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Developing the University in Turbulent Times

Ronald Barnett, Institute of Education, London

Introduction

Today, as I write this article, I see an advertisement in this week's *Times Higher Education* magazine for 'The Entrepreneurial University Leadership Programme', run by a national consortium in the UK (including Universities UK). Is that an indication as to how academic development has come to be seen in the UK: that of enabling the development of the entrepreneurial university? It is surely a timely moment to try to contend against such a conception, a conception not only of academic development but of the university itself.

In this article, in the first place, therefore, I want to explore what it is to develop the university. In the process, I want also both to examine what it means to be a university and to identify some broad principles for the development of universities that flow from that analysis.

Beginnings

Universities had their inception some hundreds of years ago, in the medieval age. Since then, *both* the idea of the university and its form have continued to change, not least as new universities have successfully been established. In this historical process, there has been a dynamic relationship between idea and form: ideas of the university have changed and this has helped changes to occur in the form of the university; correspondingly, many of the changes that have occurred in the form of the university have prompted new thinking about the university. For example, the formation of the Open University in England in the 1960s was born out of some new thinking about the possibilities for the nature of the university and, in turn, the establishment of the Open University has helped to prompt further thinking about the university both around the world, as new kinds of open university have been started, and about the very idea of openness.

This line of thinking about openness has connected with thinking about flexible learning: what kinds of openness might flexible learning make possible (over, for example, the pacing, the location, and the extent of choice in a student's programme of study)? It has also connected with new possibilities that have opened in the digital age, over new kinds of interaction and communication, not only between student and teacher but also between students themselves. And, in research, the new technologies are opening up new challenges and new possibilities for the sharing with the wider society of researchers' findings and thoughts, even prompting considerations as to the emergence of 'socialist knowledge'. Such developments in turn prompt yet further new thinking about the idea of the public university and the responsibilities of the university in the twenty-first century.

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So there is this continuing dynamic between thinking about the university and about its actual institutional form. Given all the many changes and challenges that are befalling the universities and the many opportunities for development, it might be anticipated that there would be much thinking about the nature of the university and its possibilities. And that, surely, is the case. Whereas, say, forty years ago, the number of books on the nature of the university was very low indeed (there was hardly any kind of such publication in those days), nowadays, there is a considerable literature on the university, on ideas of the university and its developmental possibilities. Recently, for instance, issues as to the 'public goods' that the university provides and to the development of its 'civic engagement' have come to the fore.

However, for the most part, that expanded reflection on the nature of the university and its possibilities is somewhat hidden from public gaze, being mostly confined to the specialist literature. The public debate and the main tracts issued by governments and supra-national agencies focus on the ever stronger coupling of universities with the economy and of universities becoming self-reliant, especially in their becoming entrepreneurial, and so in identifying their potential knowledge services and products and exploiting them in the marketplace to widening sets of customers. Here, we see developing what has been termed variously 'academic capitalism' or, more recently still, 'cognitive capitalism'. In the process, disciplines in the sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics – the so-called STEM subjects – are favoured while the future of the humanities becomes uncertain, if not precarious. (In the UK, the White Paper issued by the Department of Business, Industry and Skills, *Higher Ambitions* (2009), starkly exemplified all of these trends.)

Within the public debate, therefore, and in the public positioning and projection of universities, it appears that the idea of the entrepreneurial university has arrived with such force that there appears little room for public consideration of alternatives. It is as if the idea of the entrepreneurial university has come to represent the end point of the very idea of the university itself. As stated, this conception of universities is now promoted not only by governments but by government agencies, by transnational agencies and by the universities themselves. The only challenge, it would seem, on individual universities is that of working out where, in the academic marketplace, they are to place their entrepreneurial efforts and where they wish to place themselves.

In turn, the idea of leadership dwindles, for now the task of leading universities is the much more tactical task of securing advantage in this academic market and of steering ('managing') the university towards that end. The possibility of leadership being required to develop an alternative vision for a university is not on the cards since the possibility of a radical departure from the idea of the entrepreneurial university is not itself contemplated (as our opening observation on that magazine advertisement surely implies).

Rethinking the university

Against this background, two kinds of question arise. Firstly, could some large ideas – or even a single large idea – be identified that just might begin to dislodge 'the entrepreneurial university' from its conceptual pinnacle? Secondly, what might it mean for academic development and for the development of universities towards such alternative ideas of the university? There is a third question that is crucial here, namely: Is it possible for the public debate to widen such that it offers a space for the consideration of radical alternatives to the idea of the entrepreneurial university? Here, in this article, I shall focus on the first two sets of questions and will address this third issue *en passant*. (While, too, I will pursue this discussion with the UK – and England – especially in mind, I believe that what I want to say has applicability to universities around the world.)

In forming an understanding of the possibilities for wider ideas of the university to come into public view, we need – as a first step – to form an understanding of the contemporary situation. I have been saying that there is a continuing dynamic

between the idea of the university and the form that the university takes. And we can see this playing out at the present time. In taking on the mantle of 'the entrepreneurial university', individual universities are doing this to a greater or lesser extent, depending on their own situation (their subject mix, the balance they have between research and teaching, their proximity to regional development, their global reach and so forth). But we may observe too that the coming of the entrepreneurial university has been accompanied by the coming *at the same time* of 'the corporate university' and 'the bureaucratic university'.

The coming of 'the corporate university' is readily explicable. It is a condition of a university becoming an 'entrepreneurial university'. If a university is to be effective in promoting itself as a unified and coherent entity to potential customers for its services, it needs to become more corporate. The logos, the common format for the business cards and Powerpoint presentations, the development of a corporate strategy (even having a glossy document for public consumption), the working out of a particular identity and market positioning, are only some of the more obvious features of such a move. Becoming corporate – which reaches into all aspects of the university's functions – has two purposes: to present a particular and common self-image to the wider world and to bring all the university's staff and their activities into a common mould. This latter development is crucial in an (academic) environment in which its key players are prone to pursuing their own interests and projects and for whom, not untypically, the university that employs them has been seen by many academics as separate (not always helped by the senior management team even being in a separate building).

The link between becoming 'entrepreneurial' and becoming 'corporate' is readily explicable, therefore; but how might we account for the emergence at the same time of the 'bureaucratic' university? Isn't such a development likely to diminish the chances of a fully effective entrepreneurialism on the part of the university? If a university wants to encourage its staff to become more entrepreneurial, isn't the presence of bureaucratic procedures simply going to get in the way? I think that we can explain what often seems to academic staff to be an excessively bureaucratic regime in this way. Bureaucratic procedures in universities have two functions: that of producing information for managers (for the corporate university) and, less obviously, that of establishing systems that the academics *have* to fall in with. To put it crudely, bureaucratic procedures reflect impulses towards both control and surveillance. We can in turn explain this dual impulse on the part of management as a result, again, of the tendency towards anarchy and privateness that the inner academic world is prone to encourage. (My thoughts are expected to be my thoughts, not a repetition of your thoughts; and in order to produce my own thoughts, I need to have some measure of space for myself.)

These three ideas of the contemporary university – the entrepreneurial university, the corporate university, and the bureaucratic university – are, it is evident, not discrete. They do not point to three different kinds of university. On the contrary, as we have just observed, they are intertwined, supporting each other. And this is a powerful combination, so much so that this complex that constitutes the modern university appears to be unshakeable.

New spaces

It may seem, consequently, that there is no space, no prospect, of new ideas of the university emerging and taking hold. But such a conclusion – such pessimism indeed – would be premature. For universities have their being not just in a turbulent age but in turbulent currents. Just some of these turbulent currents are globalisation, the workings of the knowledge economy, and the shifting character of knowledge in a knowledge society. Knowledge, for example, is becoming more democratic, more interdisciplinary and more multimodal, allowing for example (as I hear on the radio news today) members of the public who have been remotely assisting a university project via their own computers to have their names on a scientific paper. The digital revolution is only just under way, in which billions of units of data are being produced globally. In this speeded-up world – a world of 'fast knowledge' – universities are becoming liquid institutions, their knowing activities spreading out, globally and into all manner of communities, organisations and agencies.

There are yet other important features of the contemporary context. Capitalism is undergoing severe challenges, prompting considerations of a need to inject a value orientation into politics. There remain – and will continue to remain – grave concerns about the environment and ecological degradation. And there are massive global challenges – of disease, famines, the workings of cities, international terrorism and crime, demographic instabilities, energy crises, citizenship, living amid difference and the place of the elderly in society and so on and so forth. All this will surely lead to a raising of the levels of expectation by both the public sphere and state towards the universities.

All of this amounts to the emergence of potential new spaces for new kinds of university identity to appear. For example, there are practical spaces, conceptual spaces, structural spaces, pedagogical spaces and societal spaces and even (dare one say it?) cultural spaces. This does not amount to a completely open field for the university to disport itself as it wishes. To the contrary, there are considerable and weighty forces pressing on the university, to which most staff (professional and academic) will testify. But the frenetic world of the twenty-first century is increasingly open-textured and presenting with manifold expectations and possibilities for the university. The university could well be called upon itself to become a developmental university, directly assisting the development of society (and not only its economy).

So, *perhaps for the first time in its nine hundred year history,* the university has seriously to think both about what it is to be a university and then, for any one university, to imagine – and then to steer itself towards – visionary possibilities for itself. The problem here is twofold: first, that imaginary thinking about the university is in serious short supply. (How many vice-chancellors and rectors are thinking creatively and writing imaginatively about the possibilities for the

university – even for their own university?) The second problem is immediately linked and goes back to a feature we have already noted. One reason for the dearth of imaginary thinking is that there is – it might be felt – little in the way of a receptiveness, still less any encouragement for, such thinking. The debate is largely about means (of achieving solvency, impact, widening participation, economic regeneration) and much less about the fundamental ends or purposes or values that the university might be serving in the twenty-first century. (And many of the voices that are speaking out all too often evince a voice of nostalgia for an assumed past.)

What is required here is no less than the courage and the energies to create *feasible utopias*. The apparent oxymoron of that term can easily be resolved: feasible utopias are utopian in that there is little likelihood of their being realised while their *feasibility* lies in a belief that they could actually be realised in this world – and perhaps there are already some examples of any such utopia which can actually be identified in the contemporary world. What is to count as a utopia, so far as the university is concerned? It is, surely, a university that was doing its maximum (within its scope and capabilities) to enhance nothing short of global wellbeing. After all, every university – to be worthy of the name – will have some global orientation. So the question becomes one of the ways in which it is going to reach out to the world and the manner in which it might do that.

The ecological university

Here, perhaps the idea of *the ecological university* is helpful. By 'the ecological university' I mean precisely a university that was consciously developing itself so as to fulfil its own potential in enhancing wellbeing in and across the world. It would be a university that was doing its best to help the world to develop in positive – and explicitly *value-based* – ways. It might interpret this in all manner of ways, through its teaching, its research and its outreach activities. It would be taking seriously its claims to be offering services to society (not just to the economy) and would be sharing its resources as public benefits. This is a feasible utopia in that, while it sounds and is utopian, several and perhaps many universities are picking up this baton and running with it. They are embarked on a programme of civic engagement, working with local communities and networks to address social challenges. They are working with governments to confront major societal issues. And they are working in other countries with developing communities to tackle social problems.

By 'ecological', therefore, I refer not only to the systems of the natural environment and their sustainability but also to the many other ecologies – social, cultural and psychological – with which the university interacts. These ecologies include knowledge ecologies, which are seeing both increasing interweavings and collisions between forms of knowledge ('interdisciplinarity') and the arrival of new knowledges (multimodal, experiential, and problem-oriented). The university now has challenges in relation to all of these ecologies and, insofar as it is sensitive to these challenges and intent on identifying its possibilities, it is entitled to be termed an 'ecological university'. This university will be reaching out to the world so far as is practical, and so far as makes sense. It will be networked not only with other institutions across the world but also via a range of ecologies. Of course, it will not be static but will be dynamic, continuously making and remaking itself, but in the interests of the world, and not solely in its own interests. It is a university truly of service in, to and across the world.

Implications

What implications might these reflections have for academic development? There are four implications. The first task for academic development, surely, is that of helping to open a space in which there can be serious reflection on the position, the purposes, and the values of – and the potential *for* – the university. A problem for universities is that there is very little reflection on their purposes and possibilities. (This phenomenon is an especially serious deficiency in universities, which, after all, are supposed to be places for critical reflection.) The second task is that of enabling academic staff – at all levels – to see themselves and their possibilities and responsibilities in the widest way. The horizons of their own identities and, thereby, their activities, need to be pulled out. Thirdly, and crucially, academic development becomes here partly a matter of encouraging forward-looking, daring and imaginative conceptions of the possibilities in front of one. How might research be projected to the wider public? Where might there be possibilities for engagement with communities in the wider society? What are their problems and challenges and how might the university assist in confronting them, and what developmental projects might be identified? How might the imaginations of students be released and inspired so that students become capable of engaging – and courageous enough to engage – in fresh thinking?

A conceptualisation of academic development of this kind raises, in turn, questions about the corporate organisation of the university. It is not to diminish the need for marketing, human resource and quality departments. It is, though, to reconsider the mission of each of them and to re-orient them somewhat so that they can help to fulfil the imaginative new self-conception that a university might choose for itself. A fourth task, therefore, for academic development is to help managers and administrators develop a wider conception of *their* role, and the challenges inherent in identifying and in working towards a new idea of the university. This fourth task could, in turn, help in both academics and managers/administrators coming to feel that they were all embarked on a unitary set of tasks with potentially common achievements, namely the remaking of the university in order that it can fulfil its potential in the world.

Conclusion

In the twenty-first century, the university lives – has its being – in turbulent times. There are several turbulences – of financial markets, of changing conceptions of knowledge, of organisational relationships (with new partnerships between higher education and business), and of developing expectations of universities. In all this, the idea of the university has itself changed such that a limited array of concepts has captured the high ground – especially the entrepreneurial university, the university in the marketplace

and the corporate university. In this milieu, those who are concerned with academic development have essentially two options: either to endorse the contemporary movements (and in effect to underwrite them as end-points in the near-thousand years of the history of the university), or to take on a wider remit so that academic development becomes a project that is intent on playing its part in the widening of conceptions and practices of the university.

It is this latter option for which I am contending here. Indeed, I am proposing that academic development has a responsibility in advancing thinking and reflection on the possibilities for the university in the twenty-first century. I have suggested that the idea of the ecological university might be just such an idea that might have some potential for consideration and, indeed, development in the onward future of the university. This idea of the ecological university, however, is only an exemplification of the possibilities for ideas of the university. Much more important is the sense that academic development should embrace the largest sense of itself, as having nothing short of a role in enabling the university to go on reflecting on itself and in linking such creative thinking about the university with its micro-practices. Academic development, ultimately, is no less than a vehicle through which the university might reconstruct itself.

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After the White Paper

James Wisdom, Higher Education Consultant

This article is an attempt to interpret seven of the arguments and decisions that have been made around the White Paper to discover the implications for educational developers and the work of improving student learning.

Fees and loans

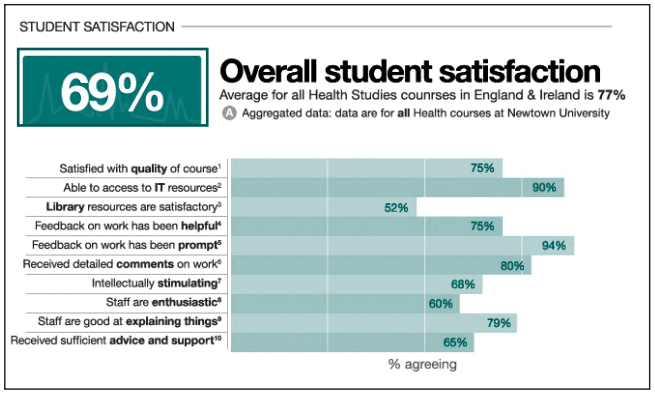
Will converting part of the English institutional block grant into loans for student fees have the long-term impact of improving the quality of teaching and of student learning? Those who believe in the beneficial effect of competition hope the impact will be in two forms – a swift improvement for the students who are in or will soon be in HE, and a longer-term improvement in the cultures and practices of English HE institutions.

Though the White Paper is unusual in its scale and speed, this is not a change in direction. Previous administrations encouraged a market approach, driven by more and better public information and the rhetoric of purchase. It is a model the civil service favours. The OECD's annual reports have been showing that one of the drivers of worldwide HE expansion has been an increasing proportion of the cost being born by families rather than taxpayers. The interesting question has been how each nation chooses to do it.

The effect of students paying fees has been a commonplace in discussions at SEDA conferences for many years. Everyone has at least one anecdote of some outrageous example of student behaviour which suggests that some students (or sometimes their parents) have a distorted concept of what higher education should really be about. Colleagues have described classes where many students, whose school or college experience has left them with very limited conceptions of learning, take the stance that, as a customer, they are entitled to more of the same. And now we have a Minister who has bet his future (and the sector's) on going further and faster in this direction.

Some institutions are responding to this as a marketing challenge. They are devising pledges, promises and charters which show how they will guarantee service to the students. Having allowed the NSS questions to become the dominant discourse of enhancement, they are now about to promote the Key Information Sets to be the benchmark for management. This may be both necessary and foolish at the same time.

There is an educational challenge here, but it is not about how to publish in ever greater detail what really lies behind the headlines. No university marketing department would be able to take the graphic which might be used to enable customers to compare 'feedback on work has been prompt', track it back through the clumsy questions of the NSS to its origins in the Course Experience Questionnaire, and at the same time explain the importance of the contextual framework which gave the CEQ its valuable role in real enhancement activity. A lot of the comparison data will need the statutory warnings of ad-land, which tell the consumer that the advert is true but not the truth.



A graphical representation of NSS responses, to help students to choose courses and institutions

Interactions with students

There have been many unforeseen outcomes of the White Paper. One of the most damaging may be its capacity to derail the work which has been done on the development of the concept of being a student.

Although many might have thought strengthening the 'student as consumer' position would appeal naturally to the National Union of Students, it was caricatured by the then President and Political Officer of the Union (Streeting and Wise, 2009). The Union has been much more interested in the concept of 'student engagement' and has conducted a project on this theme. A model of this concept (Bols and Freeman, 2011) suggests a direction of travel from *Consultation* (engaging students in discussions on a deeper level than the ubiquitous end-of-module questionnaires), through *Involvement* (with students taking a more active role in shaping their learning and teaching experience), through *Participation* (with students making decisions about shaping the curriculum) and reaching *Partnership* (notions of joint ownership of the processes of learning and teaching).

As the interest in student engagement shows, the real educational challenge is to devise a new relationship between those who teach and those who study. At present the culture of higher education is still based on the concept of academic ownership of both knowledge and process.

We have been through the protracted process of describing higher education and making it more explicit. Two forces operated in the same direction. One was the need, in institutions that were trying to make use of the concepts of credit rating, modularity, unitisation and semesterisation, to have a visible statement of what was taught, learned and assessed at the various levels of awards. The other was the quality challenge and the transition from assumed, instinctive standards based on custom and practice, to explicit standards based on published criteria. Both forces were strongly resisted, in part because they challenged the privilege of exclusive ownership.

Nevertheless, one of the outcomes of describing higher education through learning outcomes, assessment criteria and explicit standards, is that lecturers and students now have a common platform for discussion about both content and process. Unfortunately, the language in which modern descriptions are expressed is sometimes impenetrable to students and often to academic colleagues. But the more students understand the processes within which they are expected to function, the better will be the quality of their learning and their overall experience. Educational developers have been at the forefront of this process, in their work on (amongst other things) assessment and feedback, in improving course design and in fostering reflection on learning.

The growth of open, transparent and explicit educational processes would be happening whatever the political context of HE, as so much of the research around approaches to studying and constructive alignment supports it. The challenge for educational developers is to pursue the development beyond the widely accepted position that students should understand the world they are in, to the more contentious position that students should take more responsibility for shaping that experience. Unless it is handled well, and is derived from real educational values and credible research, it will generate a cynical reaction and will be characterised as the inevitable outcome of a narrow, customer-focused emphasis. But really the opposite is the case; unless we can move in that direction, we will be forever trapped in the unproductive and inappropriate discourse of students as customers consuming the education they are given.

Contested places

The first stage of a rolling programme will take out of the HEFCE allocations about one quarter of the places on offer next year. These will be the students who are awarded two As and a B at A level, and 20,000 student places which will be offered back to those institutions charging less than £7500.

Universities will continue to compete with each other to attract the AAB students, but some will try to take the opportunity to expand their numbers. Scholarships for talented but poor students will now be used for all AAB students. The social injustice is painful, as independent schools deliver a higher proportion of these students than state schools. The impact in the classroom has not been discussed, but these scholarships will be visibly funded by the fees of the other students. Will this change the dynamics of group work and collaborative learning? We may need research which explores the educational benefit of this development.

At present, institutions fund bursaries through fees and the block grant. In future the more extensive bursary regime will be wholly supported through fees. Many students will arrive at university expecting their fees to be spent on teaching. David Willetts hopes this will make these purchasers acutely aware of how much is being transferred to research and other university priorities, and exercise pressure accordingly. Will fee-funded bursaries hinder attempts to build cohort identity and collaborative learning? Or will this just be the Ryanair experience, when your neighbour has paid half the amount for the same flight? We will need to monitor closely any changes towards attitudes to group work and peer support, and the assumptions about collegiality which for some institutions has been most important.

Only 16 universities announced fees of less than £7500, partly because most decided to use bursaries rather than waiving proportions of fees. Although students prefer bursaries (it is money in their hand), the Treasury prefers lower fees (and smaller loans). The main beneficiaries of the 20,000 places would therefore have been the FE colleges and private providers, but 27 more universities are racing to adjust their fees downwards to be able to compete and expand. This can only pile the pressure onto institutions with widening-participation missions.

David Willetts' question was that, as Band D subjects were costing the

Treasury today around £6400 in fee loans and block grant, what sort of fantastic improvements had been planned to justify a 30% increase in costs to £9000? The re-allocation of the 20,000 is the Minister's answer to his own question. In response, Martin Hall, vice-chancellor at Salford, noted that widening-participation students were more expensive to teach, and that this price competition was 'not student-focussed but Treasury-focussed'. HMG clearly intends to exert maximum pressure to reduce the costs of HE to the Treasury, while maintaining the rhetoric that students are the 'heart of the system'.

Costs of higher education

In the twenty years between 1980 and 2000 the cost per head of educating HE students halved, and class sizes doubled. Between 2000 and 2010, on the other hand, expenditure per student rose faster in the UK than in any other OECD country. The Browne report shows that the lowest unit cost was reached in 1997 – just below £6000. By 2010-11 that had reached just over £7000.

Throughout this whole period the fundamental models of university teaching have hardly changed. Most IT innovations have been at the same general price as face-to-face teaching. The main changes have been around staff:student ratios. The changes we are expecting from now on are reductions in staff costs (by shifting to FE colleges or by employing cheaper tutors – the professors are in the prospectus, but the postgrads are in the classroom), and the stripping out of services that are beyond the classroom (such as collegiate life, accommodation, sport and subsidised research). There has been some movement around re-designing using fewer modules, with more formative and less summative feedback. Some institutions have experimented with sweating the assets, such as the concentrated two-year degree (Liz Hart Associates' report to HEFCE (2011) shows a potential reduction of one-quarter in costs, but notes how hard this will be for inflexible institutions). While existing institutions struggle to replace their administrative services with IT systems, any new entrant will not start with that burden. Despite all these shifts, the models of teaching have stayed remarkably resistant to change, even with some of the private providers. Only the full IT-based distance learning provision of a limited curriculum delivered by a new institution formed around a streamlined administration seems to have the potential to offer a systemic challenge to traditional costs.

Educational developers have enhanced existing models, working within the assumptions of their institution, going with the grain of the place, sometimes achieving marginal efficiencies, other times investing in quality improvements. Have there been advances in pedagogy which are capable of re-shaping university practice so significantly that the costs of achieving graduate outcomes can be significantly reduced? And if there are, what is the role of the educational development community in implementing them?

Risk-based regulation

The relationships between educational development and the quality processes of an institution are complex, but there is a common perception of a tension between assessment reform and the institutional quality framework. Whether it is by self-censorship, reluctance to experiment, resistance to change based on a 'play safe' culture, or an exaggerated regard for tradition, most of the time we assess most students by a very limited range of mechanisms. If we are intent on modernising higher education, then we are going to have to invest a lot of time and thought into new and more appropriate forms of assessment, White Paper or not.

The question then arises – will the proposed reforms to the management of quality have an impact on this work? Will the move to a risk-based regulation system generate an environment in which change, some of it potentially risky, will be able to flourish? Or will senior managers be even more cautious about attracting attention and damaging reputation? Whatever answer emerges, it reinforces the importance of building a deeper and more engaged relationship with students, without whose involvement and understanding much of this work will be nearly impossible.

Parents as customers

For the straight-from-school universities, one of the most dismal of the many unintended consequences of this White Paper will be a significant shift in the relationship between parents and their student children. The comparison web sites are aimed as much at parents as students (why else would *Which?* choose to enter this market? – it is not the reading matter of choice for most 17-year-olds). No one bothers to tell their horror story about the pushy parent any more – they have become commonplace. The fostering of academic and intellectual autonomy as the central feature of course design has had to struggle for some time against the 'schooling' culture of being told what to do, what to think, when to think it and how to show the examiner you have thought it. The new fees and loans structure is going to make it that much harder for parents to resist making interventions which will be for the best of intentions and may have the worst of outcomes. The challenge for educational developers will be to help institutions develop cultures which strengthen our students without dividing their loyalties.

Academic vs vocational study

Throughout the public debate one set of supposed opposites has maintained its rhetorical significance – academic against vocational study. Occasionally someone from the academic side makes the claim that graduates of pure, theoretical or esoteric subjects will at the same time have developed employability skills which justify their starting salaries. Less often someone from the vocational side claims its education can be intellectually nourishing and lead to similar personal growth and development as the academic subjects. The new fees will make HE decisions more stressful for individuals and families, and might reinforce the idea that richer students can study for personal development while the poorer have to study just for the job the family needs them to get. The challenge for educational developers will be to help to change

the terms of the public debate so that real personal development can be valued highly by all students and all their families. We know from daily experience it is not the different subjects which are inherently more valuable, but the ways they are taught, studied and assessed.

We may have an ally here in John Hayes, the Minister for Skills *etc.,* whose speeches usually end with some fine slogans: 'Apprenticeships: time honoured, but right for now'; 'Flagship policies for a flagship sector' (that's FE, by the way); 'Never has a Government believed as much in FE as I believe in you'. His support for craft and vocational skills is clearly heartfelt, and he represents a strand in government thinking which is heavily favoured. In his 'Vision of FE' speech he referred to 'the beauty of craft and the elegance of learning', and his various attempts to link these false opposites are very similar to Peter Mandelson's exhortations to HE when he was Minister.

Conclusion

The closest comparison is with the turbulence of the early 1980s, when threatened contraction in HE shifted quickly to rapid expansion. The issue then was whether lowering the barriers would bring thousands of students who could not achieve the standards. Of course they could – and there are thousands more who still could. The issues today are whether a loans/fees regime can be the basis for expansion – probably not much in its present form – and whether a customer culture can be the basis for enhancement – also probably not much. The challenge for educational developers is still to recognise the values behind real educational quality, and nurture them as vigorously as possible.

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The case for Programme-Focused Assessment

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Using examples and ideas from the NTFS PASS project, this article argues that Programme-Focused Assessment (PFA) should be considered by all courses and programmes in HE that wish to improve their assessment processes and make assessment more 'meaningful' for their students. From both theoretical and practical perspectives, the PASS project has demonstrated that principles and techniques of PFA can resolve many of the problems which are currently associated with assessment in higher education.

After brief discussion of current assessment issues in relation to PFA, this article will:

- explain what we mean by PFA
- highlight different methods and approaches which reflect the principles of PFA
- suggest the likely impact of PFA, with specific reference to case studies
- suggest directions for future work in this area.

Current assessment issues

The PASS project was set up to directly confront issues which concern every course/programme leader in HE: how to design and deliver an effective, efficient and sustainable assessment strategy which ensures that the main course/programme outcomes are satisfied. Programme-based assessment (now renamed programme-focused assessment for reasons we explain below) provides a framework for such effective strategies. The emphasis in PFA on integrative assessment which relates very directly to the overall programme aims and outcomes, can deal with assessment issues at two rather different levels: dealing with specific issues in assessment as currently practised across HE, and supporting course/programme leaders who are responsible for the overall assessment strategy.

Specific issues

The suggestion that there are some fundamental issues with assessment in higher education should not come as a surprise to anyone reading this article. Concerns and dissatisfaction can be found running through the research and development literature on learning and assessment in HE, through the student comments in the NSS, and through conversations on assessment with most academic tutors. Unfortunately, many of these problems are long-standing and it is perhaps depressing to note that early research into assessment and feedback uncovered problems which have yet to be convincingly resolved in many institutions. For example, Higgins *et al.* (2002) characterised the students in their study as 'conscientious consumers' in relation to assessment feedback – interested in and anxious to receive constructive feedback but often confused by sometimes contradictory and regularly incomprehensible comments on their work.

Recognising this context, the PASS project started by producing an Issues paper, authored by Chris Rust and available on the project website (www.pass.brad.ac.uk), noting problems such as: students and staff failing to see the links/coherence of the programme; modules being too short to focus and provide feedback on slowly learnt literacies and/or complex learning; and students and staff adopting a 'tick-box' mentality, focused on marks, engendering a surface approach to learning.

More recently, Chris co-authored the very useful paper with Margaret Price *et al*. (2011) which bemoans the lack of 'pedagogic, and particularly assessment, literacy' possessed by both academic staff and students. They offer 10 key premises that should inform our assessment decisions. For example, Premise 8 suggests that 'learning is more effective when students understand the assessment process' (p. 485), with obvious implications for the use of assessment criteria and the process of feedback. At a practical level, it is interesting to ask students how they would define a 'first-class' degree performance in their subject or discipline area. Can your students outline the assessment criteria on which their degree programme is based, or will they more readily outline the algorithm which builds up the module marks to achieve first-class status?

Comparing approaches to assessment, Price *et al*. (2011) suggest that 'an incremental approach focused at module/unit level provides an assessment experience that appears very disaggregated to students, whereas a programme/course focus enables an overview of assessment tasks and progression' (p. 490). And that overview, coupled with the sophisticated level of student understanding implied in premise 8 above, is a key component of effective PFA.

Supporting programme leaders

Despite the very significant growth of research into assessment and assessment feedback, there is relatively little evidence which can specifically support programme leaders in their strategic decisions on assessment, as the following examples demonstrate:

- Programme-Based Assessment has been used in a number of US colleges and seems at first sight to be a practical realisation of the QAA's concept of 'synoptic assessment' (as endorsed in their Precept 3). But this method has not been explicitly investigated in the UK alongside other major assessment strategies. There are many other examples of possible strategic decisions which have not been fully explored, alongside the concerns already highlighted that the conventional aggregation of module assessments offers a fragmented and disjointed experience to students
- Most of the development work on assessment in the UK to date has focused on specific examples and thus demonstrates significant change at module or assignment level. However, it is not clear how to generalise from specific examples in order to develop a coherent programme strategy
- Institutional teaching and learning strategies are now commonplace across UK HE. These strategies vary considerably in their focus and approach and it is not always clear how we can determine their effectiveness. Very few strategies have foregrounded the role of assessment. In many strategies, assessment has been implicit rather than explicit. There is also the difficulty of translating policies from institutional to programme level
- Too often a programme focus on assessment has not moved beyond assessment schedules and grids of learning outcomes and modules. This is compounded by uncertainties about the nature of an effective programme assessment strategy
- We have useful summaries and manifestos of general principles (from projects and initiatives such as REAP and the two CETLs who became partners in the PASS project – ASKe at Oxford Brookes, and AfL at Northumbria). However, this does not provide a completely consistent picture. For example, whose set of principles do we use? And again there is the problem of translating global principles into a specific programme strategy
- Innovation in assessment may have unintended consequences if it does not consider how different students interpret and respond to particular innovation. For example, while formative assessment is regarded as one of the most 'powerful' tools in the lecturer's toolkit, this may be mediated by student strategies (e.g. students viewing a formative opportunity as a 'safety net'). This is further complicated by different views on student orientations to feedback and different recipes for improvement
- Modern modular programme structures may have implications for assessment which can undermine particular strategies. For example, the development of slowly learnt aspects of graduateness such as academic literacies is often lost, ignored or is serendipitously acquired within fragmented course structures
- To further complicate their strategic decision-making, programme leaders must also take account of notions of collaborative or group assessment
- Lastly, but by no means least, there are significant issues of inclusivity in assessment.

What do we mean by Programme-Focused Assessment (PFA)?

The PASS project started by using the term 'programme-based assessment' to describe our emphasis, as this expression had been used in a number of previous papers and articles. At a number of workshops and seminars, this terminology was challenged on the grounds that surely most assessment has some basis in the course or programme from which it emanates. While this is true in principle, we would argue that the links between a particular piece of assessment and the overall programme outcomes can often be remote or tenuous to the students (and sometimes to the staff as well). Rather than extend this debate, we have adopted the term programme-focused assessment to highlight the focus on programme outcomes.

Key features of what we mean by programme-focused assessment and its potential advantages are summarised in Figure 1, below. The first and most critical point is that the assessment is specifically designed to address major programme outcomes rather than very specific or isolated components of the course. It follows then that such assessment is integrative in nature, trying to bring together understanding and skills in ways which represent key programme aims. As a result, the assessment is likely to be more authentic and meaningful to students, staff and external stakeholders. But we say 'likely' rather than 'certain' as we do not suggest that an integrative assessment automatically becomes more meaningful – the nature of the assessment and the criteria still have to be explained and demonstrated to students, especially to those who have been accustomed to a diet of discrete assessment tasks. And this is not an argument to revert back to the 'crunch' of final examinations from the 'good old days' (as one of our workshop participants elegantly expressed it). A set of unseen final examinations which test discrete subject areas (and where the assessment criteria may be obscure or ambiguous) is *not* programme-focused assessment. As the diagram implies, levels of meaningful integration can be achieved in a number of ways, as illustrated by the examples in the next section of this article.

Figure 1 offers two dimensions in which assessments can vary: the extent to which the assessment covers specified programme outcomes; and the weighting of the given assessment towards the final qualification. At the bottom left, the typical assessment on a single module of a modular programme is likely to relate to only a few of the main programme outcomes. It also has only a small weighting in relation to the overall qualification. As we move towards the top right-hand area of the diagram, we increasingly find forms of assessment which we would describe as programme focused. The different lengths of the boxes suggest that some types of assessment are likely to have very different weighting in different contexts. For example, the single capstone module may have very different credit weightings in different institutions.

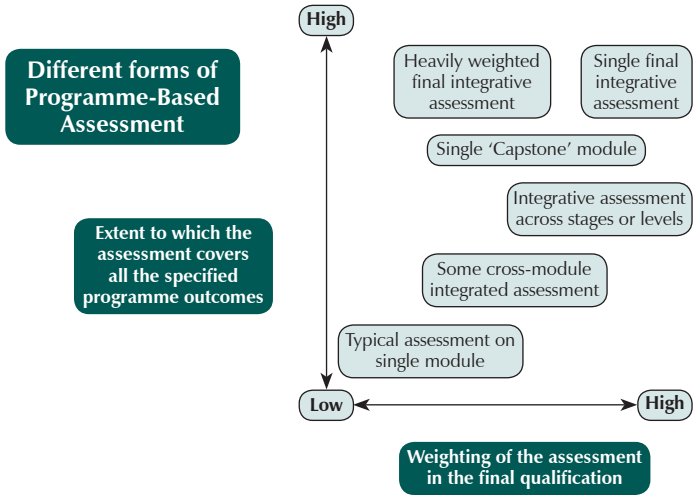

Figure 1 Different forms of Programme-based/focused Assessment

The idea of the single, final integrative assessment may seem rather obvious to many colleagues in disciplines like Fine Art and Design, where the 'Final Degree Show' is commonplace. But a Final Show or Exhibition may not fully encompass the notion of PFA if the assessment criteria are not clearly related to the overall programme aims and if these criteria are not fully understood by both students and staff.

Examples of PFA in practice

We have recently found colleagues in a number of institutions who are implementing relevant innovations in assessment which we would see as incorporating elements of PFA, although they may not be explicitly using the PFA terminology. Further details of the following are available on the PASS website.

The Peninsula Medical School (PMS)

This summary is extracted from the full case study by Sue Rodway-Dyer, University of Exeter (Rodway-Dyer, 2010).

The PMS curriculum has characteristics which differentiate it from other medical schools and facilitates a PFA approach to assessment. Most medical programmes are based upon a 2-year pre-clinical phase where the emphasis is on academic scientific learning, followed by a 3-year clinical phase where learning occurs in (normally) the hospital environment. PMS wanted to break this mould and articulated a 'two-wedges' approach to the 5-year programme (Figure 2). In year 1 the scientific learning has the 'thick' end of the wedge but there is clinical learning too, but with only the thin end of a wedge. Over the years, the scientific learning decreases from thick to thin and the clinical learning increases from thin to thick.

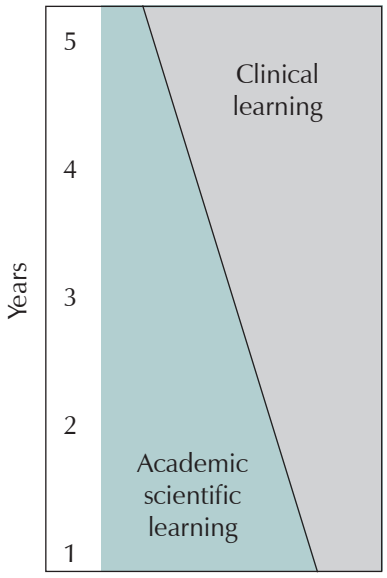

Figure 2 The PMS approach

For logistical reasons, students in the first two years are based on the university campus and the final 3 years in local hospitals, but there is an appropriate mix of scientific and clinical learning in all years.

The innovative concept behind using programme assessment evolved at PMS due to the initiative of a number of key staff and the engagement of an external consultant from the University of Maastricht, which was the first European HE establishment to adopt programmatic testing. A key driver was the belief in the need for an integrated curriculum with integrated assessment. In all five years the assessment was designed to address the programme-level graduate outcomes. It was central to the philosophy of the programme that learning activities could contribute to *any* of the

assessment strands. This principle has not changed since the outset.

Biomedical Sciences at Brunel
The BSc in Biomedical Sciences (with specialist routes) was revised from the existing course, primarily to resolve two major issues: teaching staff were struggling to cope with the assessment workload following a significant increase in student numbers; and students were not demonstrating sufficient integration across the different modules. Staff wanted to improve students' critical thinking and analysis and to break down the impression that students were treating modules as 'silos'. Students were also failing to carry over important learning from year to year.

The revised course takes advantage of new assessment regulations at Brunel which allow courses to specify teaching (study blocks) and assessment tasks and activities (assessment blocks) separately so that one assessment block can relate to several study blocks. Courses can also include conventional modules where the study and assessment blocks completely coincide.

Major course elements here which represent the ideas of PFA include:

- Assessment blocks which relate to one or more study blocks
- Assessment blocks which have different forms depending on the focus of the assessment, e.g. for second year practicals, the lab practical sessions are formative and students are given a range of data and have to write a scientific paper for the assessment task
- Synoptic examination worth 20 credit points at all three levels.

The revisions to the course have enabled a major reduction in assessment and staff time has been shifted to provide more contact and student support.

Foundation Degree at Exeter College
The Leadership and Management in the Aviation Industry Foundation Degree (LMAI FDA) has developed a curriculum designed on the assumption that the most authentic pedagogy focuses on the identification, analysis and resolution of immediate problems in the learners' world. This structure and delivery model includes a number of important innovations (e.g. integrated work-based learning, emphasis on 'close learning', variety of distance elements *etc.*).

Major course elements here which represent the ideas and principles of PFA include:

- Use of synoptic problem-based assessment and extended year-long modules
- The requirement on students to make ongoing links between taught material and all modules (*i.e.* a cross-functional business-wide approach) for all formative and summative assignments
- Ongoing formative feedback and continuous opportunities for critical reflection.

The LMAI FDA was designed to deliver impact for both the employee and the employer. Early-stage indicators suggest that this innovative structure has begun to have a positive impact upon the working practices of the enrolled managers but also more broadly across the organisation in which they work.

Other developments
One of our aims over this last year of the project is to find, investigate and disseminate further examples of PFA in practice. For example, we are currently talking to staff at Liverpool Hope University about their new undergraduate regulations which 'abandon modules' and which demand that every course specifies the 'Key Honours Assessment' at Final Year Level.

We will continue to look for further examples in order to test the impact and consequences of PFA. This differentiates the PASS project from other assessment projects which are investigating a range of current practices across the sector, most notably TESTA, which is also featured in this issue. Towards the end of this academic year, we are aiming to share comparative thoughts and outcomes with TESTA and other related projects (including the 'Assimilate' project at Leeds Metropolitan and 'Rethinking Final Year Projects and Dissertations' at Gloucestershire).

What is the impact of PFA?

Another issue which is a priority in our final year is to investigate impact in the number of innovative case studies which are now emerging – our initial attempt to chart the key features of this impact is given overleaf in Figure 3.

This diagram highlights some critical features for course or programme teams which are considering a move to programme-based/focused assessment, e.g. the importance of institutional regulations and teamworking. The notion of 'mindset' reflects the fact that many younger staff now working in HE have only ever experienced modularised/semesterised systems and may find it difficult to conceptualise valid alternatives. As a result of this and other potential barriers, we cannot pretend that moving to PFA is an easy process. As Price *et al.* (2011) comment, achieving such a programme focus is likely to 'require both a creative and a team approach but may challenge some staff's established working patterns' (p. 490).

And the future?

Overall, we have been a bit disappointed that we have not been able to unearth more current examples of PFA principles in practice. However, the examples and the case studies that we have investigated suggest that the principles and approaches we have identified can make a real and positive difference to both the staff and student experience, provided that the institutional regulations and procedures are supportive. We need more examples and more detailed investigation of the processes and factors which make PFA most effective.

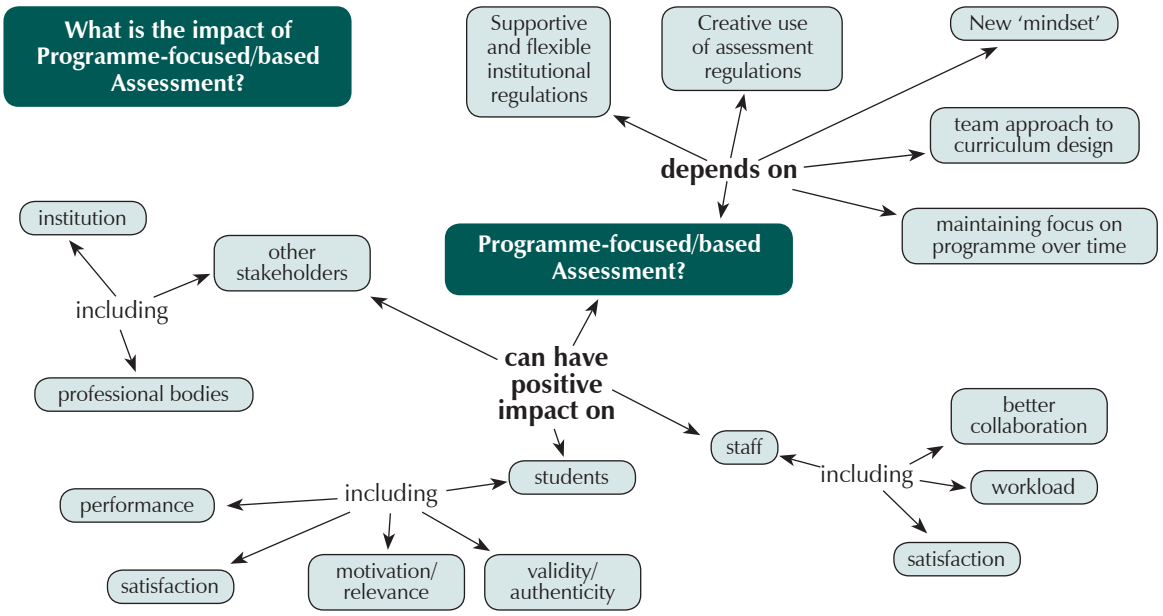

Figure 3 The impact of Programme-based/focused Assessment

Programme-focused assessment does offer some creative answers to the assessment issues which plague many courses and departments. The PASS project can provide inspiration and examples, but the real test will be how these ideas can be further developed by course teams over the next decade.

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The TESTA project: research inspiring change

Tansy Jessop and **Yaz El-Hakim,** University of Winchester, and **Graham Gibbs,** Higher Education Consultant

This paper explores reasons for the expansion of a funded Higher Education Academy National Teaching Fellowship project, 'Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment' (TESTA). In 2009, TESTA started a three-year research project on seven undergraduate programmes at four UK universities. By the end of its second year, it had expanded to twenty-two degree programmes in eight UK universities. TESTA is being piloted at a further three UK universities, and will be offering an additional ten universities the opportunity to use its model through the HEA Change Academy programme.

Internationally, TESTA is being used in one faculty at the University of New South Wales in Australia for the benefit of 7000 students. The TESTA website (www.testa.ac.uk) demonstrates the project's international appeal, with almost 3,000 hits of four minutes each from sixty countries in one year.

The project's growth and web interest has happened two years into a three-year project, before the research is complete, and without published outputs. It is the credibility of the change process rather than published results that seems to be compelling. This article provides a brief background to the project, and explores reasons for TESTA's growth and usefulness to degree programmes within HE.

TESTA website homepage

Background

TESTA began in 2009 between four historically similar 'Cathedrals Group' universities. It was led by Winchester with Bath Spa, Chichester and Worcester as full partners. Its conceptualisation owes a great debt to Graham Gibbs, who on his first ever career sabbatical, scoured disciplinary papers about assessment and feedback, searching for evidence of approaches which helped students to learn. The distillation of his extensive, disciplinary-focused review was a paper identifying ten conditions of assessment and feedback which help students to learn (Gibbs and Simpson, 2004). Post-sabbatical, Graham became Director of Learning and Teaching at Oxford University, which prompted him to examine the extent to which institutional and disciplinary contexts shape assessment environments. Out of his 'ten conditions' paper, he constructed the Assessment Experience Questionnaire (AEQ) to measure the influence of these conditions on student learning. Alongside the AEQ, Gibbs and Dunbar-Goddet (2007) developed a triangulated research methodology which TESTA has since adopted. This methodology was first used in a study of various programmes in three different universities (Gibbs and Dunbar-Goddet, 2009).

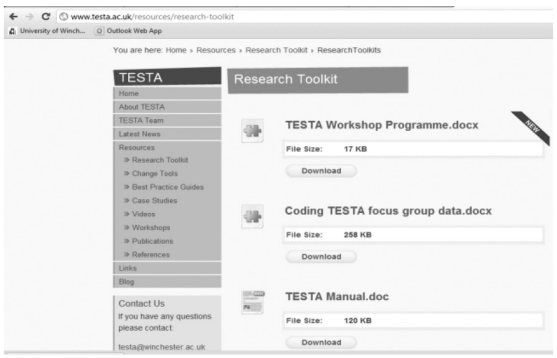
Explanations for TESTA's growth can be found in (a) the research methodology including the representation of data in case studies; (b) the significance of a programme focus on assessment; and (c) the nature of the change process adopted. Our paper explores reasons for the growth of TESTA within these three broad categories.

The Research Methodology

TESTA combines the use of a tried and tested methodology with case study representation of data which allows programme teams to grapple with complex and particular data in productive ways. The following two sections describe the methodology and its representation.

TESTA employs a robust methodology

One reason for TESTA's growth is its robust research methodology, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches; triangulating by method and from different standpoints. TESTA uses three methods to depict an assessment environment. The first is the programme audit, which ascertains the 'planned curriculum' from programme leaders and definitive documents. The audit calculates the balance of summative and formative assessment, variety of assessment, proportion of exams to coursework, and the average quantities of written and oral feedback that a typical final year student has experienced. It reviews how aims, learning outcomes and assessment tasks are aligned, exploring the mapping and representation of written criteria across modules to the programme level, and issues of progression. The audit is often the moment when programme leaders visualise the assessment pattern across a whole programme for the first time.



The research toolkit on www.testa.ac.uk, which helps people experiment with and use the TESTA process, is one of the most popular destinations of visitors to the site.

The second research method is the AEQ. Students are asked to respond to 28 statements on a five-point Likert scale. AEQ scores show the influence of a programme's assessment pattern on students' habits of working, their approach to learning, their use of feedback, and perceptions about its quantity and quality. AEQ items ask students how clear they are about goals and standards, and what learning they derive from exams. The final statement on the AEQ is a satisfaction item: 'Overall I was satisfied with the quality of this course'. Across some 1200 AEQ returns from TESTA programmes, four scales have consistently shown a positive statistical correlation with overall satisfaction. These are: clear goals and standards; quantity and quality of feedback; use of feedback; and appropriate assessment. Improving on any of these four scales is likely to result in students being more satisfied with the quality of their programme.

The third method consists of focus groups with final year students. Discussion about types of assessment, how assessment influences student effort, what feedback is like, when it reaches them, how useful it is, perceptions of online, oral and written feedback, ideas about 'feed forward' and deliberations between students about how they achieve a good 'nose' for quality, are all embraced in the focus group method. The student voice gives texture, power and explanation to scores on the AEQ.

TESTA tells a compelling story

Many educational research projects can legitimately claim to have rigorous research methods which are well triangulated. The leap from good data to a compelling story is a further reason why TESTA has captivated academics and educational developers, and impelled them to action. Richardson comments that much social science research reporting falls at the last hurdle by being written up in boring policy-speak, stripped of the personal and lacking vitality (Richardson, 1990; 1994). She laments the loss of vital texts and their replacement with formulaic and detached reporting which veils the researcher's interpretation, imitating scientific positivism and tending to sanitise the raw words of real people. Gross-Davis identifies the key features of a good case study as these: it tells a good story; raises a thought-provoking issue; has elements of conflict; promotes empathy with the central characters; lacks an obvious, clear-cut answer; takes a position; demands a decision and is relatively concise (Gross-Davis, 1993). This is what we have endeavoured to do in representing TESTA data, deploying a case study format which

provides the distinctive results of each methodology, and triangulates them – confirming, contrasting, and opening up spaces of ambiguity for discussion. The interaction between student voice, statistical analysis and programme mapping provides rich data for creating good cases, with the potential for tensions, nuances, confirmations and contradictions. This is particularly so with focus group data, where we use a narrative structure to convey the student voice in snappy headlines which interpret, prioritise and select categories, followed by student quotations which authenticate the analysis. Again and again, it is the words of students which reverberate in the minds of academics and convey the power of what is evidenced elsewhere in the statistics and the audit.

The Significance of a Programme Focus on Assessment

This section explores the significance of TESTA's focus on programme features of assessment. At a time of anxiety about modularity's impact on the shape, size and pedagogic rationale for assessment patterns, TESTA has rekindled the idea of the programme. Many institutions have been pausing to reflect on the impact of modular academic structures on degree coherence. At the four partner institutions, there have been debates about 'short fat' and 'long thin' modules, capstone assessments to integrate knowledge and test higher-order skills across modules, and more integrated approaches to develop deep and 'slow' learning over longer periods of time than a 12-week semester allows. A secondary driver for this call to tame the modular beast has been a feeling of anxiety that it has spawned more summative assessment than ever before, as a consequence of the link between credits and modules, and within the compressed time frames of semesterised modules (Knight and Yorke, 2003). As with one-day and 20-20 cricket matches, there is a feeling that frequency has trivialised the meaning of summative assessments, making for a fast-paced but shallow game. The resulting dearth of formative opportunities – 'time in the nets' – means that students have fewer opportunities to experiment, take risks, and practise to gain mastery. The high summative:low formative ratio has reduced students' focus on intrinsic motivation for learning, as everything which drives student work is linked to an extrinsic grade.

TESTA calls to the programmatic and opens up space for conversations among programme teams who often do not have the time, space, or reason to engage with each other in substantial cross-modular dialogue about pedagogy. The only other time this kind of conversation might and should occur is during periodic review, but the focus then tends not to be on how the whole programme's assessment works together, but rather on assembling modular offerings into something resembling a coherent programme. There are many ingenious and inspired lecturers with responsibility for teaching modules, who may have very limited opportunities to share their practice and shape pedagogy on the whole programme. TESTA challenges a modular outlook and asks programme team members to surrender some modular autonomy for the greater good of the whole programme.

The Change Process

In this section we explore why the change process has been meaningful and credible enough for programme teams to act on. TESTA has helped teams to bring about systematic changes to programme assessment patterns, based on complex discussions about the evidence and its relationship to their experience of teaching students.

TESTA nurtures ownership of the data and process

In reporting back research, TESTA has a 'live' programme team event where the external evidence is presented and discussed with a programme team. The purpose of this event is to disseminate findings and to encourage discussion about the evidence from the perspective of those who teach students. This programme team meeting has become the pivot of the change process. It is evidence-led; has a narrative structure with space for dialogue; works to build relationships between researchers, team members and programme leaders; and respects local knowledge and insight. The TESTA programme team meeting provides a framework for teams to interpret their own data, with a mix of external 'bird's eye view' findings and openness to local insights from team members. The event is characterised by listening, discussion, questioning, and probing at the meaning of evidence in relation to wider debates about quality, pedagogy, and academic structures. The programme team meeting is a place where intuition meets evidence; and where pedagogy and theory are discussed in disciplinary and institutional contexts. It is a place where the potential for change is given permission. Several programme leaders underscored the value of the team meeting as a catalyst for change. As one remarked:

> *'Once we'd had that big team meeting I got quite excited about it because I'm quite interested in teaching and learning. I like the idea that you can actually change things. It isn't set in stone.'* (Programme Leader E, October 2010)

The kinds of questions we ask give programme teams the responsibility for interpreting the data we present. So, for example, to the question 'why, given your high volume of written feedback, are your students so lukewarm about using it?', we say to teams that 'what matters here is what sense YOU make of what is going on, using the data as a prompt'. The consequence of this approach seems to be that lecturers are engaged and energised to tackle problems and implement locally-owned strategies. After the meeting, programme teams develop changes *without our involvement*. We have followed up by interviewing programme leaders about changes made, and their rationale

for them. We are currently in the process of evaluating the impact of interventions on each programme in a second round of TESTA data collection.

The TESTA change process is embedded in a participatory social process. It is not a managerial tool nor is it part of an audit culture associated with performance measures. Although there is an audit involved, it is an audit for the programme rather than an audit of a programme. The tone and intent of the team discussion are as important as the evidence in leading programme teams to act on the data. As one programme leader commented, 'I don't think it's just the tools. The tools are good and they work really, really well...it's the approach. It comes through a kind of collegiality' (interview with Programme Leader A, 2010). Teams describe feeling invested in the data and having the power to act on it for themselves: 'I don't think I've ever seen our colleagues quite as energised and full of ideas; it's really given us the conviction that we can take ownership of our teaching and have the courage to be imaginative in what we're doing' (e-mail from Programme Leader B, 2011).

Our approach when using evidence from TESTA is to work *with* programme teams and *with* the grain of different disciplines, being open to contextual insights from inside players. The data often resonates with programme teams, confirming with evidence what intuition and other sources had long foretold. As one programme leader commented:

> *'One of our external examiners has been banging on about marking criteria for quite a long time and we probably haven't paid enough attention to that. That came up through TESTA. The other one was related, which was students' perception of subjectivity in marking. They go hand in hand, but there's also the issue of making students aware of what measures we take to make sure that they're not subjective.'* (Programme Leader C, 2010)

In most instances, TESTA data has both confirmed and challenged pedagogical practices, as illustrated in this comment:

> *'The team thought that because we offered so many different types of assessment that we were quite innovative and this was great for the students. The project has made us re-think variety. So that's been very useful. We knew the students had a heavy assessment workload, so we would have reduced that anyway. This data helps me go to the team and say "Well, look, we've got the evidence now to be able to go ahead and do this" rather than it being on a whim…'* (Programme Leader D, 2010)

TESTA is a complex change process

The final reason why TESTA has gained ground is that it couples research and development; evidence and intervention; critique and innovation. It sets in motion a complex and multi-layered process of change, based on evidence and generative team conversations. It involves the module-programme dynamic and the enhancement-assurance relationship. In the lead institution, senior managers describe the 'TESTA effect', and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic) has recommended that all programmes go through the TESTA process at periodic review.

Recurring themes in TESTA data have led to particular programme-wide changes. Some of these are:

- Too much summative assessment (assessment of learning)
- Not enough formative assessment (assessment for learning)
- Lack of sequencing of tasks across the programme
- Feedback failing to feed forward to the next task
- Bewildering variety leading students to have to master both content and process
- Marker variation
- Lack of clarity about goals and standards (knowing what 'good' is)
- Troughs and peaks in timing of assessments leading to patchy effort from students, and surface learning under pressure
- Modular conception of assessment so that tasks do not feed into each other across modules.

The kinds of changes we have witnessed and are measuring through post-intervention data collection include structural changes to whole degree programmes; changes which address assessment and feedback themes; and those with a strong pedagogic focus. Two of the original TESTA programmes have revalidated their entire degree programmes to have stronger and longer strands which cohere across semesters and years. This has been complemented by more linked assessment, and a rebalancing of the summative:formative ratio to reflect greater attention to assessment *for* learning. The data has spoken to programme teams in different ways: for some the 'message' is about streamlining, sequencing and reducing varieties of assessment; for others it is rebalancing the ratio of summative to formative assessment, and devising strategies for embedding a culture among students and academics where assessment for learning is valued enough to be undertaken, even though it carries no marks. Other teams have devised cunning tactics to make feedback feed forward in iterative cycles of reflection and action, while several teams, confronted with the knowledge that students perceive variation in marking standards, have engaged in dialogic marking workshops with their teams.

It is early days in assessing the impact of these changes, but the overriding impression we have had is of teams working systematically in evidence-informed ways to enhance student learning across whole programmes. This bodes well for more substantial, multi-layered, collegial approaches to enhancing teaching and learning. The unintended consequence for many academics has been rich, particular, theoretical and evidence-based discussion about assessment and feedback.

Acknowledgements

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Book Review

The Fundamentals of Workplace Learning: Understanding how People Learn in Working Life

by Knud Illeris

2011, Routledge, London

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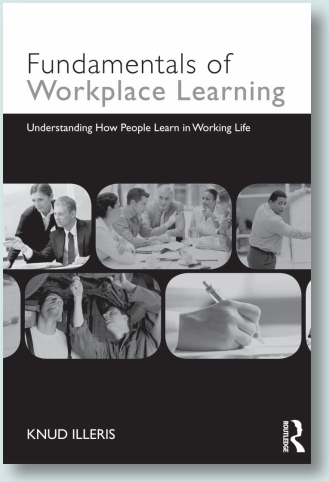

Learning in the workplace is certainly topical and this book aims to present the challenges and issues related to learning outside educational institutions. Illeris is a professor of lifelong learning in Denmark so this book is positioned from a Scandinavian perspective rather than that of the UK or US, drawing from a research and political stance reflecting these origins. The emphasis is on providing the conditions for learning through work experience and placements as part of an education programme, particularly for school or college students, although education for working learners in the workplace is included.

It is divided into three sections: the first considers the basic theories and conditions of learning in general and as applied to the work environment. This is illustrated with Illeris's own models of learning, acknowledging the impact of the work context in which learning occurs, and making a particular case for the development of competence as an outcome of workplace learning, arguing that competence cannot be achieved through traditional educational experience in school or college. The second section considers workplace learning in practice. This considers the provision of conditions conducive for learning within a work environment, for example, mentorship, technology and management responsibilities. There are some suggestions included to maximise learning opportunities at work, such as work shadowing, or job swaps, although few new ideas are offered. The third section revisits some of the special conditions for learning at work, concluding with a summary of conditions ideal for promoting learning at work. Discussion of the differing political and cultural influences on funding for workplace learning raises some interesting points for policy makers in education and government and has implications for organisations.

The target audience for this book is not clear, varying between school and college staff, but it could have informed workplaces and those involved in managing learning at work, although some might find the writing style hard to engage with. This book would probably be informative for extreme novices to the field, but I found the writing style heavy going, being repetitive in places, and using a generalist, rather patronising tone at times. It could have explored some key concepts much further such as reflection, organisational learning and facilitation of learning. Recent work and research around professional learning and work-based learning at HE level were not included although the concept of 'Communities of Practice' (Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1998) *Communities of Practice: learning, meaning and identity)* was alluded to. 'Organisational Learning' was identified as being a potential source of stress and burnout on the basis of some research, but there was no indication what could be done to mitigate this. Some concrete examples and specific illustrations might have lightened the tone, making application more evident. Some of the terminology although scholarly, seemed not to reflect current practice in the UK and US. Recent employer engagement projects and research regarding learning at work in the UK have more to offer with regard to live examples and innovative practices, and unfortunately I feel this book has a limited contribution to current knowledge and practice.

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Postgraduates who teach: in their own voices

Debbie McVitty, National Union of Students

> *'You give something back, I mean, you've gone through the system and now it's your turn to try and impart that information, to get people excited about your topic as well.'* (UK PhD student, female, biological sciences)

Support for postgraduates who teach in UK universities has improved significantly in recent years. It is now unusual to see postgraduates teaching without any kind of preparation or support. But undergraduate fees are set to increase significantly from 2012 and student expectations of contact time and teaching quality are increasing, at the same time as many universities are experiencing reductions in overall income. Postgraduates may find themselves in more demand as teachers – but with more demands on them as teachers.

In the summer of 2011, NUS undertook five focus groups in different universities around the UK to better understand the experience of postgraduates with teaching responsibilities. We wanted to know how postgraduate students across the range of subject areas experience the teaching development that is on offer to them, where their support and advice comes from, and their opinions of what it means to be a postgraduate teacher in today's higher education system.

It is hardly surprising that those postgraduates who volunteered to sit in a room and discuss teaching were universally passionate about their subject, loved teaching and were deeply concerned about the quality of the undergraduate experience. The postgraduates we interviewed were clear-headed about the pressures on institutions, and did not expect to have their hands held. But at initial results stage we have identified a number of areas that institutions may wish to investigate in order to support greater professionalism in postgraduate teaching.

Access to training opportunities

For most of the postgraduates we spoke to, the existence of formal teaching training was not an issue. However, in several institutions the training was mandatory in some subjects and not others, and there were ongoing problems with postgraduate awareness of what training was available, their eligibility for it and barriers to application for courses. Applicability of formal training to the subject or mode of teaching was also raised on a number of occasions.

> *'I just think that, em, because they're trying to design something for everyone, some of the stuff they're talking about might not be relevant to your subject and things, so some of their ideas might be great in some ways but may not be applicable to what you're doing.'* (UK PhD student, female, social sciences)

> *'I wanted to do the qualification one, but I don't do enough teaching, and I don't prepare materials so I can't do the qualification one – I have to do the one-day course.'* (UK PhD student, male, physical sciences)

> *'You have to, you have to get like, signatures from your supervisor, signature from head of department, and then you have to do a little statement, and it's just it's really, I didn't know it'd be so hard just to apply for a course.'* (UK PhD student, female, humanities)

Access to advice from practising academics

Postgraduate teachers tend to appreciate advice and reassurance from practising academics in their subject, but a number struggle to access this as a resource that would help them develop as teachers. Certainly access to this kind of feedback seems in some cases to be more a matter of luck than policy.

> *'I've never had a case where an academic has gone, "Oh I don't have time for that". Perhaps I've got a good department or I'm just very lucky, but everyone that I've ever approached about teaching help has been fantastic.'* (UK PhD student, female, medical sciences)

One student identified a possible solution to this problem – a named contact within departments:

> *'There should be someone who you go to, or somebody within your department who's just the sort of teaching go to person that, that wouldn't mind, they expect that they're gonna get postgrads asking them something...cos quite often the unit coordinator either won't email back or will just be really annoyed that you've got in contact with them and be quite narky.'* (UK PhD student, female, humanities)

For PhD students coming from overseas negotiating departmental teaching cultures and the preferences of individual academics can be challenging:

> *'He treats me as one of his students, and uh, later I prepare my own slides, my own materials, but he doesn't use it at all, and uh, well I felt, a little bit frustrated.'* (overseas PhD student, male, social sciences)

Formal and student feedback

The question we asked that elicited one of the widest ranges of response was, 'how do you know how you are doing as a teacher?' In a number of cases, postgraduate students did not feel able to assess whether their teaching was effective or not. Where feedback structures existed, whether from students or academic staff, the quality of feedback was variable. In the case of academics, feedback was insufficiently detailed, or focused on content over style. Student feedback was viewed as potentially problematic:

> *'To mark somebody well in these terms you need to be quite grown-up and quite reflective and understand what the thing is about which I think people in that category are not yet, all of them able to do.'* (EU PhD student, female, humanities)

A full report of findings will be available from NUS later in 2011. For more information contact postgraduates@nus.org.uk.

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New to the field: Integrating the student voice into the PG Cert

Jo Peat, Roehampton University

> *'I ask you to begin to explore, within your own context, new ways to engage students in their learning, to involve students in your internal quality assurance systems, and in the design and planning of courses.'* (Porter, 2009)

With this exhortation from Aaron Porter in mind, this project sought to embed student observations of staff into the Roehampton University PG Cert HE. This echoes one of the goals of the current Roehampton University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, which is to be informed by the student voice. The purpose of such student engagement needs to be clear, however, so that it avoids becoming a tick-box exercise and is rather one that seeks to genuinely and actively engage students in decision-making and change at local and university level. As Little *et al.* (2009) point out:

> *'While institutions' rationales for student engagement processes stem from a central concern to enhance the student experience, for many […] institutions a "listening and being responsive" rationale seemed to take precedence over a rationale that emphasised student engagement as being central to creating a cohesive learning community (and hence staff and students being viewed as partners in enhancing learning experiences).'*

The formal introduction of new colleagues to learning and teaching in higher education would seem to be a prime area in which to involve students as partners in shaping and enhancing educational experiences. The PG Cert already involves a number of observations of new members of staff; however, I am mindful that we, as academics, can be at quite a distance from being students and may have done our degrees in a very different academic climate. We may therefore have very different perceptions of learning and teaching from our students, as a result of age, experience and our role in academia. My aim was to interrogate students' perceptions of the efficacy of taught sessions, the stimulation, engagement and enthusiasm brought to these by the lecturers, and to engage the student voice in the pedagogic process itself, so that those new to teaching in higher education become aware of the needs and wishes of the students at the beginning of their higher education careers.

I invited students to participate in the PG Cert in the form of consultants to the new staff. My long-term aim is to invite students to participate more fully in the induction of new staff members; however, initially the student volunteers were asked to observe the new academics' teaching. These student observations would, of course, be with the accord of the academics and would be regulated by a confidentiality agreement.

The recruitment of students was of paramount importance, as the students needed to be committed to the project and be relied on to observe confidentiality. The students were asked to observe staff who were teaching on programmes other than their own, both at undergraduate and master's level. This disciplinary distance would help the students to focus on the pedagogical approaches employed rather than the content of the taught sessions and would be less threatening for staff than being observed by students on their programme. Training in observation of teaching had to be undertaken by the student participants prior to the observations, as students are not, by definition, likely to be trained in the theory and practice of pedagogy (Streeting and Wise, 2009). However, '[Students] have become experts in being students with a commitment to gaining the most from their educational experiences' (Kay *et al.,* 2010) and are therefore ideally placed to take part in this type of project.

The recruitment of staff members to the project proved more straightforward than initially envisaged. The current and previous PG Cert cohorts were approached and, happily, a number of these colleagues were interested in becoming

involved. It is now hoped to extend this initiative to more experienced members of the academic staff as part of the CPD/enhancement process.

The observation process began with an introductory meeting between the student and the member of staff to agree the focus of the observations. Prior to this meeting, the students, in consultation with the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit, agreed areas of focus and the lecturers were then able to put forward other areas of their practice on which they would like feedback. Once the observations had taken place, the observer and observed met again to discuss aspects of the observations and the observation process. Details of the actual observations remain at all times confidential between the two parties involved: they are not shared with me. My interest is in the process rather than the details of the lecturers' pedagogical approaches. To this end, the lecturer and student each have a questionnaire to fill in on the process, which is returned to me once completed.

This is a small-scale, on-going study primarily to test the waters. So far, the initiative has been very positively received both by staff and students; I am aware, though, that I am working with enthusiasts and that, if this is rolled out on a larger scale, there will be an element of resistance and uncertainty from some colleagues. As Trowler, Saunders and Knight (2003) point out, cultural change takes time, subtle persistence and a mindset that thinks 'small scale and incremental'. For staff, the student observations have enabled them to receive feedback on aspects of their teaching from the peers of those they teach. They have raised, as positive points, that this feedback is not strictured by current views of how we 'should' teach in higher education, a weakness maybe of observations by educational developers; nor are they peppered with comments about how this discipline has been taught historically, a potential criticism of observations by departmental colleagues. As the students are not on the programme taught by those they are observing, they feel more able to feed back truthfully, although there is, of course, a certain reticence about feeding back more critical comments to someone perceived to be in a professional role when the observer is not. Staff also commented on being able to ask these students for feedback on areas of their teaching in which they feel less confident, which they would be less eager to do with a colleague. One lecturer remarked that she feels unable to ask her own students for detailed feedback on her teaching, although she has always wanted to gain a student perspective on this, and this project has allowed her to do so.

Davie and Galloway (1996) suggest that initiatives such as this, which enable students to contribute proactively, motivates them and helps them to 'gain a sense of ownership in their own educational journey'. The students involved all reported enjoying the process. For them, the most interesting part was 'being on the other side' – they felt as though they had moved from being students in the learning experience to seeing the session more from the lecturer's point of view. They felt that it also gave them an insight into student behaviour, as they were able to sit back and watch their peers, an indulgence they rarely take part in. Another aspect of interest was that they had not necessarily considered the pedagogical approach of lecturers before taking part in this project; they commented that students often passively accept the way in which the session is being taught, whereas this gave them the opportunity to consider the actual teaching more objectively and consider which approaches were more successful than others from a student point of view.

As QAA points out, the idea of students as partners, co-creators and experts emphasises active student engagement and collaboration (Kay *et al*. 2010), which I am convinced is a positive development in higher education. Porter adds that:

> *'There are clear benefits to cultivating a learning HE sector. If the sector can respond comprehensively and rapidly to learners, it will improve its success in pedagogy, its capacity for innovation, and its international competitiveness. If practitioners across the sector are able to listen and respond to learners, and to do it well, then higher learning itself will become more relevant and more exciting for all of us.'* (Porter, 2009)

I hope that this initiative will provide another step in this direction for Roehampton University.

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Information for Contributors

The Editorial Committee of *Educational Developments* welcomes contributions on any aspect of staff and educational development likely to be of interest to readers.

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Transforming Learning@UWS – A Manifesto For Learning in the Real World

David Ross, University of the West of Scotland

Background

This work originated from a coffee-room discussion in summer 2009 in the Centre for Academic and Professional Development (CAPD) which expressed some frustration that a university that has very good student engagement in committees and staff-student liaison groups had a limited record of engaging students to plan curricula and pedagogy at a strategic level. At the same time, the university was embarking on a major 'transforming learning' project to lead us into a new learning, teaching and assessment strategy following a major merger with a large college, creating a new institution with four geographically spread campuses and a wide diversity of students, including almost 50% part-time.

We decided to combine these two efforts and started in autumn 2009 with a remit to get our students involved with staff in discussing their learning with the team of educational developers and effective learning skills developers. We planned to take staff and students on a journey using the tried and trusted educational developer's technique of *'Appreciate the past to understand the present to envisage possible futures'*.

The 'Transforming Learning @ UWS' project aimed to do what it said on the tin – develop initiatives that would lead to transformational change in student learning, given our diverse demographics and retention record. We had strong backing for the initiative from the Students' Representative Council, who were especially interested in the concept of strengthening student engagement. We employed the services of a consultant whose area of expertise was 'the student voice' – creating safe, stimulating environments in which students could be motivated and enthused to discuss their views.

In setting up the project methodology we were also very keen to promote the concept of developing learners as learning evaluators and as co-creators of learning in an active way. The concept of 'co-creators' is one that our learning, teaching and assessment strategy group was wrestling with and welcomed our input.

Starting off

The CAPD team met with the consultant to map out key parameters. We agreed that our overall strategy would be an initial briefing session for all, separate student and staff focus groups with cross-sharing of outputs, a final mini-conference with presentations from the staff and student groups and a final discussion to agree the pedagogical principles. We also agreed that our consultant would handle the student groups and that CAPD would handle the staff discussions.

We recruited staff and students from across the university, but not without a bit of a struggle as it was very early in the academic year. Eventually we got a good representative sample from across the university but without any new entrants (we conjectured this would be too much for them).

The initial briefing turned out to be very revealing. Staff and students warmed quickly to the basic idea but were insistent that the brief needed to be wider than pedagogical principles. So we revised the brief and included pedagogical principles, a learning environment and 'expectations' of what students wanted from staff and vice versa. We proposed to all involved that what we were now about was creating a 'Learning Manifesto' for the University. We identified a revised and expanded set of goals:

- to develop a set of pedagogical principles that underpin the UWS vision of learning in the real world
- to engage academic staff and CAPD in the further implementation of LTA Strategies and the University Strategic Plan with respect to effective learning
- to develop learners as learning evaluators and as co-creators of learning
- to develop a Learning Manifesto for the University
- to build a platform for each School/subject area to continue sharing thinking on learning through staff/student learning 'communities' beyond the end of the project.

The last of these was very important. We didn't want this project to end with the production of a 'Manifesto'. We wanted the debate to continue within the various staff, student and, most importantly, the staff-student groups that existed.

Phase 1

We began with a staff and student briefing on the theoretical underpinning for the project, including reference to:

- Learning settings – complex, volatile environments of dynamic change
- Potential for change is dependent on certain factors being present
- Revisiting Vygotsky (1978) and the zone of proximal development, stressing dialogue and co-construction of knowledge
- Enculturation in classrooms (Wenger, 1998)
- Power relations in classrooms (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1987)
- The prime importance of *'other'* as a dynamic for change (Marková, 2004)
- The unsettling issue of identity and the impact on it by the social settings of classrooms (Gallacher, 2006)

- Power of dialogue – dialogue as embodiment of self, dialogue as voices of the mind (Alexander, 2004).
- Importance of emotion, instinct, sensing and non-verbal communication (Heron, 1997).

Phase 2

We then set the staff and student focus groups 4 key questions – for example, for staff:

- Q 1 – what are the pedagogical principles that underpin our approach to teaching and learning at UWS?
- Q 2 – what characterises our learning environment?
- Q 3 – what pedagogical practice can learners expect to see in their learning?
- Q 4 – suggest a strategy for disseminating and acting on changes to professional practice… and give an indication of likely training needs to effect change.

For students, the questions were directed more at their thoughts on strengths and weaknesses in the current learning environment and what they really wanted from their higher education. The initial student focus groups showed that they already wanted more! They wanted the start point to be not about pedagogical principles but about 'values' and basic assumptions about 'engaging' — and the staff went along with them!

As far as the concept of 'engaging' went the groups agreed that:

Engaging classrooms:
- give space for the self
- provide flexibility for growth
- promote collaborative learning and knowledge construction.

Engaging classrooms

Engaging classrooms are ones where the learning strategy is based on:
- continual questioning
- challenge, enquiry
- discussion and debate

And – most importantly – engaging classrooms are ones where learners' voices are heard.

Developing the concept of 'values' was actually the most illuminating part of the whole project. Students were keen on further discussion around specific values that students and staff should aspire to when operating in the learning environment, based around 'keywords' which are very relevant to any learning, teaching and assessment strategy. They further proposed that values were fundamental to their education and therefore to any concept of a 'Learning Manifesto'. We adopted the title 'Core Values' and these were agreed as:

- *Equality* – staff and learners are treated equally
- *Democracy* and the right of every individual's voice to count
- *Mutual respect* between staff and learners, among learners themselves and between staff across the organisation
- *Collaboration* between staff and students and a spirit of recognition of what can be learned from each other
- *Diversity* – the experience of all individuals who participate in learning is valued and carries the same status
- *Sustainability* – learning, knowledge and skills which continue to evolve and maintain their relevance to societal needs.

Our Manifesto was born! The key parameters of the other sections of the manifesto were initially agreed as:

Pedagogical Principles

This is the key section of the Manifesto. From the outset of the project it was planned that the concept of transforming learning at the University would focus on a number of fundamental principles that would underpin everything else, shaped by the views of the staff and students in the focus groups and the current overall strategic vision of the University.

The principles cover the seven fundamental tenets of learning at the University. They are a mix of some that are already embedded at least in parts of the University and others that are mainly aspirational. Many institutions will have something similar. The value to us was the process that brought these about and the fact that we actually now have a set.

Learning in the University of the West of Scotland:

- will be a transformational experience for all those who participate in it and contribute to it
- will promote and foster among staff and learners, self-directed and independent learning behaviour and self-reflection
- will nurture interest and develop skills among its learners in scholarly enquiry, debate and output in a culture of self-reflection, openness to change and the pursuit of achievement and excellence
- recognises the knowledge that individuals bring; knowledge which is created through research, innovation and enterprise; knowledge which is ever changing through the university's engagement with the academic community and with the society it serves
- grows from an active process of engagement between staff and learners, where relationships are open, honest, respectful, valuing and life-giving
- is always appropriate to the needs of learners, ensuring clear and enriching pathways to the academic and vocational qualifications they aspire to and are capable of
- is responsive to the educational, cultural and emotional starting points of all learners; takes account of individual histories, circumstances, and goals.

Learning Environment
We realised that a set of Principles without an environment in which they could operate was not good practice and so the third section of the Manifesto was born, which defined the key parameters and features of the environment for learning that would have to be in place to ensure the pedagogical principles could operate.

The groups came up with the statements below.

The Learning Environment:

- will be enabling, respectful and effective
- will be varied and appropriate to the needs of learners. Teaching staff will take account of different approaches to learning and individual pace in grasping concepts and will anticipate and demonstrate a full understanding of the difficulties learners might experience and continually check understandings
- will focus on both the collaborative acquisition and creation of knowledge and how to find, apply, challenge and communicate it in a shared manner
- will foster and encourage research and innovation that underpins teaching at all stages of the curriculum
- will foster and support trusting relationships in which staff and learners will interact honestly and helpfully
- will depend on regular, comprehensive and transparent feedback from teaching staff to learners as central to progress in learning. Learners will have a clear view of what is required to improve and receive both formal and informal commentary on progress
- will encourage learners to provide feedback to their teachers in order to ensure that their experience is suitable and meets their needs
- will encourage learners to reflect on their learning and to dynamically challenge one another and their teachers from an informed basis; to question assumptions, ideological positions and request further information
- will encourage teaching staff to engage with their learners and to create links between the abstract and reality through aspects such as story-telling and real-life examples to authenticate theory, the sharing of personal experiences, biography, anecdotes and social as well as academic interchange
- will require teaching staff to take responsibility for creating learning contexts that are enjoyable and fulfilling and in which learners can take managed risks

In developing this environment, we envisaged that staff will be expected to use an appropriate variety of approaches to delivery and assessment, including the use of dynamic small learning teams (pairs or larger groups), and the use of virtual learning activities.

Staff-student Expectations
The final section on staff-student 'expectations' was intriguing to say the least and some well-founded expectations of staff for their students were thoroughly challenged; adding a rich dialogue to the discussions.

Learners can expect teaching staff to:

- be skilled communicators and partners in learning
- be confident, authoritative and credible
- act as role models for the academic and vocational worlds learners are preparing for
- be energetic, passionate about teaching their subject and motivated.
- demonstrate commitment to and interest in them as individuals
- focus on teaching that is underpinned and informed though research and scholarly activity
- be engaging
- inspire learners by exhibiting the transformational power of learning through their own behaviour
- value their knowledge and life-experience and show a willingness to learn and receive feedback
- manage relationships in learning groups to achieve the best result for each individual
- play an active role within the learning group as co-learners
- provide feedback so that they are clear about what is to be achieved, what they have to do to improve and where their strengths and weaknesses lie
- take managed risks and encourage risk-taking.

Teaching staff can expect learners to:

- act as full partners in learning
- take responsibility for their own progress
- be reflective and seek space for reflection
- challenge, question, and initiate debate
- ensure an increasingly sound knowledge base from which to engage in dialogue
- voice their insights into their learning experience and the strategies used
- seek a leadership role within their learning environment
- interact with one another outside class times
- build informal learning networks in order to enrich their learning experience and bring personal experience to their learning
- engage with them in all aspects of learning
- provide feedback to staff on their learning experience in their classes
- make use of the full range of technology available to them in the university and at home
- take managed risks.

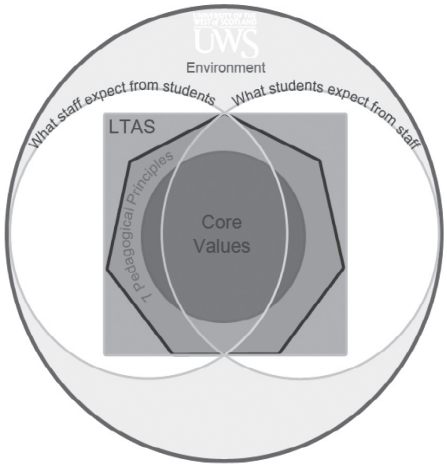
Phase 2

After the first round of focus groups, by November 2009, the number contributing to the discussion had almost reached 100 (equal staff and students) and covered almost all academic departments. The groups worked their way through various iterations and the rest of the manifesto began to take shape. The first draft was

produced and presented to a wider audience of staff and students at a mini-conference in December 2009 and, after some particularly excellent student presentations, all got involved in mixed group discussions. Feedback was incorporated in a further draft and the Manifesto was presented to others in the University in January 2010.

The Manifesto has been designed as a 'stand-alone' document that will inform future needs within the University and be flexible enough to be incorporated into a wide range of policies and procedures. The Learning Manifesto contains five interacting and integrating sections: Core Values, Pedagogical Principles, the Learning Environment, What Staff Can Expect from Students and What Students Can Expect from Staff.

This diagram shows how the elements are integrated:



Phase 3

We put the draft Manifesto out for wider consultation in early 2010 and, based on the feedback, produced a further iteration for University approval. Most feedback was very favourable. Subsequent to the main phase of the project, the draft Manifesto was accepted by our National Enhancement Themes steering group on the Graduates for the 21st Century as a positive contribution to the debate on graduate skills, and on the back of this the students organised a larger conference for themselves on the concepts, giving us a warm endorsement. Since then, the Manifesto has been presented at various internal group meetings and conferences and has always gone down very well. It has also formed one of the pillars of our new University learning, teaching and assessment strategy – not bad going considering where we started!

Conclusions

What did we learn?

First of all, we got a lot more than we bargained for – we got much more than the basic pedagogical outputs. We had great staff-student interactions and brilliant students who showed staff a thing or two when it came to dynamic presentations! Above all, all of us, academic staff, educational developers and especially students had lots of FUN!

What were the implications for us as educational developers?

A much better project than we envisaged, showing that we as a group need to have more confidence in our colleagues and students and their abilities to get deeply involved. It also taught us that students are a much richer source of help than we had previously given them credit for.

Were there problems?

Of course there were – nothing could have gone as smoothly as this text may suggest! It was difficult at the start to get staff in particular to be motivated, to take time to be part of the project and to accept what we were trying to do. It re-emphasised the importance of perseverance.

And finally...

This was a classic example of retrospective box-ticking. In other words, something that started as a simple idea produced far more than was expected and impinged on a large range of cross-institution and national issues while we were at it. We covered issues such as pedagogical principles, learning environments, learning contracts, student charters, graduate skills development, Scottish National Enhancement Themes (QAA) and students as producers. Not bad from an initial one-hour idea-generation meeting!!

The last two sections of the Manifesto in particular have provided a new dimension to the University and sparked their own further debate – whilst some of these ideas are simple to envisage, others are not and represent considerable challenges to staff's 'conventional' concepts of 'me teacher-you student'. They are strong on the conventions of 'co-creation', taking managed risks and taking responsibility. Indeed, we are very hopeful that these two sections will become the basis of further institutional discussion on the nature of a 'Student Charter' in the near future.

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Notice to Publishers

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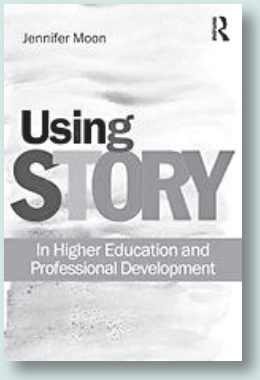
Book Review

Using Story: In Higher Education and Professional Development

Jennifer Moon

(Routledge, 2010)



My first and immediate concern on agreeing to review this book was about being able to complete it in an unbiased fashion. You see, I'm a fan of Jenny's work, publications and contributions to educational development. Also I am already a convert about the value of using story in a wide range of educational contexts. However, my concerns progressively evanesced as I worked through a series of selective and detailed readings of the text. Starting with the expansive statement on the fly cover – 'Jenny provides a rich patchwork of different uses of story in education that cuts across forms of story, story activities, disciplines and applications, all of which will aid the use of story'. So here was one of my markers – would this book appeal to and encourage those from a disciplinary base and who might disavow generic approaches?

The overall structure is simple, a three-act play with the first formed by two chapters providing 'Some introductory ideas'; a second part of four chapters which moves through 'Theory' and a final lengthy set of eight chapters exploring 'Story in Higher Education'. As a simple overview I would say that the work is comprehensive, scholarly, a journey of exploration and most certainly work in progress. At an early stage (page 4) Moon sets out her stall: 'Like others of my books, this is an act of research and exploration but also a provision of ideas and techniques to enhance education and learning' and 'My early thoughts on this project were that it would entail a tidy sequence from a theoretical framework to applications in practice'. You will gather that this did not prove to be possible or sensible and with regard to the issue of disciplinarity, in the final eight chapters, this is described as 'a sort of patchwork quilt relevant to most disciplines'. I found it difficult to make or see this connection, but anyway I do not have any hang-ups about disciplinarity. It might, however, have a significant impact on readership and sales.

At the end Jenny provides an 'Afterthought' (page 169) which reviews the journey thus far. When looking back across the work as a whole and the current state of knowledge we are told 'I have not reopened chapters to add to it because it would take me into the details of contested knowledge in the science journals'. This seems to be a strange statement in a work which is rooted in a highly academic and scholarly style of presentation *(an act of research)* and so richly embroidered with references throughout. At times I did wonder if I sensed the heavy hand of a commissioning editor which inhibited the occasional breakthrough of reflective passages. A work written from the head with some modest input from the heart. So, overall, I hold reservations about the work. Who is the audience and will it achieve a broad disciplinary readership? I sense that there is another book here; one which puts aside the academic style and to be written with an intimate style – this would complement the current publication.

Anthony Brand is an Independent Educational Consultant.

Disseminating what?

Ailhlin Clark, University of Aberdeen

We live in an academic climate where, as people involved in educational development, we are frequently encouraged to identify and disseminate examples of 'good practice' in learning, teaching and assessment, both from within our individual institutions and from elsewhere. Refitting this into something more useful, perhaps what we have to ask ourselves is, what are the best means of identifying and determining the most suitable examples and how can we best disseminate those which we find? In this article I intend to consider these questions drawing on my own experiences as Enhancement Coordinator at the University of Aberdeen.

My role is a temporary post which runs for 18 months. Its focus on enhancing learning and teaching, a key feature in the QAA Scotland's Quality Enhancement Framework, and the identification of good practice, has allowed me to spend time identifying examples of good practice, which is something many in the sector would like – but frequently lack the resources – to do. With the increased emphasis on enhancement in Scotland as a result of the Quality Enhancement Framework (Quality Assurance Agency, 2011), this role is seen as increasingly strategic.

I have now spent over a year investigating and evaluating possible examples of good practice highlighted through diverse channels, and at the same time reflecting on the most and least effective ways of doing this. One of the most striking things I found when I started was often a reluctance

to talk about teaching. However, I believe that one of the benefits of this project has been encouraging people to reflect on and talk about their teaching. Indeed, I would argue that disseminating good practice can have the effect of enhancing practice in learning and teaching by creating a culture where 'good practice' is acknowledged and its value in a higher education context recognised.

Is this 'good' practice, 'best' practice or something else?

An important question which I believe has to be addressed relates to what we might mean when we talk about 'good practice'. Indeed, if we are to give ourselves the task of identifying examples of it, we have to reflect on exactly what we might imply when we refer to:

- Good practice
- Effective practice
- Best practice, and even
- Innovative practice.

Looking at these terms from a wider perspective, it is interesting that they are used within different sectors, or even, on occasion, interchangeably. For example, the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) refer to 'good', 'effective' and 'innovative' practice in their 'Effective Practice with e-Learning' (JISC, 2011); as do Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE, 2011). Beyond this, it is clear from scanning a range of sources that the term 'good practice' is regularly used in the context of education by groups such as OFSTED and the Commonwealth Secretariat; by Healthcare professionals such as the General Medical Council, the British Dental Association and the Royal College of Nursing; and also in the Third or Voluntary Sector by a number of Charities (Third Sector, 2011), although what they mean by this term isn't necessarily clear.

'Effective' practice is widely used in education at a range of levels, for instance by JISC, the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS, 2009) and the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC, 2007), as well as within Primary Health Care and Social Work organisations. Meanwhile, 'best' practice appears to be favoured by the Government and is used by Scottish Government and the Office of National Statistics and also by Healthcare organisations and publications such as the National Health Service and the British Medical Journal. And, as might be expected, 'innovative' practice is favoured by the eLearning and learning technologies sector.

While this indicates that there is not a clear method to the use of these different phrases, I personally am most comfortable with the terms 'good practice' and 'effective practice'; although this does not mean that I would disregard any of these different terms, but rather I try to include the positive aspects of each. As such, it is important to consider that good practice can be, but is not exclusively, innovative but more than that, it is first and foremost effective. Perhaps where this takes us, therefore, is how we might evaluate the quality of particular activities in learning and teaching with a view to identifying examples of good practice.

Channels for identifying good practice

Examples of 'good practice' have come to my attention in a wide range of ways. In some cases programmes or courses might have been highlighted in reports such as those by External Examiners or through Internal Teaching Reviews which I have used as a source of information. Indeed, External Examiners' Reports in particular have been a valuable identification channel in this regard; from two years' reports (2008-2010) more than sixty programmes or courses have been identified as embodying a degree of good practice, which I have been able to follow up.

Additional examples have emerged as a part of institutional quality assurance reviews under the Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR) process, conducted as a part of the Quality Enhancement Framework. Alternatively, individuals responsible for particular activities have had contact with the University's Centre for Learning and Teaching, for instance through funded teaching development projects; or have been identified through nominations for Institutional, or College, teaching awards. A further way that I have tried to identify examples of good practice is through trying to access and listen to the 'voices' of other stakeholders, one of the most important of which is students.

Accessing student voices on the subject of good practice is difficult; the number of students at a university like Aberdeen is high and given the number of courses which most students will take during their university education this means that the sheer number of student evaluations can be overwhelming. However, since course coordinators do summarise Student Course Evaluation Forms (SCEF) for their courses as a part of the annual course review process, this has provided insight into student perspectives in their courses. Another channel which I have used is student-staff liaison committee meetings, where subjects raised by a number of students may be discussed. However, since I do not attend these personally I am again reliant on staff with whom I am in ongoing contact to apprise me of any examples of good practice which have been identified.

One further channel which I have been able to utilise in terms of providing a student perspective on good practice in learning and teaching has been through discussion with the Students' Association, which represents the University's student body as a whole. Where possible, I have worked closely with the Students' Association in identifying further examples of good practice. However, the reality has rarely manifested in solid examples which can realistically be used constructively. In part this has been a consequence of the temporary nature of sabbatical posts but also other factors, including the ongoing development of the role of class representatives, and institutional initiatives such as Curriculum Reform, which have placed an emphasis on other activities. One activity which did identify a number of examples which I was then able to follow up and use in different dissemination activities was

their Student-Led Teaching Awards. These Awards identified a number of university staff I have been able to approach on the basis of their winning an award or being nominated for one. However, examples identified by students, including through Teaching Awards, can be primarily subjective in nature, rather than objective, and this can mean that students identify something as being good practice where there is little real substance behind their identification, and consequently there can be very little to carry forward or disseminate.

I've found something; but what can we do with it?

So, having found an example and deciding that it merits development and dissemination as an example of 'good practice', there remains one further question which we have to ask ourselves, highlighted at the outset of this paper: how can we best disseminate examples of 'good practice' which we find? A number of Scottish, if not British, Universities and education institutions now have dissemination strategies for 'good practice', which encourage us not only to identify good practice but to disseminate and raise awareness of these across our institutions. One of the key responsibilities I have in this role is the dissemination of examples of good practice, although it has taken some time to gain a real insight into what this means at an Institutional, and at School or College, level.

In any context there are different levels of dissemination which we have to consider, not only in terms of how we disseminate information but also what we hope to achieve through this, whether it be for awareness, knowledge or understanding, and/or use or action (Gravestock, 2002; King, 2003). At an elementary level any dissemination which I look to do within the University has the general aim of raising awareness of what we would refer to as 'good practice' and where appropriate, informing people of what is going on around them. However, there is also a need to establish means of going beyond this onto the more active stages of dissemination. Indeed, as has been discussed by, amongst others, Stewart and Thompson (2005), effective dissemination needs to take into account a number of variables, including a range of audiences and different means which might be used as dissemination mechanisms.

A large part of my role is to promote activities and initiatives which are related to 'good practice' and to encourage engagement with both our own activities and those of groups such as the Quality Assurance Agency, who have developed the Scottish Enhancement Themes, and the HE Academy. However, in the case of promotion and engagement it is not simply a case of passively providing information, but encouraging a higher degree of interaction between the two sides, which can on occasion limit the appropriate sources which we can use, as highlighted in the example of external examiners' reports. As Trowler, Saunders and Knight (2003) identify, there is strength in the approach of changing both thinking and practices; however, if we hope to truly embed any of the practices which we are disseminating, there is likely to be a need for a deeper level of engagement rather than simply informing people of what others are doing. It is also important to encourage people to engage through different means and to use examples of 'good practice' which we identify, to encourage as many people to engage with this as possible.

Some of the dissemination activities which I have been involved in at the University of Aberdeen, and the type of dissemination I have looked to develop, are shown in Table 1.

As this table illustrates there are different types of dissemination activities. Of the categories identified above, *awareness, inform* and *promote* are arguably easier to instigate or measure than those intended to engage. Providing information for colleagues, in any format, might raise their awareness or inform them but is obviously not enough to initiate engagement with a topic, partly because it is not a passive process. However, if examples of good practice are made available to people who in the process are made aware of activities developed by colleagues, this can have an impact on their own practice as they can be encouraged to engage with similar activities themselves.

I have found that opening communication by recognising what someone has done well, or acknowledging activities which they have been involved in, can have a positive effect on what they will talk about and can lead to them becoming more aware of their own practice strengths in their own practice or in instigating change in their own teaching. Equally I have found that if

Activity	Dissemination
Development of website, identifying 'spotlights on good practice'	Awareness • Inform • Promote
Developing channels of communication, both within the institution and externally	Awareness • Inform • Promote
Writing articles for college newsletters	Awareness • Inform • Promote
Supporting Learning and Teaching Enhancement Programmes and reviewing their outcomes	Awareness • Inform • Promote • Engage
Attending 'best-practice in learning and teaching' meetings at School level, encouraging colleagues to talk about their own teaching activities	Awareness • Inform • Promote • Engage
Developing Enhancement Themes Guides summarising the outcomes of individual themes and their achievements at national, institutional and College levels.	Awareness • Inform • Promote • Engage

Table 1 Dissemination Activities at the University of Aberdeen

members of staff see that colleagues, from their discipline or from one unrelated to their own, have initiated particular activities, then this can influence their practice, either through the emulation of activities or through the design of something new.

During my time at Aberdeen I have developed a series of criteria which I place against potential examples which come to my attention. These vary, and also depend on how something might have been brought to my attention, but typically include:

1. Might it be of interest to others, perhaps because it's novel, and might work in other areas of this institution, or across the sector?
2. Does it offer the potential of increasing student engagement or performance?
3. Would it save staff time and are there other colleagues who might benefit from it?
4. Might it encourage other people to reflect on particular aspects of their teaching? E.g. employer engagement, innovative assessment or feedback methods
5. Is it something I was familiar with but had not seen in this particular context before?

Depending on the answers to these questions, and the nature of the activity itself, there are often natural channels of dissemination which might be open to either the individual responsible for it or to someone in a more centralised position like my own. While examples which answer any of the questions might work as a means of raising awareness, informing and promoting, I have found that those which are novel or could potentially save staff time or benefit staff can prove more suitable for directly engaging staff. In my experience this can prove to be even more the case when the individuals responsible for them can be encouraged to take an active role in the dissemination activities, for instance encouraging colleagues to talk about their 'best practice' during teaching meetings at School level, which I am aware has encouraged other staff members to instigate similar activities themselves. However, I believe that it is important that staff feel supported in activities of this type as it is unlikely that this process would occur naturally without some input or encouragement to do so. As such I would argue that there is a need for some attention to be paid to activities of this type at a discipline or institutional level, if we hope to encourage staff, at all levels, to engage more fully with good practice as a concept.

Conclusion

The process of identifying and disseminating examples of 'good practice' is not, as anyone involved in it knows, a simple one. It is an inherently subjective process where someone has to take a degree of responsibility for highlighting a course or activity as 'good practice'. Equally, as I have tried to outline, anyone in this position has to try and do their utmost not only to identify examples in which they themselves see the merit but also those which have value at a wider level – taking into consideration how an example has been brought to our attention, and what it might exemplify in terms of 'good practice'.

What I have tried to do in this article is to highlight both the approach that I have taken and the criteria I have used, as others may find these of use. My role has now been in place for some sixteen months and I believe is having an impact institutionally. However, the process of identifying and disseminating 'good practice' at Aberdeen is not complete, and there is much still to be accomplished, even if I have had the luxury of dedicating time to this task which colleagues might not be able to do, and within that I hope to continue to evaluate not only the best methods of dissemination for any examples which are identified but also to carefully evaluate what is achieved through individual dissemination activities.

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Twitter, SEDA and the November 2011 Conference

Sue Beckingham, Sheffield Hallam University

What is Twitter?

Twitter is a micro-blogging tool which allows the user to 'tweet' a message using up to 140 characters. Initially critics dismissed Twitter for its banal conversations, but the reality is that Twitter has been appropriated in many other ways. Tweeters are sharing links, breaking news, organising events and much more. The ability to write a succinct message which catches the interest of followers is the key. The introduction of url shorteners such as bit.ly and goo.gl that also provide analytics on click-throughs (and the automation of shortened links within Twitter itself) has meant that users can include a link to relevant websites, videos, podcasts and images, without using too many precious characters. Followers can choose to 'retweet' messages, cascading information on to an ever growing audience, reply with a comment, or save a tweet as a favourite. The use of the hashtag # symbol before relevant keywords allows tweets to be categorised and searchable.

So what is the relationship between Twitter and SEDA?

Hashtags are now frequently used at conferences. At the SEDA conferences in November 2010 and May 2011 only a few people were sending tweets. While some were frequent users, others commented that they were new to this and had never realised such conversations were going on about learning and teaching development. But at this November's conference, a very different picture emerged.

The Twitter username for SEDA is @Seda_UK_ and the conference was given the hashtag '#sedaconf16'. Between 14 November and 1 December, 1339 tweets using #sedaconf16 were posted by 117 unique Tweeters – a huge increase. SEDA sent 126 tweets promoting and commenting on sessions. A total of 579 tweets were retweeted. 446 tweets included links to associated information, some including photos taken at the event. Some tweeted about just joining Twitter as a result of attending the session on 'using social media to develop a personal learning network' (Beckingham and Walker, 2011). Another on how she had 'now found lots of new Ed Dev tweeters to follow'. What was interesting was the number of people engaging in the dialogue who were not actually present at the conference. One tweeted 'some interesting workshops and sessions at #sedaconf16, would be interested in a couple of them, first I'd heard of conference today'.

The value of Twitter as a social communication tool for the SEDA community is vast. It enables users to build a web of connections with people they may never have had the opportunity to meet and to mutually benefit from the experiences of professionals beyond their immediate network. With over 100 million active users, Twitter should not be dismissed as a fad.

SEDA News

Congratulations to Emma Dawson on being awarded the Supporting Educational Change Certificate.

SEDA has been awarded a £10,000 JISC grant for work on embedding digital literacies. The report on the previous JISC grant on embedding IT is at tinyurl.com/84h9hgp.

SEDA has responded to the Government White Paper on Higher Education (tinyurl.com/7dluc49).

Forthcoming Events

SEDA Workshop – Learner Engagement: A Guide to Work-based Learning
11 January 2012, Woburn House, London

SEDA Spring Teaching Learning and Assessment Conference 2012
17 May 2012, Queen Hotel, Chester

New Publications (£12)

Working with Cultural Diversity in Higher Education
Edited by Monika Foster (SEDA Special 28)

Learner Engagement: A Guide to Negotiated Work-Based Learning
Mike Laycock (SEDA Special 29)

Developing Reflective Practice with Early Career Academics
Edited by Louisa Sheward and Marian Renshaw (SEDA Special 30)

Getting started

A good starting place is @Seda_UK_, then follow some of its 800 followers. By developing your personal learning network and connections, you will soon find valuable online dialogues taking place.

There is a degree of serendipity with Twitter – you will have to accept you will never be able to read every tweet. The continual flowing stream can be overwhelming as you increase the number of people you follow. However as Shirky (2008) argues, 'It's not information overload, it's filter failure'; there are mechanisms to organise and filter the vast amounts of information. Whilst there are now numerous resources available to help you with this, remember you can always send a tweet asking for advice.

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