future problems; which may become a drain on university resources.

Therefore, this field necessitates a collective investment of time and effort, for what could be seen as a largely, but not exclusively, delayed gratification in spite of any difficulties faced.

Diversity and equality for all?

A further point of concern resides in the issues highlighted within a 54 page report compiled by the Equality Challenge Unit (2009), comprising a review of current literature and empirical data. It paints a less favourable picture, resulting from the views held by Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) professionals in higher education, in which a significant proportion of them state that they have experienced racism and/or racial discrimination. Mirroring this, the experiences of students seem to suggest that there is a 'growing gap in attainment between white, black and Asian students' (Shepherd, 2009). Furthermore, there also appears to be a 'disturbing racial divide among universities' (Curtis, 2006), with MacLeod (2009) reporting that in 2009, 'Just five students of black Caribbean origin started at Oxford this year; at Cambridge there are eight'. These comments suggest that the pull to address issues surrounding multiculturalism and the allocation of resources may not be comparable across institutions. Following this, with such scrutiny and media attention surrounding these issues, this subject is likely to generate added suspicion and perhaps a vote of no-confidence amongst some BME students and professionals - which can only be overcome through persistent efforts and increased resources over a longer timeframe.

Culture, but at what cost?

Crossley and Watson (2003, p35) highlight that educational institutions have become increasingly motivated primarily by financial objectives, when looking to research culture in connection with learning. Whilst this is a necessary activity, if it is at the expense of a more classical interpretation of the role of education, which has little to do with the pursuit of profits, it may pose serious long-term problems to an education institution by:

- Potentially prejudicing academic thinking
- Hampering the encouragement of free thought
- Failing to unearth meaningful insight into culture and learning, if they appear not to be financially profitable

- Going against the academic principle of understanding culture in connection with learning. In that it is a necessary part of ensuring the preservation of a pure transmission of knowledge.

Culture within the classroom

Holden (2002) reviewed existing cross-cultural management and anthropological frameworks to suggest that managing across cultures is:

‘the art of combining varieties of common knowledge through interactive translation. In order to develop this modified concept of cross-cultural management, it will be necessary to come to an understanding of translation both as a process and as an analogy’ (p. 227).

Within this he appraised the role of language, concluding that it can be seen metaphorically with ‘its symbolic powers serving to unite people with a sense of common purpose. Seen in this way, language is a very potent expression of company wisdom, lore and vision’ (p. 236).

Sulkowski and Deakin (2009) assert that, ‘historically, education has taken the premise that all students are equally capable of learning regardless of ethnic background, social class or cultural origin’. However, their findings suggest that ‘the question of why non-native students in the UK still seem to be underperforming becomes somewhat inconvenient’. They conclude that a solution to this problem is dependent on lecturers making students aware of their intellectual abilities and then developing them. Asmar (2005) supports this view by claiming that greater cultural understanding and sensitivity to differences are necessary pursuits for UK lecturers. However, Asmar goes on to state that this is hampered by some, due to perception that these students are a problem.

Day-to-day practical experiences and approaches

A cornerstone of my approach has been to champion cultural ethnicity within my subject material and classroom. Taking the lead from my experiences and training in advertising, I have reframed a student as oscillating somewhere between a key accounts client and a management trainee. Attempts to find out the backgrounds of my students and then match class material to their significant cultural frames of reference, appear to have been well received. An essential part of this is being able to distil and crystallise both the similarities and differences between cultures and then map them to the subject wherever possible.

Our endeavours are eased by the fact that education in the UK is transmitted through one language, namely English. However, this should not be a premise for putting the onus on multi-lingual and culturally diverse students to conform completely to the norms of the English speaking lecturer. There should still be a continuous, collective appraisal of the more symbolic and metaphoric elements of language. In order to assist in the process, business thinking has borrowed from other disciplines such as psychotherapy and NLP (Neuro Linguistic Programming), e.g. Bandler and Grinder (1975).

I have also tried to address some of these issues by breaking down potential barriers and opposition, by selling the benefits of diversity and demonstrating as much in my behaviour. Within the classroom, I aim to make great efforts to pronounce peoples’ names as they wish them to be pronounced, share anecdotes of my encounters with different cultures and have even tried to learn the odd phrase in different languages. This has had the effect of creating an environment of cultural curiosity, which I have then used to highlight and transmit the essentials and peculiarities of British

academic culture, to hopefully fill gaps and impart significant elements that would assist students in their studies.

This approach draws strongly from methodologies present in social sciences and relationship marketing and services literature, suggesting that if benevolence is implicitly signalled with 'a caring attitude and personal commitment', the customer will reciprocate 'seeking repeated interactions and disclose information... if this seems natural' Hansen (2003). Students are increasingly being viewed as a customer of sorts, Baker (2008), Sellgren (2009). Whilst this remains contentious – especially from the perspective of a lecturer, as quality of delivery and service does not necessarily guarantee student satisfaction, it appears that students are becoming more and more comfortable with defining themselves as such.

The delivery of this customer orientation has posed challenges when orchestrating assessed group work activities. A common dilemma lies when addressing the question of whether it is more fruitful for students to work with people from the same cultural backgrounds, or whether to attempt to encourage them to work with people from different backgrounds. From both an academic and a long-term professional perspective the answer would have to be the latter. However, in the short-term, with the pressures of students wanting to achieve good grades in as painless a way as possible, they may more often than not, opt for the former.

As a result, I have often put this question to students, presenting the merits of both sides. By empowering students to make an informed decision in this process, the aim has been to expose them to another facet of business whilst presenting a democratic and transparent process. This is designed to tie them into a psychological contract, which is also part of a process on my part to manage both their expectations and accountability through inclusion.

With more international students in the classroom, lecturing and providing business case examples, which all parties are able to understand and interpret to the same degree and in a comparable fashion, can present a challenge. This is especially problematic when setting more practical marketing assessments, which rely upon accessing current market data. For example; the nuances associated with broadsheet versus tabloid newspapers and their reliability; or the difference between commercial broadcasters and the BBC, in terms of carrying paid for advertising and product placement. This has necessitated my spending additional time introducing students to these marketing channels and at times, almost giving them a crash course on popular culture. This includes explanations surrounding slang and the fact that words like 'wicked' and 'sick' may have very different meanings, depending on the context. By contrast, within formal, academic writing there remains one acceptable interpretation. These facts are crucial, as in advertising, language is often reflective of its target audience. However, it is not always apparent to some students that this does not render such syntax and definitions acceptable for general academic usage.

The secondary effect from all of these collaborative activities is that through students' contributions, it is felt that their own cultural norms should permeate processes (Figure 1). The idea being that collaborative acculturation should set the agenda in harnessing diversity and preserving knowledge transfer. Without such appreciation and pro-activity, it is possible that the diversity of cultures would stagnate learning - plunging it into being passive shallow recall-based understanding. The long-term implications are that all parties involved, from the lecturer to the student, experience a hampered knowledge transfer and leave with less intellectual capital than could have been attained.

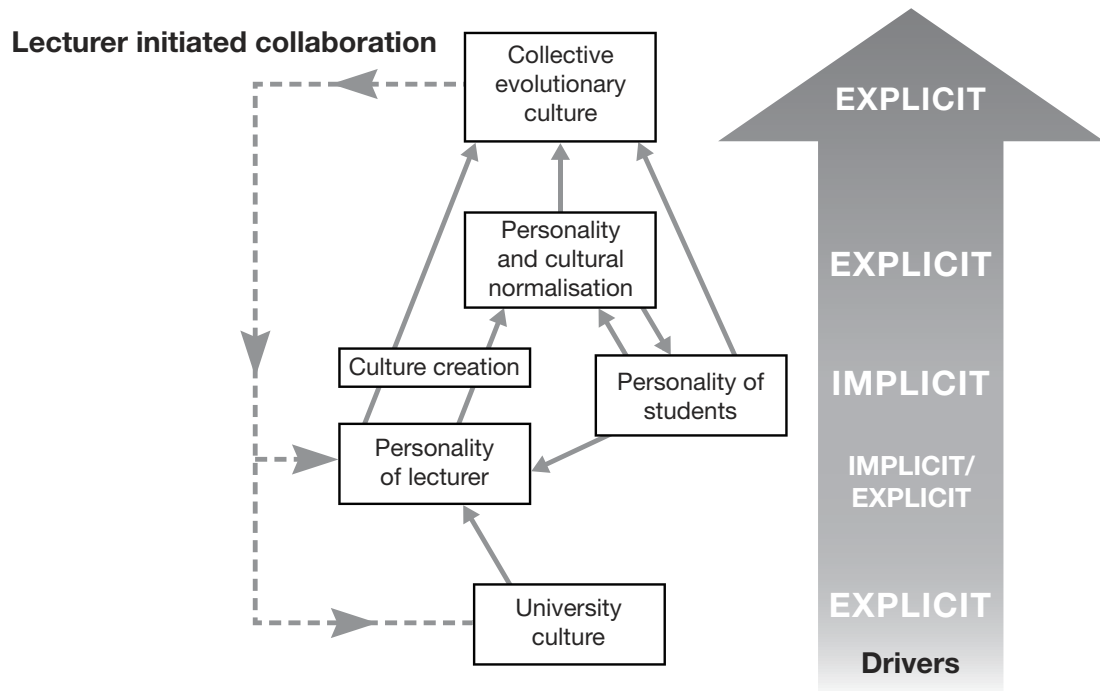


Figure 1: Collaborative acculturation – leading the agenda in harnessing diversity and preserving knowledge transfer..

Conclusions

Rowley (1996) states that ‘most staff gain gratification from working with students and witnessing the achievement and development of those students. This is associated with having a professional pride in their work.’ In addition, the view as stated in this paper asserts that lecturers should not overlook their own development and learning. The conclusions therefore are as follows:

- Lecturers should initiate, facilitate and control knowledge in the classroom
- Collectively, an environment should be created, in which two-way knowledge transfer can occur
- Cultural understanding is cited as being an active and essential component, when looking to appraise the successful execution of strategic objectives
- Culture has to play a role in the educational process and its normalisation and understanding can only occur when it is actively addressed and continually reviewed by all parties
- Culture, if competently and sincerely harnessed, has the potential with its associated trappings, to deliver academic and commercial gains
- Increased long-term gratification, attained from achievement and development, can be experienced by both students and lecturers through further developing meaningful relationships in which culture plays a part.

Future agenda setting and suggestions

Following the identification and acceptance of this approach, a more inclusive curriculum design could be achieved by a further allocation of resources. Workshops, discussions and empirical research should be conducted, in order to formalise a basis for action. In addition, involvement and knowledge transfer to the wider community is necessary in order to achieve a broad base of collective co-operation and normalisation. In this process, universities should attempt to liaise more closely with schools and industry, across geographic boundaries using the pursuit of an education in English, as a unifying factor. Many societies and those in the education and industry sector have signed up to this philosophy, though perhaps at times passively. However, what remains paramount is the continual pursuit of trying to address these issues by filling in any gaps practically. These require at their inception sound, value-based judgements and a conducive environment. Lecturers should see themselves as being central in this role, as they are both academics and the educators of future business people. A useful analogy is one of a lecturer being like a conductor of an orchestra. This is especially crucial as English is the lingua franca of business and an increasingly diverse audience of students arrives on British shores in their pursuit of excellence.

As a side point, universities in the United States and Australia have attempted to address some of these challenges, through offering a range of arts courses in non-connected disciplines. In addition, these courses have counted towards a student's final degree mark. It is not uncommon for business students to take courses in art appreciation, comparative religion or classical music, for example. This approach could be investigated and piloted initially, through offering non-assessed additional short courses. In order to encourage student attendance and participation these courses could be linked with:

- Opportunities to engage with industry
- Relevant internships
- Personal skills courses
- Career development workshops.

Ultimately, the fruits of these initiatives are our students. In what can be described increasingly as a commercial service-based industry, students are our customers, our ambassadors and our future academics. The focus therefore should be to manage this process in a manner which reflects their needs and those of industry.

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Biography

Jonathan Wilson is a senior lecturer in Advertising and Marketing Communications. Previously, Jon has worked full-time for Emap Advertising (now Bauer Media), Haymarket Media Group and on the CBI's journal. In addition, Jon has undertaken consultancy for Saipa Group and Saipa Karaj Football Club, Iran; SCENTA, and the Engineering and Technology Board (ETB), UK; 1&1 Internet Ltd.; and DMA Design/Rockstar Games – on Grand Theft Auto (GTA1, 2 & 3).

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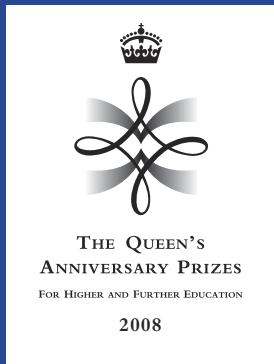
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