

Title: **Managing Expectations: bridging the gap between students' wants and needs – and ours**

Presenter: **Phil Race**
Leeds Metropolitan University

Abstract:

Workshop Learning Outcomes

By the end of this workshop, participants will be better able to:

1. Tease out some differences between
 - a. What students want;
 - b. What students expect;
 - c. What staff think students need;
 - d. What staff developers think staff think students expect

2. Leave with further ideas on finding out from students what they really think, want, and need.

Session Outline

Key issues to be addressed are:

“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place” (George Bernard Shaw). In this workshop, we'll explore ways of finding out what students (and teachers, and educational developers) really think, and what they feel they want, and what they know they need. In particular, we'll work towards going beyond the limitations of paper-based or online questionnaires, where thinking tends to be too much filtered into the 'read-write' domain, and sometimes misses the real point perhaps.

For example, the National Student Survey confirms that students are not happy with the speed or helpfulness of the feedback they receive. Sometimes, their expectations regarding feedback may be unrealistic, but there's a lot we can do to respond to their dissatisfaction, particularly by making feedback to students less of a 'read-write' business (printed, handwritten, emails and so on – see Neil Fleming's 'VARK' work)) and more an auditory, visual and kinaesthetic business (whole-group, small-group, one-to-one, and – particularly – peer feedback).

In particular, we can help students to develop a healthy thirst for feed-forward – the parts of feedback which can help them to improve their next pieces of work, and lead them to better achievement of the intended learning outcomes of our modules and courses.

The session will start with thoughts and questions about student retention drawn from 'Improving Student Retention in Higher Education' (Crosling, Thomas and Heagney, eds, 2008) and formative feedback from 'Enhancing Learning through Formative Assessment and Feedback' (Irons, 2008), and apply ideas from 'Making Learning Happen' (Race, 2005) and 'Making Teaching Work' (Race and Pickford, 2007) to work towards bridging the gap between wants and needs, overtly with students, so

that they are more satisfied with their experience of higher education, and more convinced of our wish to make this a fulfilling experience.

We will aim to work towards ways of helping students to clarify their expectations, and to systematically build on all the feedback (and feed-forward) they can gain (from us and from each other) to feel that their expectations have been met, and that their achievement is comparable to their highest expectations.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

Please provide an indication of how the session will be structured and how activities and discussion will be facilitated. For discussion papers please include a few indicative questions which will focus the discussion element.

1. Short preamble from Phil, setting out the problems and issues (15 mins).
2. Exercises using post-its of different colours, for participants individually to brainstorm aspects of what they think students want, what they think lecturers think students want, what students actually need, and so on (20 mins)
3. Group comparison and prioritisation of aspects arising from the post-it products (30 mins)
4. 'How to give better formative feedback to more students in less time' short provocative input from Phil (10 mins).
5. What we need to do – action planning exercise (15 mins)
6. Close.

References

Crosling, G, Thomas, L and Heagney, M (eds.) (2008) *Improving Student Retention in Higher Education* Abingdon: Routledge.

Irons, A (2008) *Enhancing Learning through Formative Assessment and Feedback* Abingdon: Routledge.

Fleming, N at www.vark-learn.com

Race, P (2005) *Making Learning Happen* London: Sage.

Race, P and Pickford, R (2007) *Making Teaching Work* London: Sage.