Contents

Writing in Today's University

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Introduction

Student writing is never far from the columns of the higher education press. It is all too familiar to see viewpoints expressed in newspaper articles concerning falling standards of spelling, punctuation and grammar. The argument that students can no longer write in the eloquent prose apparently evident in the writing of earlier generations of university students is linked – often anecdotally – to students' proficiency with other forms of more informal communication, text messaging, on-line 'chat', *etc.* Plagiarism has also taken centre stage, with the use of the internet blamed for the inexorable rise in reported cases of both the lack of attribution to appropriate sources and blatant cheating. The dominant view, then, might appear to be one of gloom and doom, with university lecturers despairing about their students' ability to master the written word and produce a piece of original work. However, alongside these headline-grabbing issues, much serious attention is being paid, by both practitioners and researchers, to the complex issue of student writing, and academic writing more generally, in the diverse contexts of today's higher education.

Academic literacies research

The last decade has seen the development of a body of research which has been influential in raising awareness of the part that student writing plays in the processes of teaching and learning in UK higher education. This work, known as academic literacies research, takes as its starting point the position that writing is integrally linked to issues of disciplinary and subject-based knowledge. It claims that, in order to understand writing in the university, we have to understand how it is implicated in the construction of the different discourses and genres of disciplines and subjects, in both academic and professional domains of learning. This contrasts with what is often a more dominant perspective, which focuses primarily on surface features, such as spelling and punctuation, and conceptualises writing as a transferable skill, which once learnt can be transferred with ease from context to context. Researchers in the academic literacies field have examined the ways in which issues of meaning-making and identity are implicated in the writing of students, who bring experiences of writing from other contexts – inside and outside the university – to any new writing task. The research has often been practitioner-focused, emerging from contexts where practitioners were finding that traditional models of writing were unable to provide the nuanced understandings and descriptions that seemed to be necessary in order to successfully support student writing. Rather than seeing problems in terms of poor student writing, it has provided evidence for gaps between students' and tutors' expectations of the writing task, and explored the implications of this finding for practitioners and university teachers working with student writers. The research has also brought to the fore issues of power and authority in the practices of writing for assessment and giving feedback.

Emergence of new kinds of writing

Developments in the field have taken place at a time when new forms of writing

are being continually called into play in the assessment arena. The use of reflective writing, for example learning journals and logs, originally developed in more vocationally oriented courses as a form of personal exploration through non-assessed writing, has now been taken up across the curriculum – in some instances replacing the more traditional essay as a form of assessment. University teachers are being encouraged to experiment with a variety of writing tasks, both individual and collaborative. The rationale for this shift is, in part, due to recognition that the academic essay is not always the most appropriate genre to encourage or develop students' engagement with the subject. Ironically, this move to provide new written spaces for student expression has quickly become subjected to the same kind of requirements to comply with specified assessment criteria as are associated with more traditional forms of student writing.

Writing in the disciplines

A focus on engagement with the nature of writing in subjects and disciplines has also been at the heart of another development in approaches to supporting students. Attention is being paid in some institutions to an approach known as 'Writing in the Disciplines'. Such programmes, which were first developed in the US, are based on the principle that writing is integral to learning in the discipline. In order to learn about how a discipline works, students need to be provided with as many opportunities as possible for writing and engaging with the genres which are pertinent to that particular discipline. In the UK, the Thinking Writing programme at Queen Mary, University of London is unique in developing a university-wide initiative which puts writing at the very centre of learning the discipline. Writing, then, is seen as more than a tool for assessment. It is at the very heart of learning. This practical approach to writing within disciplinary contexts is, therefore, closely aligned with the academic literacies research but differs somewhat in its orientation. The latter has focused on writing as a social practice which varies from context to context. Although research findings provide evidence that students have to learn how to engage in different disciplinary genres in their writing, they also show how, even within the same discipline, students also have to learn how to respond to the different requirements for writing, not just at the level of discipline but at the level of department, individual tutor and even for a particular assignment. Thinking about student writing requires us to consider not only what is special about writing in a particular disciplinary context but also about how students come to make meaning in their writing in terms of any particular writing task. In other words, we need to support students in being able to write across the different requirements of modules, courses and tutors, in an increasingly interdisciplinary context. This is the challenge faced by those who are interested in understanding and supporting student writing across the curriculum and see writing as central to learning. Such debates provide a very different perspective to those which grab the attention of the media.

Writing across the university

There are at present a number of different approaches to supporting student writing in our universities. Unlike the US context, where all students have to enrol in freshman composition courses and writing centres exist in every university, in the UK initiatives have been more idiosyncratic, depending upon the particular institutional context. Although it is common for learning support units to offer students specific help with writing, instances can also be found of departments providing more targeted support dealing with disciplinary requirements. Educational developers are also working with university teachers, embedding writing support into the mainstream curriculum. It is in the domain of educational development that the issue of supporting academic writing more broadly is now being discussed. Initially, what was seen as an issue for undergraduate students has been broadened to include support for all students, including postgraduates, and not just those who entered higher education through less traditional routes, or who have English as an additional language. More recently, attention has begun to be paid to academics as writers and the relationship of writing to issues of academic and professional identity. At a recent conference on Writing Development in Higher Education a number of presentations explored these issues. Barry Stierer's contribution to the Academic

Literacies Research day held at the University of Westminster this summer considered what it means when lecturers who are typically specialists in academic disciplines and/or professional domains other than education find themselves 'writing education', when they are asked to produce documentation concerning accomplishment and accountability in relation to their own teaching practices.

Other changes in higher education are also resulting in attention to what are seen as new spaces for writing. As increasing numbers of students engage in blended learning or e-learning, they are required to communicate with their tutors and peers through writing asynchronously or in real-time. Researchers have begun to explore the nature of these texts produced by students and their tutors in teaching and learning encounters online. While some focus on the multi-modal nature of electronic environments – the merging of the visual and the written – others examine the nature of the writing that is required and in particular its relationship to assessment.

Interest groups

Over the years informal groupings have emerged of those interested in taking these different research and practitioner agenda forward. The most established is the Inter-university Academic Literacies Research group, formed in 1994, which meets once a term at the Institute of Education. The group provides the opportunity for a presenter working in the field to engage in in-depth discussion around a specific area of interest in a supportive setting. Presenters may be members of the group or invited speakers (from the UK or beyond) who welcome a few hours spent in discussion around their work.

Writing Development in Higher Education (WDHE) is a group whose main point of contact throughout the year is a listserv. Some members also subscribe to the European Association of Academic Writing listserv, and to the European Association for Research into Learning and Instruction, SIG Writing listserv, which often debate similar issues with a more global orientation. The biennial conference for Writing Development in Higher Education is the main forum in the UK for those interested in the broad field of academic writing. Each conference organising committee makes decisions about the general orientation and theme of the conference, making each conference a unique environment able to reflect topical concerns around writing. For example, the 11th WDHE, held at the Open University this year, focused on 'Challenging Institutional Priorities', examining the ways in which writing issues are often sidelined in terms of more dominant agenda of teaching and learning, indicating a lack of recognition that writing is at the heart of many of these high profile initiatives, such as e-learning.

For the last seven years an annual one-day Academic Literacies Seminar has provided the opportunity for participants to discuss work in progress, take stock of new developments and directions and network with colleagues in the field. This year it is being hosted by the University of Westminster. A small but significant event, it brings together both researchers and practitioners in a productive forum.

The last decade has been an interesting time as increased attention has been paid to learning and teaching across the academy; hand in hand with this there has been a developing recognition that writing is very much at the centre of learning in higher education, despite the changing nature of the environment in terms of curriculum content, design and delivery. Research has led the way in challenging some of the more dominant views of student writing, offering evidence for the complexity of student writing and providing alternative explanations for what are often conceptualised as deficits in the novice student. At the same time, practitioners have been taking forward a number of initiatives in their own institutions which are informed both by these research findings and by other perspectives which see writing as a mainstream curriculum issue. Attention is also being paid to writing across the university at all levels and not merely focusing on the undergraduate student writer, thus opening up debates about the significance of writing more generally in constructing academic identities.

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Learning Styles Again: VARKing up the right tree!

Neil Fleming, Educational Developer and **David Baume,** FSEDA, Higher Education Consultant

Introduction

This article was developed in conversations (face to face and via email) between David Baume PhD FSEDA, Higher Education Consultant, and Neil Fleming, the designer of the VARK questionnaire and helpsheets.

Understanding how we learn

Students and teachers need a starting place for thinking about, and understanding, how they learn. Self-knowledge is a good start. How to get that self-knowledge? Inventories can be useful. Initially, it doesn't much matter which inventory we use. Why not? Because a learning style is *not* a set of scores on some inventory, or a set of alphabetic symbols, or paragraphs of descriptors with labels. A learning style is, rather, a description of a process, or of preferences. Any inventory that encourages a learner to think about the way that he or she learns is a useful step towards understanding, and hence improving, learning.

VARK above all is designed to be a starting place for a conversation among teachers and learners about learning. It can also be a catalyst for staff development – thinking about strategies for teaching different groups of learners can lead to more, and appropriate, variety of learning and teaching.

One proviso should be made about the VARK inventory. It is, technically, not a learning styles questionnaire, as it provides feedback only on one's preferred modes for communicating. These 'modal preferences for learning' are only a small part of what most theorists would include in a complete package deserving to be called a 'learning style'.

Some learners already know a lot about the way they learn, and need no help from any inventory or questionnaire. For others, doing the VARK questionnaire again and again over time is a worthwhile exercise, even though – maybe because – the scores may vary. VARK works when people find it useful.

The origins of VARK

For nine years I was one of Her Majesty's school inspectors in the New Zealand education system. During this time I watched some 9000 classes. I was puzzled when I observed excellent teachers who did not reach some learners, and poor teachers who did.

When I moved to Lincoln University to work in staff development, I decided to try to solve this puzzle. There are, of course, many reasons for what I observed. But one topic that seemed to hold some magic, some explanatory power, was preferred modes of learning, 'modal preferences'. Some parts of a learning preference are comparatively difficult for an individual to change, or for an education system to respond to – for example, preferred time of day to study, or preferred time for food intake, or motivation. But attention to preferred learning modes allows flexibility for students and teachers to modify their behaviour, if not their preference.

It seems to me that our preferences are part of who we are. They inform how we approach things. We often have quite strong preferences for such things as cars, colours, food and partners. So why not look into our preferences for the ways in which we learn?

The main ideas and sources that informed VARK were my prior experiences and observations, and working with students and teachers at Lincoln University who provided my laboratory and practicum.

My main current ideas about preferred learning modes include:

- modal preferences influence individuals' behaviours, including learning

- modal preferences are not fixed, but they are stable in the medium term

- both students and teachers can reliably identify and

provide examples of their use of modality preferences in learning

- preferences can be matched with strategies for learning. There are learning strategies that are better aligned to some modes than others. Using your weakest preferences for learning is not helpful; nor is using other students' preferences

- information that is accessed using strategies that are aligned with a student's modality preferences is more likely to be understood and be motivating

- the use of learning strategies that are aligned with a student's modality preferences is also likely to lead to persistence at learning tasks, a deeper approach to learning, active learning and effective metacognition

- knowledge of, and acting on, one's modal preferences is an important condition for improving one's learning.

I could produce a similar list for teachers' modality preferences and their influence on students' learning. But I am not a theorist.

The development of VARK – and the name

I noticed that, in response to a question such as 'How do I get to..?', people gave directions in different ways. I wondered if different people prefer to be told how to get there in different ways – being shown a printed map, having a map sketched for them, being told, being given written instructions, being physically taken there. So I began with a question about this.

Other questions came from my work with students. I tested these questions on students whose preferences I knew from discussions and from examples of their note-taking and learning patterns.

After a couple of years I had 13 questions. I called the questionnaire VARK. It could have been KRAV or VRAK. I learned much later that VARK is Dutch for pig, and I could not get a website called vark.com because a pet shop in Pennsylvania used it for selling aardvarks – earth pigs!

VARK is an acronym for Visual, Aural, Read/write and Kinesthetic. VAK inventories had been around for years. What was new in my work was a second 'visual' modality for Read/write learners. From what I read and observed, it seemed obvious that some students had a distinct preference for the written word whilst others preferred symbolic information as in maps, diagrams, and charts. These two preferences were not always found in the same person. There is more acceptance of this distinction today than in the 1980s.

Using VARK

Users complete the questionnaire online or on paper. They can have more than one answer per question, so they get a profile of four scores – one for each modality. That begins a process of thinking about how they prefer to learn. VARK is a catalyst for metacognition, not a diagnostic or a measure. The questionnaire is deliberately kept short (13 questions – maybe 16 in the new version) in order to prevent student

survey fatigue. It also tries to encourage respondents to reflect and answer from within their experience, rather than from hypothetical situations.

Over 180,000 people have used VARK online from mid-March to mid-September 2006. Those who answer some demographic questions make up the group called 'With Data'; the others we call 'Visitors'. There is a big jump in use after the holidays when the UK and the USA go back to school. Figures will decline slowly from the August high through to next February.

Table 1: Visits and Completions

2006	With Data	Visitors	Visitors Per Day	Visitors Per Week
March*	3813	13,523	781	5467
April	4823	17,178	573	4008
May	5320	20,231	653	4568
June	9850	20,509	684	4785
July	7396	15,583	503	3519
August	16,827	49,502	1597	11,178
Totals	**48,029**	**136,526**		

* Only the last 17 days of March are recorded here.

Table 2: Regions and VARK Visitors
(15th March to 11th September 2006)

Asia	Canada	Europe	Oceania	South America	UK	USA
3%	2%	2%	6%	1%	9%	77%

Interestingly, twice as many women as men use VARK and supply data about themselves. Also, of course, the ratio of students to teachers is high – about 6:1. We know that just under 8% are completing the questionnaire for a second (or third or...) time.

When users get their results online, we ask if they think their results are a *match* to their own perceptions, or *don't match* or they *don't know*. Those figures run at 58%, 37% and 5%. I know self-perceptions don't rate highly in research, but I would be worried if those figures were in any other order.

I spend a lot of time answering emails; I enjoy that, and get ideas from what others contribute.

Using VARK for what?

I know, from the daily stream of emails from people asking for permission to use the copyright VARK materials, that it is heavily used. (It is free for use in schools and universities.) I wish I knew more about the uses people make of it. I have a file full of examples and testimonials – and a few criticisms, too. Here are three examples of positive feedback:

- One teacher in the USA has been investigating the notion that maybe those students who are multimodal – that is, they prefer to use several modes to fully understand something – are missing out the most in our education systems. This teacher has tracked many of the students who are asking for help at her learning centre.

A disproportionate number of these are multimodal, with scores such as 11, 10, 9, 7. Her theory is they don't get enough variety in their intake of information to confirm or settle it as new learning. Modal impoverishment?

- A French professor revamped his philosophy teaching and assessment so that it allowed for 'visual' expressions of learning, and found that a different set of students excelled

- Some students take their VARK scores to the teacher and say, 'Can you help me by teaching this way...?'

I find all this fascinating. Much education is probably mono- or at the most bi-modal. Teaching often reflects the teacher's preferred teaching style rather than students' preferred learning styles. Managed or Virtual Learning Environments may not change that as much as we hope – they sometimes implement old teaching styles in new technology, although with a shift from speech to text (A to R!).

Various students are doing research on VARK; teachers have given papers on it and made conference posters. Some UK universities have placed the VARK software on their intranets, but I don't hear much from them. I run workshops on VARK and how to use it effectively, most recently in the UK and USA, and these result in a lot of enthusiasm for VARK.

The helpsheets may be the most useful part of the package. There is no shortage of learning style inventories available. What made VARK different when it was launched in 1987 was that it came with helpsheets rather than labels. Now students can get some help with the question, 'OK. I know what I am, but what do I do about it? How can I use knowledge about my learning preferences to help me to learn?'

Some reservations and cautions about VARK

Learning styles have had a bad press. It seems that they are lauded and then attacked on an almost cyclical basis. This is probably because it is very difficult to measure learning (in part because it is difficult to define learning in useful ways), especially if one wants to know when learning happens or to what it can be ascribed.

The critics of learning styles say things like: 'Knowing one's learning style does not improve learning.' That is just as true as that knowing one's weight does not help weight loss. However, knowing one's learning style *can* be beneficial if learners take the next step, and consider how and when they learn, as part of a reflective, metacognitive process, with action to follow. You don't fully understand how you learn with a learning style inventory alone. What happens afterwards has the potential to make a difference. Just as what you do after you find out that you are overweight makes a difference to your weight.

Dr Marilla Svinicki, Professor and Area Chair, Department of Educational Psychology (Area: Learning, Cognition and Instruction) at the University of Texas at Austin, tested VARK, and wrote:

'We found that [VARK] was hard to validate statistically, including with several modifications we tried and several statistical strategies such as multidimensional scaling. We just couldn't get a good fit with the data.

This does not mean that the instrument itself is not valid or desirable, but it shouldn't be used in research; that is not its strength. Its strength lies in its educational value for helping people think about their learning in multiple ways and giving them options they might not have considered. The statistical properties are not stable enough to satisfy the requirements of research, but then, one of our findings is that no one else has been able to design an instrument along these lines that does. So VARK is in good company.

Everyone who uses the VARK loves it, and that's a great thing to be able to say. So it is obviously striking a chord with almost everyone who uses it. We just have to recognize that the constructs of learning style are too varied to pin down accurately and every instrument I've ever considered suffers from this same issue.'

I sometimes believe that students and teachers invest more belief in VARK than it warrants. It is a beginning of a dialogue, not a measure of personality. It should be used strictly for learning, not for recreation or leisure.

Some also confuse preferences with ability or strengths. You can like something, but be good at it or not good at it or any point between. VARK tells you about how you like to communicate. It tells you nothing about the quality of that communication.

It is a pity that technology does not easily allow us to have the questionnaire in Visual, Aural and Kinesthetic modes.

Further developments with VARK

- We are in the middle of a five-yearly review of the questionnaire. We have modified some questions, removed some and added some. We are using the strong visitor numbers in autumn 2006 to test these so that we know who is choosing each option and who is not

- We have a new subscription service where no software needs to be installed on your intranet. We store the numbers for you and give you access to your classes' results

- Using people's VARK scores, I am writing profiles about learning for individual teachers and students

- We are keen to add translations of VARK beyond the 14 languages we have at present

- I am starting to use learning preferences for sports, using VARK to help coaches, players and athletes. This work is mainly in elite professional sports, but VARK can also help amateur coaches and indeed parent coaches

- I still enjoy visiting the UK and the USA to run participatory workshops and development sessions on VARK (and other topics).

My own VARK score, and comments thereon

My last score was V=7, A=1, R=4 and K=3. My MA (Hons) in Geography fits with my strong preference for diagrams,

charts, maps and visual symbols used in many situations. (My children, when they wanted help with their homework, would say, 'Dad can we have the short version please and without any diagrams'.) My R score indicates that I have some preference for Read/write input and output – this is evidenced in my publications and writing style. Embodied in that K score is a good dose of practical 'just do it' preference. I pay little heed to Auditory input – at least, according to my family!

These scores are a good place to begin a conversation about how I learn.

Acknowledgements

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Neil Fleming is an educational developer and the designer of the VARK questionnaire, and **David Baume** PhD FSEDA is an international higher educational consultant, researcher and writer.

What's in your bag? How reflection on everyday practice can help us become more self-critical

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'There are three things extremely hard: steel, a diamond, and to know one's self.'   (Benjamin Franklin, 1750)

Reflection is fundamental to professional learning in many areas including the academic development of HE lecturers. Many of us have been influenced by the work of Donald Schön (1986, 1991) and his popular concept of the reflective practitioner. But, while it is widely agreed that reflection is a good thing, it is less clear how successful we are at using critical reflection to improve teaching and learning practice. Many people do not find reflection on professional practice easy. Reflections on teaching are often formalised into academic programmes and heavily theorised, which may make it a difficult for some to include emotions and personal values. But we reflect on everyday practice such as how to travel, manage relationships *etc.* all the time, otherwise we would not be able to conduct our lives. In reflections on everyday life, personal attributes and values may be much more transparent and people might find it much easier to reflect: the process of writing about self seems to 'come naturally'.

To test this idea, I have taken part in a study of the everyday practice of carrying a bag in which participants were invited to write a 'bag day' story. These were autobiographical accounts written freely without any expectation of reflection. Because people were describing everyday life, many of the autobiographers wrote highly reflective accounts without help or theorising and many found it easy to be self-critical. Some people employed literary techniques which helped them be self-analytical including produce a dialogue with self. Interestingly, the writing process followed Schön's (1986, 1991) stages of reflection without prompting from others. I shall explore some of the findings of the project below and show how I have used the idea to help my colleagues reflect.

What's in your bag? – an autobiographical writing project

The interdisciplinary research project, People and Their Things (PATT), aimed to use autobiographical writing to investigate what people carry in their bags and analyse the contents from a range of perspectives.

The first round of stories were written by the PATT group members (eight in all). We were instructed to tell the story of our bag(s) used/carried in the course of a particular day, and describe the contents of bags and pockets. We selected a particular date and agreed to write our bag story on that day. We were all aware of the possible sociological analysis of the accounts in that they might provide insights into gender, class, ethnicity, age *etc.* as we planned to write a book. Thus, as members of the research group, we were encouraged to reflect on the account we had written.

Following the successes of these stories in producing rich data for analysis, we each agreed to ask at least two more people to write a bag story on another date as a second round. These writers were not briefed on how far to be reflective and they were not expected to provide any analysis of their account. However, this did not prevent second round autobiographers from providing explanation for the contents of their bags and analysing their own practice spontaneously.

Reflections on the bag stories could have been written down a split second after the contents of the bag were examined, or several hours or days later when the piece of writing was being finalised ready to email to the PATT group, and the timing of this reflection-in-action made little

difference to the results. What is important is what I shall term the second reflection, which is a new reflection on the initial reflection.

The stages of the bag-writing task match well onto the stages of reflection on action in Schön's hierarchy of levels:

1. Action – looking into the bag(s)
2. Recording observations – writing the bag day story. Listing what was in the bag or describing the objects or bag itself
3. Reflection-in-action (first reflection) – thinking about the bag contents and the reasons for taking these on the journey
4. Second reflection – interrogating self to understand and analyse the practice and produce new knowledge of the situation. It is this stage that was most likely to lead to a change in practice.
    (adapted from Schön, 1991:115)

The way these stories were written did not necessarily follow this model exactly and processes may not have been as linear as the above model suggests. Nevertheless, everyone who completed a bag story will have gone through the first two stages, that is looking in the bag and listing or describing the bag and/or its contents, as this was fundamental to the exercise. Many people in the study from the first and second rounds also provided an explanation for why they were behaving as they were, which matches the third stage.

I thought that a second reflection, *i.e.* the final stage above, was unlikely to occur spontaneously, as most bag writers were not asked to re-read their account or discuss it with another person. But I was surprised how many writers did enter into a critical dialogue with self without any prompting.

Learning through autobiographical writing – some techniques for critical reflection

It was quite common for the bag authors to describe the contents of their bags or pockets in detail and provide us with their explanation for transporting these objects. It was quite amazing what people carry around with them: enough medications and cosmetics to fill a chemist shop, personal mementos, security devices, records of transactions

such as tickets and receipts as well as the more expected diaries, mobile phones, pens, money and keys. Many writers also started to question themselves and were not so convinced about the efficacy of their own practice and some even wrote about how they would change their practice. A common example was being self-critical about carrying so much 'junk' around in their bags and pockets and vowing to have a clear out.

In one of the most self-critical accounts the 'bag' was the narrator of the story. Using this literary device, the writer interpreted her experience from another's perspective. The bag as the narrator was critical of its owner and, in this example, the voice of the bag suggests an improvement in organisational practice of keeping keys in a compartment:

'She THINKS she puts them (her keys) *in my small front pocket which would be good if she did. But she drops them into me all anyhow and then it's scrabble, scrabble, scrabble, and, "Where are my house keys?"'*

A discussion of the situation from two perspectives is possible because of the narrative device which enables a dialogue between bag owner and bag. This is, of course, really an imaginary internal dialogue with another self represented by the persona of the bag, but nevertheless it successfully mimics the process of reflecting and learning through dialogue with another person.

Using autobiography to improve critical reflection in educational development
Based on this project, I have tried three ways of helping academics with reflective writing:

- Give academic staff a shortened version of the 'what's in your bag' exercise to do which demonstrates that reflection on one's own is not that difficult. When I tried this exercise with a group on my postgraduate certificate in learning and teaching course, it diffused some of the anxiety around writing a reflective statement on teaching and learning practice for assessment. A lively discussion on gender differences in what

people carry around followed. Because they found it easy, and even entertaining, to be self-critical in talking about everyday practice, they realised that they could easily do the same for their professional practice. It helped develop a culture in which it is a good thing to admit that what you currently do as a teacher may need improving. Some of them went on to use the technique with their own students. This activity can also demonstrate that sharing the reflection with another is also very valuable for improving self-critique

- For reflections on teaching experience, I suggest that lecturers write the account from a student perspective and then write a discussion with the students about the event. Seeing an event from a student perspective is a very powerful way of encouraging a more critical reflection of self, and could also help de-personalise the account

- In recognising that it is difficult to set up a dialogue with self, I have also set up a web log, or blog, to perform a dialogue with myself online to see if this might aid my own critically reflective process. I post reflections of my work as an educational developer online and then come back to the site at a later date, using a different identity and imagining that I am someone else (e.g. my boss), and I ask myself critical questions in that guise. Once again, 'putting yourself in another's shoes' can generate a critical dialogue with self without the continual need for a mentor or community of peers. I would recommend this to any colleagues who enjoy exploring the potential of new technologies.

The 'bag day' story examples of the creativity and imagination that can come out of everyday autobiographical reflection show how we could help ourselves be more critically reflective of our practice – sometimes as part of a learning community and sometimes alone.

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Being smart about assessment

Len Hand and **Jane McNeil,** Nottingham Trent University

Introduction

Like many of our colleagues, we have recently been engaged with numerous activities linked to assessment: piles of examination scripts and dissertations to mark, guidance about double-marking, anonymous marking, and formative feedback, meetings to review the quality of exam papers, shorter-than-normal deadlines for marking turn-round, and a conference on plagiarism. Of course we are not unique, for a feature of Higher Education in recent times has been the increased demands on staff to deliver high quality assessments that satisfy a large number of educational and institutional needs. Unfortunately, these diverse demands have led to an accretion of issues around assessment, and mean that issues of assessment are often discussed in a particular manner, focussing on specific educational goals or concerns. The rounded and larger picture of assessment may be missed.

Assessment is one of the most written about aspects of learning and teaching, and the literature echoes the diversity of imperatives that are evident in practice, including:

- Alignment: assessment should be aligned with learning outcomes and with other learning and teaching activities (Biggs, 2003)
- Deep Approaches: assessments should foster deep approaches to learning (Hand *et al.*, 1996; Prosser and Trigwell, 1999; Ramsden, 2003)
- Student Engagement: tensions between student engagement and assessment should be acknowledged (Rowntree, 1987), and assessment strategies will enhance engagement if they balance challenge against appropriate workload, and offer appropriate levels of choice and autonomy (Bryson and Hand, 2006). Students should become so immersed in the assessment task that learning and assessment become one (Meyers and Nulty, 2002)
- Student Time: overall assessment workload is closely related to learning approaches (Entwistle and Tait, 1990; Lizzio *et al.*, 2002)
- Feedback and feed forward: relevant, developmental and timely feedback should form part of the assessment process if learning is to be developed (Ramsden, 2003; Yorke, 2001).

Designing assessments with these (and other) issues in mind, and also in consideration of daily practicalities such as resource constraints, can make the design of effective assessment a bewildering exercise. Given the diversity and complexity of issues around assessment, it is not surprising that grassroots requests for professional development frequently place aspects of assessment at or near the top of the list. This paper describes a series of workshops, offered in response to such requests, which encouraged colleagues to take a more rounded, and 'smarter', view of assessment.

Being Smart about Assessment

Setting an assessment task is an exercise in juggling – drawing on professional experience, cognisance of the needs of students and employers, requirements of quality monitoring, and so on. 'Smart' assessment is our shorthand way of describing assessment that meets educational objectives, engages the students and also is feasible within the constraints of the staff resources available. In Figure 1 we have identified those aspects of assessment that appear to be crucial if assessments are to meet these criteria. The term 'smart assessment' here has been borrowed from the popular literature on workplace effectiveness and work-life balance (e.g. work smarter, not harder). Smart assessment, therefore, is assessment that meets the aims and aspirations of good pedagogy, while being achievable in a resource-constrained situation.

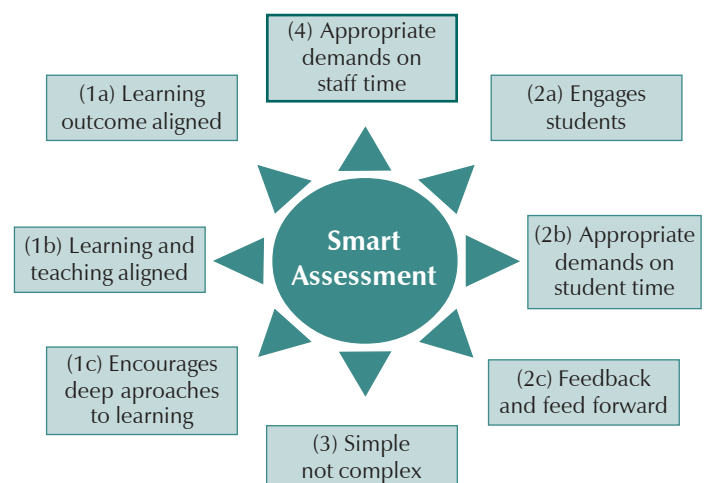*Figure 1 – The Criteria for Smart Assessment*

Figure 1 has been informed not only by our own experiences and discussions with colleagues but also by the extensive literature on assessment. The major issues raised in the literature (briefly summarised earlier) are incorporated into boxes 1(a-c) and 2 (a-c) of Figure 1. Even with only these elements in place we can see the multiple aspects that academics must consider when designing assessment tasks. However, without two more criteria, we would argue that a 'good' assessment is not necessarily 'smart'. These extra criteria are:

- That the assessment should be *simple not complex* (box 3): a useful assessment will assess *intended* learning outcomes and not the ability to navigate a complex assessment task (unless, of course, this ability *is* the learning outcome!). Miller's proposal (1956) that humans can hold limited information in their immediate memory without some assistance in terms of organisation is contested, but might be used here to imply that any given assessment task should not be overly complicated in its instructions. Such a task might assess students' ability to interpret complex written instructions, rather than the intended outcome.

- That the assessment should make *appropriate demands on staff time* (box 4). A beautifully designed assessment is destined for a short life if it does not fulfil this crucial criterion for smartness. Setting, administering and marking the assessment must be achievable with the resources available. This may seem an obvious point to make. However our own experience has been that many of the difficulties with assessment appear to stem from the incremental demands on staff over time to which we referred at the outset. As staff are encouraged to become more innovative, to provide more variety, to offer increased formative feedback and so on, ultimately the bigger picture can get lost, and hence staff find that the assessment burden has become difficult, if not impossible, to manage effectively.

The 'smart' assessment workshop – methodology and outcomes

Based on this articulation of assessment we designed a workshop to encourage the exploration of these issues and to provide time for teachers to consider and act upon their own reflections. The workshop is in three parts: (1) our initial presentation of ideas about smart assessment, (2) relating smart assessment to real assessment tasks, (3) reflections for personal and team changes.

Stage 1 – presentation and discussion

At the beginning of the workshop we introduce the idea of a holistic, 'smart' approach to assessment; the key generic aspects of 'smart' assessment (Figure 1) are then clarified and discussed in open plenary. In order to contextualise the discussion colleagues are invited to consider further aspects of 'smart' and 'not-smart' assessment from their own experience. This part of the workshop is critical as it allows practitioners to raise concerns that are central within their own assessment context. Phrases used by our colleagues to

describe smart assessment have included: *there should be lower marking loads…assessment should be developmental… needs to discourage plagiarism…assessment should have a low 'pester value'…assessment should be for learning…differentiates between students.*

Stage 2 – relating smart assessment criteria to real assessment tasks

In this second stage participants are set into small groups and asked to use the characteristics of smart assessment as criteria to critique specific assessments that they use. It helps the workshop to function if participants know about this stage beforehand and can bring along examples of their own assessments. The findings from the small groups are drawn together in open plenary either through posters, flip charts, or verbally reporting back. Two examples of this stage from workshops that we have run are shown below in Table 1:

Table 1 – staff evaluation of assessment tasks – examples

Assessment	'Smart' characteristics	'Not smart' characteristics
3 hour unseen exam	• Encourages academic integrity • Emphasises application over recall • Can allow student to demonstrate deeper learning • Resource efficient for large groups • Lower demands on staff time (depending on feedback method) and student time (depending on breadth of revision required)	• Unexciting for students • Possibly not well aligned to learning and teaching methods (for example, if 'question spotting' is possible) • Opportunity for feedback is often limited in reality • Exams may not be an inclusive form of assessment
Extended Essay	• Encourages academic integrity • Specific, consistently applied criteria are possible • Good opportunities for feedback • Rewards deeper approach to learning • Has academic rigour	• Designing out plagiarism and collusion is often difficult in reality • Inconsistencies in marking may be possible • High demand on staff time for marking

Stage 2 is important on two counts. Firstly, it demonstrates how assessment design is a 'balancing act'. In the workshops colleagues quickly recognised that not all of the smart criteria can be satisfied within any one assessment and compromise will be needed. This stage (if working well!) should discourage colleagues from taking entrenched stances (e.g. *'the only way of assessing my subject is by essay', 'exams are a useless way of assessing', 'exams are the*

only way of avoiding plagiarism'). Secondly, by drawing upon assessments that are familiar to the workshop participants, the development of new strategies may begin to be considered at a team level and this can be followed up at Stage 3.

Stage 3 – personal change

In the final stage of the workshop colleagues reflect on how they might change their own assessment practice, based on the conclusions of the discussion. The emphasis here is on personal change, and then on team collaboration. Specifically, colleagues are asked to identify how they might increase the degree of 'smartness' in actual assessments and reflect on useful team strategies for assessment overall. By operating the workshop within subject or programme teams this stage can lead to group learning and, ultimately, a team approach.

Implications for a team approach

There has been a tendency in the workshops for colleagues to look for solutions *outside* of their own control (for example, through changes to programmes or by appealing for increased resources). Some colleagues situated 'problems' with assessment with an unspecified 'other' and were reluctant to focus on what they could influence themselves. This tendency could be due to a perception of powerlessness in the face of pressures to assess 'better, faster, cheaper'. The workshop can help colleagues to move away from this position through challenging by critical friends within a supportive environment.

The workshop operates best when bringing together colleagues with a shared subject or course interest. In this context it provides a platform for the development of future strategies and the agreement of appropriate assessment practices. In one of the workshops the programme team came to the realisation that a programme-wide view of assessment was needed rather than the existing insular modular focus. This realisation, arising from their own discussions, may have more impact than a systemic or audit-driven imperative. In another workshop discussion it was clear that tutors within the same subject discipline had quite different perceptions of the potential of assessment for student learning. Our experience, then, suggests that the workshop is more effective if run with a programme team rather than a subject-based team as: (1) there is a shared understanding of the needs of the student cohort, (2) it encourages group learning and a team approach to change.

If staff are to be helped towards effective and satisfying assessment practice, a holistic approach, encouraging dialogue and collaboration within a teaching team, can be a way of negotiating a path through the competing imperatives of assessment.

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SHNID: one way to peddle punctuation

Susan Carter, University of Auckland

- **S**tudents' own experience as teachers
- **H**umour to keep interest
- **N**arrative – the soap opera of punctuation
- **I**mages – mediaeval memory technique
- **D**ebate.

SHNID is an effective teaching strategy for teaching the really boring basics. Frequently there are principles, terms or rules that need to be learned before students can integrate their own ideas and experience with the demands of any given academic discipline. Punctuation is an example of boring basics, although most first level undergraduate degrees also have foundational principles to be internalised and SHNID could be used for this work. Many university students were not taught grammar and punctuation at school in a period when educators theorised that rules inhibited creativity and spontaneity. Wanting to enter academic discourse, students need to acquire the principles of punctuation. Yet the rules are mundane, difficult to internalise, drab work in among the stimulation of ideas. In order to cater to this need, we (Student Learning Centre) have developed a series of punctuation festivals at the University of Auckland and, in doing so, we formulated the SHNID method of teaching. The punctuation festivals, nine hours in total over three days, are fun because they employ a raft of strategies to make the mundane memorable.

SHNID

Students' own experience as teachers

Students are set into groups that each have one punctuation point to teach. They are given handouts with the point and examples and useful graphic images too, as discussed below. They are charged with the task of teaching the point using their own examples which are to be memorable. We stress

at the start of the festival that the challenge is to make the points memorable so that, when editing their own essay drafts later, they will be able to conjure up the rules by conjuring up the memory hook that each rule was hung upon. Personal stories work well.

The process becomes something of a parlour game, but only in the interest of good learning practice. Each group comes to the front of the class and works as a team to teach their point. Although student participation takes longer, if there is any way at all that time can be found for this, it is more effective and enables learning through engagement. It exploits the principle that you learn best when you must teach.

At the end of each day we give the entire handout for the material covered that day to everyone whereas, during the session, they only get the little bit of it that they will be teaching. Our handout is detailed and offers several examples of each point, but students are encouraged to make up their own examples and to come at the teaching from their own perspective.

Humour

When the subject is boring, humour makes it endurable. In the process of teaching, students are encouraged to be funny as a way of being memorable; they tend in practice to take the opportunity to show off their own wit. Again, this makes the festival fun.

Narrative

Tiny narratives are another memory prompt so we encourage the development of a mini soap opera or, actually, twin soap operas, behind the examples that we provide on our handout, and this is sometimes creatively extended by the student groups and their teaching in our workshops.

Images

Classical and mediaeval memory techniques involve attaching ideas to memorable images (grotesque, obscene or funny, or all of these) so that the ideas are retrieved via the images. We begin with a picture of two cane toads copulating in the headlights of an oncoming vehicle. The cane toads are bloated, bored, at a point of satisfaction but doomed to die. From this tragic allegory of doomed love we hang the point that dependent clauses cannot survive as sentences. Copulating cane toads! A sentence fragment! This leads to the importance of using full stops correctly and making grammatically entire sentences. We make a point of collecting memorable images as useful for ideas that are intrinsically unmemorable in themselves. Acronyms (such as SHNID) are another mnemonic technique.

We also give the students one image per group as a tool for teaching, but they need to stretch their imaginations. The image might be an optical illusion to teach a point about the semi-colon or a human contortionist for a point about commas. Often they are funny; always memorable. Typically students are puzzled at first by the demand but quickly get into showing off their own creative narrative, comic and metaphoric skills.

Debate

As my co-facilitator and I put our material together we argued about the rules and then about how best to teach them. Then we realised that it was a good teaching practice to show that things can and should be argued by bringing your own debate into the classroom. By continuing to haggle over the grey area decisions as the first class sets off, we encourage students to contest and argue, and to keep arguing until convinced or convincing. As a facilitator, you are likely to be better at this than they are. If there is only one of you, and you are not a

deeply divided individual, you might report arguments. But creating an environment where it is fine to question is important.

SHNIDD?

As a hidden D to our acronym (which could be SHNIDD, although this is something of a grey area), we had an emblematic donkey to represent the grey areas where one is at liberty to make punctuation choices. We decided to broach grey areas and to debate them through, looking at the implications, rather than avoiding them. This decision came out of our preparation where we could have just chosen unambiguous examples where it was patently clear that there was only one right way to punctuate, but decided that this was a bit of a cop-out. We speculate too that perhaps manuals' tendency to be totally

circumspect with examples is the reason why so many students have trouble punctuating their own writing: actual writing does not always provide such obvious and clear-cut sentences.

Conclusion

Recently two teachers of teachers proposed that they *'wished to bring home to our teachers that a theoretical framework is necessary, that it is not enough to reflect on tips and tricks for more popular or more efficient teaching'* (Booth and Anderberg, 2005, p. 376). I'm not sure that I always agree, since sometimes a lot of multi-syllabic words shake down to very little that is really usable; maybe there is a place for tips as well as for theoretical pedagogy. In this article I am simply and unashamedly handing on tips and tricks that work. SHNID's foundation in classical memory

techniques ensures students are able to learn the boring stuff efficiently and enjoyably. Try SHNID as a verb: do it!

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Developing a new policy for the peer review of teaching: a cross-institutional approach

Clare Kell and **Andy Lloyd**, Cardiff University

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to set out the process through which a new policy framework for the peer review of learning and teaching (PRLT) was developed at a research-led institution. The paper will present the process that facilitated the development and adoption of an adaptable and empowering approach to PRLT, and explore how the policy framework is being implemented (in the current piloting phase) across diverse settings in the institution. While acknowledging that the approach described is not the only paradigm for teaching/learning support development, the paper will try to share some of the excitement being expressed by staff who feel:

- *'allowed to talk about teaching and learning'*
- *'valued for their role in supporting student learning'*
- *'noticed'*.

The local and national context

A number of educational development articles begin with a section labelled 'context'. While there is a temptation to gloss over this in the desire to focus on the 'meat in the sandwich', it is crucial to the process of change and its management (Jackson, 2005; Seel, 2005). Context shapes the aims, objectives and often also the outcomes of projects.

Simply stated, context cannot be ignored, and was a major influence on the project we describe here.

The list of contextual factors is long and varied with most interrelated in some way. Factors relevant to the PRLT project include the shift in policy towards enhancement of the student learning experience (Clegg, 2003), and the increasing emphasis being placed upon the provision of continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities for staff involved in student learning (Taylor, 2005). More than ever before, academic staff are being required to demonstrate a commitment to CPD in order to remain in good standing with relevant professional bodies.

These developments are reflected in government policy, being significant themes in the 2003 White Paper on 'The Future of Higher Education', and the consequent development of a national professional standards framework in teaching and learning (Higher Education Academy, 2006), the introduction of the National Student Survey, and the developing quality systems operated by the Quality Assurance Agency across the sector.

In 2005, Cardiff University and the University of Wales College of Medicine (UWCM) merged. This was a major driver for the project, which was one of a series of initiatives

designed to help engender a new shared culture in learning and teaching within the merged institution. The importance of this aim should not be understated, given the very different cultures that existed in the two institutions, and the fact that Cardiff remains a research-led institution, albeit one that focuses great care and attention on teaching and the support of student learning. The merger was also important in that it allowed a dedicated resource to be made available to help bring together the different approaches to peer review that had operated in the two institutions. Reflecting in part the different communities of practice that came together in the new University, some departments had used peer review as a formal evaluation of teaching, whereas others favoured a more developmental approach. While all departments are committed to maximising the student learning experience, each discipline has its own priorities, language, and culture with respect to learning and teaching.

All these factors suggested that the project would be challenging, but important in helping meet a diverse number of aims and objectives. Based on previous experiences that showed the value of personal reflection and peer-assisted reflective practices to both staff and student learning, it was agreed at an early stage that, whatever model emerged, it should be based on the overall desire to continue to enhance student learning.

Project Ethos
The desire to enhance student learning became the main ethos of the project – and it was recognised that this is everyone's responsibility, in that those staff across the institution whose work impacts on the student learning experience need to be involved in any process that developed them in their role. In isolation, however, this gives the impression of a project based on simple ideals rather than complex pragmatism, and it was recognised that the project needed both to work with staff across the institution, and develop a series of meaningful principles on which consultation would be undertaken. Three basic principles were adopted, these being based on previous experience and on a review of the pertinent literature. The principles quickly became the project 'mantra'. They guided all that has so far been achieved, and continue to drive ongoing efforts to secure effective implementation across the institution. The project 'mantra': *reflection, development* and *enhancement*.

What our colleagues thought
The consultation process was a unique opportunity to get behind the doors of the academic schools and supporting directorates, to see the enormous and varied amounts of peer dialogue already being used to challenge and develop all aspects of the student learning experience. It also provided an opportunity to explore the practicality and relevance of different models with the academic community. The consultation process revealed that there was overwhelming agreement that the student learning experience was central to this, and that peer-assisted scholarly reflective practice would be a positive approach to support individual and departmental learning and teaching

development. While supportive of the ethos of the project, staff across the University were concerned that, in reality, the implementation of any policy would be burdensome and fail to 'join-up' with other existing and new post-merger initiatives. Staff wanted a process that would allow them to evidence their practice, so that PRLT would, for example, integrate with existing requirements for the demonstration of ongoing CPD. Colleagues across the University rejected the notion of PRLT as an additional activity that was 'laid on top of' their existing work, an 'annual, essentially meaningless exercise in teacher-cloning'.

Across the institution staff wanted the whole range of their activities supporting the student learning experience to be accessible for critical, peer-assisted dialogue. This message, while strong from all sectors, was most passionately articulated by academic-related staff: those staff in our institution who have an extensive face-to-face interaction with students, such as library staff, language tutors, and careers staff. During the consultation exercise these staff referred to themselves as the 'silent underclass', the staff who make a major contribution to the student learning experience but perceive themselves to be denied equality of access to development and other resources. To these staff, a new, inclusive approach to PRLT was seen as empowering: an opportunity not only to explore and develop their own practice but also an opportunity to disseminate their work across the institution.

In summary, consultation showed that staff across the University would 'buy into' a new approach to PRLT that:

- was a flexible, enabling policy framework that transferred responsibility for specific design and implementation to local sites
- was simple to implement
- embraced the whole teaching role
- was empowering and inclusive
- promoted fair access to development resources for all staff
- supported staff commitment to enhancing the student learning experience
- was seen as non-judgemental, confidential to the peer pair/group
- was a constructive, mutually beneficial component of continuous personal development
- aims to promote excellence in learning and teaching.

Our solution: the umbrella approach to PRLT
In response to the consultation process, the project team developed a Policy Framework for the Peer Review of Learning and Teaching. The Policy Framework sets PRLT into the everyday work of all staff engaged in the support of student learning. Using an umbrella analogy, the project team described staff and student development as being embraced under the umbrella. In this analogy the fabric of the umbrella becomes all the varied roles and activities that go into support learning (Figure 1) – and all of these activities are valued and made public through the PRLT dialogue.

Figure 1:
A holistic approach
to PRLT

The student learning experience

Staff:
• Reflection
• Development
• Enhancement
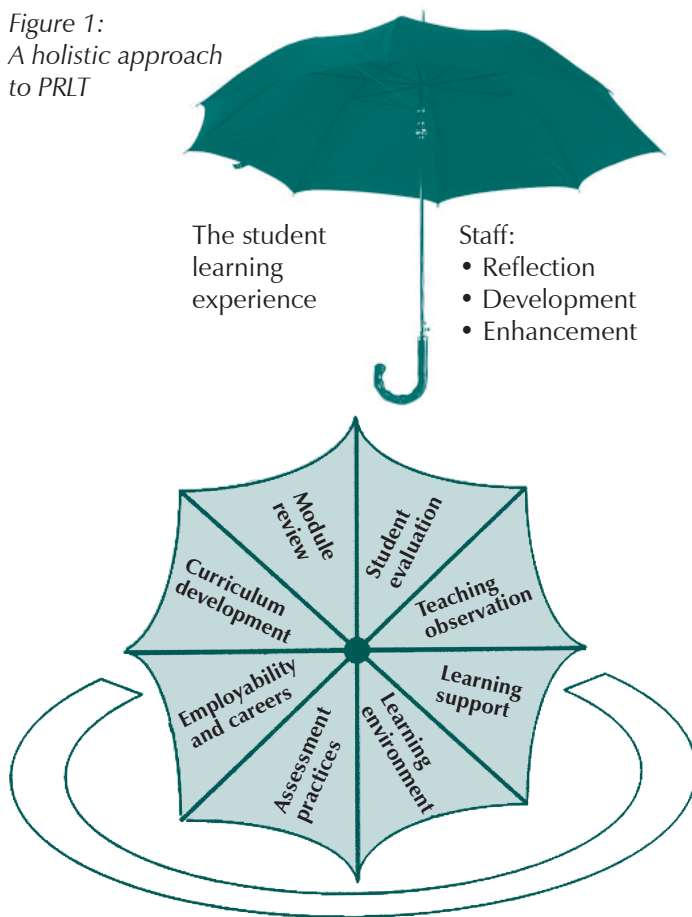
Within PRLT, staff across the University are free to select the focus of their review. Indeed, some schools and departments have expressed an interest in using PRLT to help community dialogue by suggesting an annual 'theme' for the review processes across their staff. Such an approach uses PRLT as a vehicle through which other policy initiatives can be achieved; for example, peer-assisted scholarly reflective practice focussed upon departmental assessment practices could help staff address pertinent issues arising from implementation of the new Cardiff University Assessment Strategy. PRLT, therefore, becomes a meaningful and useful activity to both individuals and groups of staff.

Promoting and supporting the professionalism of teaching and learning support

To align with both internal and external emphases on the professionalism of teaching, the PRLT Policy Framework is underpinned by a set of professional values. These were developed from existing statements used by the HEA and SEDA, in consultation with staff, and include:

• an understanding of how people learn
• a concern for student development
• a commitment to scholarship, professionalism and ethical practice
• a commitment to working with and learning from colleagues
• working effectively with diversity and promoting inclusivity
• a commitment to continuing reflection on professional practice.

These values reflect the intention of PRLT to be non-judgmental and mutually beneficial to all parties involved. Whether local sites choose to implement PRLT using peer-partners or peer-groups, the underpinning ethos is one of evidence-based scholarly reflection facilitated by a peer (or peers) for mutual ownership and development. To this end the PRLT project is supported by a wealth of web-based resources suggesting ways to collect evidence and undertake scholarly reflective practice, and ideas for facilitating the reflective practice of others (these resources may be accessed at **http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/11681**).

Does it work in practice? Preliminary reports from the pilot reviews

Three pilot reviews have been undertaken to date across the University: two involving academic staff (one observation-based review and one exploring assessment practices) and one involving language tutors. All participants had previously expressed great scepticism about PRLT. All reviews used a peer-partner format.

In practice, participants valued the freedom to explore aspects of their practice that were relevant and current and welcomed the sense of being involved in a pan-University initiative. When asked to describe any personal implications of PRLT, individuals reported 'getting the buzz back into learning and teaching', 'a sense of empowerment from being ''allowed'' to talk about learning and teaching', and a 'sense that their work would now be ''noticed'''. Despite their initial scepticism, participants embraced the new approach and strongly supported its ethos facilitating reflective practice and supported dialogue about the professional values underpinning their practice. All participants, however, commented on the ongoing challenge to 'get away from the easier task' of telling their peer partner 'what I would have done' rather than using the collected evidence to facilitate reflective practice.

What we have learnt from the project

1) The potential challenges of adopting a flexible approach to PRLT

While the PRLT Policy Framework aims to offer Schools, Directorates and individuals the ability to engage with PRLT in a meaningful and relevant manner, we recognise the dangers of local policy implementation described by Boud and Walker (2002):

• individuals/departments/divisions could avoid/bypass the challenges of scholarship required for the process
• dysfunctional local traditions may become more entrenched rather than being confronted
• difficulty with effective dissemination out of/across specific community
• danger of 'wheels being reinvented'
• monitoring and evaluation of the process difficult as no two sites will be approaching the implementation of the Framework in the same way
• staff development needs will be more locally specific – this will have an effect on current provision.

The Policy Framework attempts to address these issues by describing a minimum expected standard of practice but will rely heavily on local ambassadors of PRLT to support the development of local initiatives.

2) The challenges of turning a policy into a living and developing practice

This of course is the ultimate challenge: how can the policy be embedded within meaningful practice and not left to sit on a shelf? The University has developed a multi-pronged approach (including linkage with University strategies, presentations, 1:1 meetings *etc.*) to promote PRLT and facilitate its use across the institution but recognises that change is culture-related and will not occur overnight. We shall rely heavily on the early ambassadors and their work within local sites.

Concluding messages

The PRLT project has been a fantastic opportunity to explore the diversity of activities supporting student learning that occur within a research-intensive university. The project team have used this information and the networks of supporters that were created from the consultation process to create a modern, inclusive and empowering process to support staff development of the student learning experience. While acknowledging that we are a long way off a fully embedded practice, we do believe that the new approach to the PRLT is relevant and meaningful to both our institution and across the wider community.

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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.

Submission of an article to *Educational Developments* implies that it has not been published elsewhere and that it is not currently being considered by any other publisher or editor.

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Mike Watts and Helen Pedrosa

SEDA Special 19
ISBN 1 902435 35 4
SEDA, October 2006
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A Framework for the Professional Development of Academic Staff with Teaching Responsibilities

Denis Berthiaume, University of Lausanne, and **Mary Morrison**, University of Southampton

Introduction

Over the past 16 months, we have been developing a framework to guide the professional development of academic staff with teaching responsibilities at the University of Southampton. This was undertaken within the Professional Standards Project (PSP) funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) through its Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (TQEF). This document introduces this framework and describes its various components, provides general observations about the framework, and makes recommendations about its future use.

Context

The University of Southampton has over 2500 academic staff, the majority of whom have some teaching responsibility, spread across 20 schools with differing needs and interests. The TQEF and the new Higher Education Academy (HEA) Professional Standards Framework (PSF) afforded us the opportunity to review our practices and develop a coherent but flexible approach to the professional development of our academic staff with teaching responsibilities.
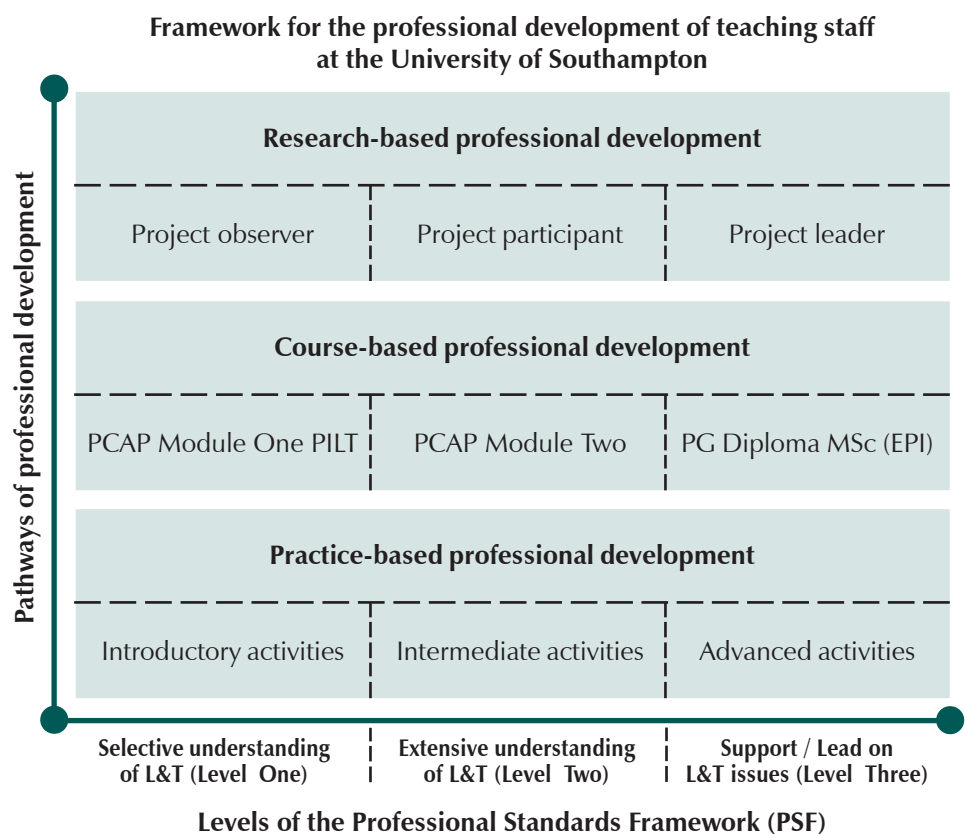
The main professional development opportunities in learning and teaching at Southampton are provided centrally by the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit (LATEU), formerly the Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLT), with additional sessions offered by schools. One of the chief aims of the PSP was to develop multiple options (and coordinate existing ones) for teaching staff, taking into consideration the suggested levels in the PSF. This led to the development of our own framework that identifies a variety of progressive pathways for

staff. It is flexible in that it indicates and encourages movement between the pathways at any stage in the development process. Furthermore, it was intended to relate current and future practice to the PSF and recognise that various stages exist in the professional development of university teaching staff.

Teaching staff may be at a stage in their development where they have a need for only a limited or selective understanding of learning and teaching issues. Opportunities corresponding to level one are likely to be of immediate use to these staff, which could be those new to teaching, postgraduates or postdoctoral staff undertaking limited teaching duties, and teaching support staff. Those involved more heavily in

teaching, or more established teaching staff, may require a more extensive understanding, and opportunities corresponding to level two should be appropriate to them. Well-established teaching staff, or those who have taken on management roles, may wish to develop skills and understanding with regard to supporting or leading on relevant issues. Those needs should be met by opportunities corresponding to level three of the framework.

Thus, by considering the needs and interests of staff at different stages of their careers, and the expectations of the PSF, the Southampton framework allows us to identify relationships between elements and indicates where we should develop, review or adapt our practices.

Framework for the professional development of teaching staff at the University of Southampton

Pathways of professional development	Selective understanding of L&T (Level One)	Extensive understanding of L&T (Level Two)	Support / Lead on L&T issues (Level Three)
Research-based professional development	Project observer	Project participant	Project leader
Course-based professional development	PCAP Module One PILT	PCAP Module Two	PG Diploma MSc (EPI)
Practice-based professional development	Introductory activities	Intermediate activities	Advanced activities

Levels of the Professional Standards Framework (PSF)

Presentation of the framework

The Southampton framework offers three separate but interconnected pathways, each indicating varying levels of accomplishment reflecting the PSF. The first pathway, or *practice-based professional development*, is the standard professional development as offered in most higher education institutions. This comprises short, intensive sessions focusing on aspects of learning and teaching practice. The sessions may have a broad remit, such as instructional strategies or assessment, or they may be very specific, such as the application of a particular technology. Those offered at level one have no expectation of previous experience, those at level two presume some knowledge or previous experience, and those at level three would enable people with substantial knowledge or experience to develop their skills further, thus enabling them to lead and support on those issues.

The second pathway, or *course-based professional development*, consists of all courses intended to support the development of learning and teaching skills, possibly accredited by the HEA. Module One of the Post-graduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PCAP) – our HEA-accredited programme for new lecturers – and the Postgraduate Induction to Learning and Teaching (PILT) – our programme for doctoral students intending to work in academia – correspond to level one of the professional development framework. Module Two of PCAP, because of its emphasis on advanced understanding and skills in learning and teaching, corresponds to level two of that pathway. Finally, level three of professional development can be reached through that pathway with the help of a Postgraduate diploma or an MSc in Educational Practice and Innovation offered by the School of Education. Programmes in Higher Education Management offered jointly by the Schools of Management and Education could also complement initial course-based professional development. Those opportunities are currently being examined.

The third pathway, or *research-based professional development*, rests on the idea that most teaching staff are also researchers and that they may be interested in developing their understanding of learning and teaching through applied research projects on the topic. Therefore, at level one, staff can choose to be an observer or 'passive participant' in university-wide or school-based applied research projects in the area of learning and teaching. At level two, staff may develop understanding of learning and teaching through a more active participation to applied research projects, focusing on specific aspects of the project or accomplishing specific tasks. Finally, at level three, staff might lead on applied research projects, where they would be responsible for the design, implementation, and evaluation of research projects in areas that are of interest to them. To support such initiatives, applied pedagogical research groups are currently being developed both in specific schools (e.g. Health Professions and Rehabilitation Sciences) and university-wide (e.g. Evidence-based Policy and Practice group).

One important characteristic of the framework for professional development presented above is that it offers the possibility to move from one pathway to another at any point. An academic who has completed Module One of PCAP can move on to the practice-based pathway and take level two activities to supplement his/her learning on PCAP. Alternatively, following completion of Module Two of PCAP, someone may choose to move to the research-based pathway and lead on a specific pedagogic research project, further developing applications specific to his/her discipline. Finally, someone having completed a series of practice-based activities could envisage registering in the MSc as a complementary form of professional development. What we are trying to do is offer staff a pathway that meets their individual needs and aspirations.

Observations

So far, discussion of the framework has raised some issues and highlighted some areas for further development. For instance, there is a lack of identified opportunities for those at the advanced stage (i.e. level three of the framework) and we are currently considering how to address this. It may be that constructing practice-based sessions is inappropriate or insufficient, and we should rather identify means for individuals to pursue an interest, or address a need, consistent with their background and experience, such as identifying leadership courses or advanced courses provided externally. Also, further opportunities should be developed in order to support level three activities in the research-based development pathway. As an example, a Southampton-based teaching fellowship scheme is currently under development, to support those interested in further developing their skills and understanding of learning and teaching by focusing on issues of importance to both their discipline and the university as a whole.

Discussion of the framework with senior management has also questioned the validity of provision of activities centrally, when it might be more appropriate and relevant to work with the schools and develop activities in collaboration with school staff. For instance, we are currently developing a pilot professional development programme with one specific school. The pilot will be evaluated in order to identify how we can best support the discipline-specific professional development needs of academic staff with teaching responsibilities within schools.

Conclusions/future developments

In short, the framework provides us with a means of categorising in a meaningful way the professional development opportunities for academic teaching staff at Southampton. It shows how the components relate to one another and therefore indicates a potential pathway for the individual. Furthermore, it indicates to LATEU where we need to concentrate our energies in terms of staff groups or particular issues. The framework will be a working guide for us in the coming years as we endeavour to broaden and improve professional development for academic staff with teaching responsibilities.

Denis Berthiaume is Director of the Centre for Teaching Support at the University of Lausanne, and **Mary Morrison** is an Educational Development Consultant in the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit at the University of Southampton.

The Future for External Examining: a Higher Education Academy Project

Howard Colley, Higher Education Academy

The White Paper of 2003 'The Future of Higher Education' made a number of recommendations on strengthening and enhancing the external examining system based on earlier deliberations by the Teaching Quality Enhancement Committee (TQEC). The Paper recognised external examiners as 'guardians of the reputation of UK higher education' but noted the need for appropriate training and support. In 2004 the Higher Education Academy was invited by HEFCE to provide a programme of support to secure improvements in the external examining system. A number of the proposed improvements relate to the broad field of staff development and include: enhancing induction for external examiners; encouraging institutional preparation of internal examiners to take on the role of external examiners; and consideration of a national programme of support for external examiners. This article will outline the progress in securing these improvements.

In considering the induction of external examiners the Academy has gathered evidence from a number of sources which include discussion in working parties and workshop events, research based on the use of questionnaires and interviews, and attendance at events with a full or partial focus on induction run by HE institutions and organisations such as Edexcel and Foundation Degree Forward (FDF). An initial suggestion from the TQEC was that the Academy could provide accreditation of institutional induction programmes; however, consultation across the HE sector indicated little support for this other than the possibility of light-touch recognition by the Academy. A particular problem is the wide variation in approaches to induction with the post-92 institutions commonly running centrally planned induction events and the pre-92 institutions generally favouring induction delivered at the Faculty or Departmental level on a more informal basis. Our work has shown that both approaches are taken seriously but do have potential weaknesses. For example, attendance at a central event by external examiners is usually only between 30% and 50% of invitees. With Faculty and Departmental delivery of induction our work has shown that the central administration has considerable difficulty in determining if this is taking place. Nevertheless, when we speak directly to external examiners we do find that experienced examiners have noted significant improvement in induction. The Academy will keep under consideration the potential for introducing a recognition scheme that will take into account the utility and validity of varying approaches to induction. In addition institutional induction packages will be supplemented by resources provided electronically by the Academy.

A key recommendation of the TQEC was that institutions should look to support the more explicit development of internal examiners to take on the role of external examiners. The idea of an 'apprenticeship' approach was debated in a number of our earlier workshops, which were attended by staff with considerable experience of external examining, but gained limited support. This was, to us, a little surprising with an argument based on seeing little advantage in formalising a development process that appeared to be working reasonably well informally. In institutions there was a tacit assumption that senior academic staff would become external examiners and would have acquired the necessary skills through exposure to internal examination systems, and validation and review events. Over the last year the Academy has supported a handful of institutions that have run preparation events for staff aspiring to become external examiners. These events, which have been very well received by more junior staff, have included a general introduction to roles and responsibilities and the opportunity to talk to colleagues who are experienced external examiners. Similarly we have recently completed a series of workshops with FDF with a majority of attendees being staff from HE units in FE colleges and they also would welcome the opportunity for early 'internal' preparation.

The Academy will continue to support the development of an internal 'apprenticeship' approach because it has the potential to give more consistent preparation for external examining when considered against the wide variation in induction mentioned above, and it offers the opportunity for experienced external examiners within an institution to assist the development of their more junior colleagues. As part of that support we want to encourage institutions to map out the road to external examining appointment in CPD schemes and for promotion criteria to recognise external examining. This might involve introduction to external examining in PGCert programmes for new staff and attendance participation in internal preparation activities such as workshops. The 'road' could also consider the recognition of responsibilities and activities such as: acting as a module leader, programme leader and internal examiner; serving on internal examination boards, validation panels and institutional committees; and chairing internal examination boards, validation and review events, and institutional committees.

With regard to a programme of national support for external examining the Academy's Subject Centres are playing an important role. A recurring theme during our work over the past two years has been the increasing difficulty in finding external examiners. In response to this a number of Subject Centres have established external examiner registers.

Edexcel Licence Centres Conference 2006 Seminar 2 – External Examining

External examining in a framework for continuing professional development

Teaching	Research	Academic Management	Reflective Practice	Professional Status
Design, delivery of modules and responsibility for evaluation of the quality of teaching on module Contribution to institutional learning and teaching developments and events *(Module leader working mainly at departmental level)*	Institutional recognition and developing national recognition *(Research group member)*	Member of examination board Member of departmental/course committee Member of new course planning group	Benchmarking of modular student performance Collection and use of student feedback Constructive alignment of assessment with learning outcomes related to subject benchmarks	Associate Practitioner *(following completion of accredited PGCertHE)* Registered Practitioner PSRB membership **Internal Examiner**
Design and delivery of new programmes, and responsibility for annual quality monitoring of programme Contribution to institutional learning and teaching developments and events *(Programme Leader working across a faculty)*	National recognition and developing international recognition *(Research group leader)*	Chair of internal examination committee Leader of new course development Member of validation panels and internal panels for PSRB accreditation visits Member of faculty board	Benchmarking of performance of student cohorts in subject area Development of approaches to collection and use of student feedback Pedagogic input to assessment in new course proposals	Registered Practitioner Senior Practitioner PSRB membership **Internal Examiner** **New External Examiner**
Leadership and co-ordination of programme and curriculum development, and responsibility for quality of teaching within department Co-ordination of institutional learning and teaching developments and events *(Head of Department)*	Internal and External Assessor for research proposals National and international recognition	Chair of full examination boards Chair of validation panels Chair of faculty committees Member of key institutional committees Member of PSRB accreditation panels	Benchmarking of performance of students across the institution Pedagogic input to institutional teaching, learning and assessment policy and strategy	Senior Practitioner PSRB assessor QAA reviewer **External Examiner**
Co-ordination and leadership of institutional learning and teaching developments and events and responsibility for quality of teaching in a faculty *(Dean)*	Budget holder for research projects National and international recognition	Chair of faculty board and institutional committees Institutional nominee/ representative on national initiatives Chair of PSRB accreditation panels	Cross-institutional benchmarking of student performance Development of institutional policy and strategy on learning, teaching and assessment	Senior Practitioner PSRB assessor QAA auditor **External Examiner** **Chief External Examiner**

Registers and databases of external examiners are now provided by: Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism; Social Policy and Social Work; Performing Arts; Education; Economics; English; History, Classics and Archaeology; Legal Education; Information and Computer Sciences; Mathematics, Statistics and Operational Research; Built Environment; Psychology; Accountancy, Business and Management. The Subject Centres can be accessed through a drop-down menu on the front page of the Academy's website (**http://www.heacademy.ac.uk**). The intention is to extend the coverage to other Subject Centres. The Academy also has web-pages dedicated to external examining (**http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/externalexaminers.htm**) with a number of guides for external examiners, papers on topics such as induction, accreditation and professional standards, and reflective accounts from practising external examiners. A principal activity for 2006-7 will be the consolidation and expansion of material on the website to create a comprehensive electronic handbook for external examining which will provide guidance, information and case studies.

This will be linked to appropriate websites within institutions, the Subject Centres and subject associations, professional bodies and other organisations such as the UUK, SCOP, QAA, Edexcel, and FDF. The Academy also facilitates two JISC mailbases to promote discussion between external examiners (external-examiners@jiscmail.ac.uk) and the staff supporting the external examining function (eesupportnet@jiscmail.ac.uk). The Academy will also look to support wherever possible institutional events and initiatives aimed at enhancing the external examining system.

If you would like further information on the programme please contact: howard.colley@heacademy.ac.uk.

Howard Colley is Director (Institutions) at the Higher Education Academy.

The next issue of Educational Developments *will feature a report by Stephen Bostock on the piloting of the External Examiner award within SEDA's Professional Development Framework.*

London Scholarship of Teaching and Learning 6th Annual International Conference

Conference organised by the Educational Development Centre, City University in association with the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (USA), the International Society for SoTL and the HE Academy (UK) 18-19 May 2006.

Fran Beaton, University of Kent

The theme of this wide-ranging and popular conference was *Practising the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*. This theme brought together international speakers and participants debating the impact and challenges of SoTL on staff and students in different Higher Education environments.

The conference focus was on the practice of SoTL in complex contexts and explored a number of areas within that theme. These included addressing the challenges of student diversity, policy and practice in access (or not) to Higher Education; scholarship informing reflective practice; SoTL and learning environments; and initiatives to promote SoTL.

Plenary sessions provided a lively and thought-provoking stimulus, flagging major themes in the national and international contexts. These included the challenges of SoTL for culturally diverse environments, and the conflicting emphasis on research productivity and prestige at a time when we need to respond imaginatively as teachers to engage with the wider community. This last framed a passionate discussion about the fundamental purpose of higher education and the role of university educators as champions of diversity, attempting to forge a pedagogy for social justice. Speakers explored this from a number of perspectives: the practicability of SoTL as a basis for dealing with educational disadvantage; how critical pedagogy can counter institutional cultures which reinforce inequality; SoTL bringing locally generated knowledge to a wider 'teaching commons'. The session dealing with the development of the

Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund framework – generally welcomed by universities in supporting institutional and subject development – highlighted the institutional tension between Learning and Teaching Enhancement and the pressures of the Research Assessment Exercise, and the contentious nature of individual awards through National Teaching Fellowships.

Practical applications – and challenges – of these overarching themes were explored in smaller, more discursive parallel sessions throughout the two days. These sessions included reports on work in progress, including initiatives taken in response to – or to foster – institutional and disciplinary change and discussion on the practicalities of promoting, engaging in and implementing SoTL in Higher Education today.

There were five parallel sessions – each lasting an hour and a quarter – with two or three speakers speaking on related topics followed by discussion. Inevitably, in a conference on this scale, it is impossible to get to everything. Lively discussions within sessions were often carried forward as the conference went on, and there were numerous tantalising snatches of conversation in the informal social spaces in between. The chance to take part in discussions ranging from the philosophical to the practical, and to find out more about the lived experience of scholars and practitioners from across the globe was stimulating and rewarding. This collaborative theme – working across disciplines, among communities, between institutions, internationally – was a recurrent and welcome feature.

In sharing my personal highlights, I've tried to give a flavour of the range of the conference referred to earlier in this article.

Scholarship informing reflective practice

Jenny Moon and Gwyneth Hughes explored the possibilities of storytelling and autobiography as a way of developing reflective practice in professional development. Claire Kell described a model for peer-assisted scholarly reflective practice. Claire and Gwyneth's articles appear elsewhere in this issue.

SoTL and learning environments

Martin Rich and Clive Holtham (Cass Business School) explored students' responses to learning alone and collaboratively. This was particularly in the context of the 'millennial generation's' self-image, attitudes and learning preferences and the dissonance between such students and the working style of senior academics and policy-makers – typically drawn from the baby boomers generation. Rich and Holtham suggested that the millennial generation's general competence in routine individual uses of IT (such as text messaging) masks more variations in competence when it comes to more complex uses of technology (collaborative activities such as blogs and discussion groups) in their learning. Such variations need careful consideration if teaching is to be tailored and students encouraged to work effectively in groups, as they will need to do in their subsequent employment.

Initiatives to promote SoTL: student diversity, policy and practice

Glenda Crawford, Richard Mihans (faculty staff, Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning, Elon University, USA), and Katherine Radcliffe and Jessica Waugh (Senior Education students at Elon) described two projects in which education students use the process of SoTL inquiry to develop a deep understanding of their own learning, and to advance the learning of others. The first involved students in designing, implementing, assessing and disseminating a university course; the second, a project to build a learning relationship with the families of English language learners in the community. Students and staff spoke of the considerable benefits of this collaborative approach, a clear example of an institution taking practical steps to give students awareness of their own skills and take responsibility for developing the skills of others.

We are promised the full conference proceedings in January 2007. Congratulations and thanks to Joelle Fanghanel and the team at City for a rewarding and thought-provoking event.

References

http://www.city.ac.uk/edc/sotlconference/index.html

Fran Beaton is a Lecturer in Academic Staff Development at the University of Kent.

Book Review

Handbook of Enquiry and Problem-based Learning: Irish Case Studies and International Perspectives

ISBN No: 0-9551698-0-1

Edited by Terry Barrett, Iain Mac Labhrainn and Helen Fallon, Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, NUI Galway and All Ireland Society for Higher Education (AISHE), Dublin, 2005
Download: **http://www.aishe.org/readings/2005-2/**

This handbook is a comprehensive information source about problem-based learning. The emphasis is on practical implementation of problem-based learning (PBL) and how it can be used effectively within organisations. It provides examples of success stories whilst being realistic about the limitations of the process, using examples from seven Irish Universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology. There are also contributions from England and Finland.

The eight sections of the handbook take the reader from the basics of PBL through to designing and implementing a programme. There are sections on how a programme works but the handbook also addresses the potential problems and possible issues. There is a useful section on students' experiences and then sections on how to develop and support learning initiatives. A final section focuses on reviewing and researching learning initiatives. Overall, the sections provide examples of how the process has worked and include a large number of quotes from participants. The extensive bibliographies backing up each paper enable the reader to follow up any points of particular interest.

The book states that its focus is on 'students learning' rather than 'teachers teaching' and case studies describe how PBL has been introduced, sometimes gradually, into areas where

more traditional teaching methods have previously been used, with reviews after each stage and revision taking place accordingly. The benefits to student learning and motivation are discussed and appear substantial. Several of the case studies show how an adapted model of PBL can be developed to take into account particular requirements of each study, for example lectures, and assessment methods such as exams. The importance of changing the role from instructor to facilitator also needs careful consideration and the case studies discuss how this can be achieved, and the importance of maintaining the momentum once a programme is underway.

The issue of finding the right type of problem is discussed in several case studies and theories are raised about how structured, or otherwise, the problems need to be. Some students embrace the idea of an unstructured problem whilst others want to be told how to do it and find the process daunting. There is a section which looks at how effectively to assess the learning on a PBL course in order that it is fair, representative and objective both from the point of view of the examiners and also from the student's perspective. The

handbook also covers how to help students develop information literacy skills and looks at how technology might be used to support PBL. The links between the PBL approach in an educational setting and the way that people problem-solve in the workplace is flagged up. The fact that the skills acquired can be relevant to the workplace is an added bonus to this way of working.

This is a useful handbook for those who are new to the PBL process. The handbook is highly informative and would be a good starting point. It raises the issues that need to be considered and suggests different ways to implement a PBL programme within an organisation. The book contains plenty of positive feedback and reflects upon the success of the programmes discussed, but the writers also remain realistic about the relative newness of the process and stress that further assessment needs to be carried out over time.

Katherine Kingstone is a University Teaching Associate involved in running courses for graduate students in Staff Development at the University of Cambridge.

Report of SEDA Summer School 2006

John Ford, Roehampton University

My role at Roehampton University is to oversee the development and implementation of personal development planning (PDP) across the university. Ironically, I had not planned to do this. I am entering into the field of Educational Development due to opportunities that have risen rather than due to any great master plan. As the focus of my job shifts from being student-facing to being staff-facing, I am aware of my need to develop my understanding of Educational Development.

A colleague mentioned the SEDA Summer School and sold it to me as an introduction to Educational Development for those new to it. So in July this year, myself and about 20 others, all in some way connected to educational development, descended upon the Ashorne Hill Conference Centre for the SEDA Summer School. The Summer School ran for three days. The first day of the summer school focused upon the role of an educational developer; the second day examined how to plan and run educational development projects and work as an effective facilitator; and in the final day we looked at personal and professional development strategies. It was intensive, enjoyable and rewarding.

One of the refreshing aspects of learning during the Summer School was that it was not simply a series of lectures taking place on the topic of Educational Development. The learning was mainly through interaction and activity. In some ways this was frustrating because it was not as processed and neatly packaged as when someone gives a lecture. However, the depth of learning was greater. Certainly, I thought much more about the issues because of the discussions that I participated in than I would have done by sitting in a lecture.

So what were the benefits of the Summer School?

1. An opportunity to meet others in similar situations
One of the benefits was meeting others working in educational development and being able to talk about the frustrations, difficulties and successes that we experience. It was helpful to see the big picture and realise that most difficulties were not particular to one institution, but were difficulties across the sector.

2. An opportunity to learn from others
At the Summer School there was not a typical delegate. Some had expertise in e-learning, some were academics moving into educational development, and some were already fairly experienced educational developers. The facilitators were excellent, but I probably learnt just as much from discussion with other delegates. From chatting to delegates I was able to learn from those with e-learning expertise about the benefits and weaknesses of e-PDP. I also had discussions with delegates about strategies they had used to implement PDP, which may be applicable to our institution.

3. An opportunity to plan an educational development project to implement on returning home
Throughout the Summer School there was the opportunity for each delegate to develop an education development project to be implemented on returning to university. Even though this was a personal project, the process was guided by taught input from the facilitators and discussion with other delegates. As educational development projects tend to be different from projects in other disciplines, I found this guided process useful. Moreover, it was beneficial because it linked the work in summer school to our workplaces and

meant that there was a clear application of the learning in the summer school.

Would I recommend a SEDA Summer School to someone else? Absolutely. It was an excellent introduction to educational development. If there was SEDA Summer School part two, for those who completed the first one, I would sign up.

John Ford is based in the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit at Roehampton University and is responsible for the implementation of PDPs across the university.

The Higher Education Academy and Educational Development

Barry Jackson, Middlesex University, and **Allan Davies** and **Steve Outram,** Higher Education Academy

The Higher Education Academy has recognised the strategic importance of educational development (in its various manifestations and titles) and, following meetings with senior educational staff and academic developers, has launched a new initiative to support educational developers and the educational development function in higher education institutions in the UK.

The overall aim of this project is to support the capacity of institutions to effect change through more fully exploiting the work and expertise of educational or academic development.

Institutions clearly differ in the ways in which educational or academic development expertise is structured and related to other parts of the organisation. There is a wide variability in the leadership and management of these functions, how they are perceived, and the level of integration into institutional strategies for teaching enhancement.

There seems to be at least anecdotal evidence that institutions also differ in the degree to which they make effective use of this expertise to contribute most effectively to the institutional enhancement agenda, which is often the responsibility of a deputy vice chancellor/pro vice chancellor for learning and teaching.

Objectives for the project for 2006-7 include:
- improving the ability of HEIs to communicate effectively with and make use of educational development expertise
- enhancing working relationships between the Academy and educational development groups and leaders
- improving communication and practice between educational development communities.

Proposed activities for 2006-7 to realise these objectives include:
- discussion of the range of existing organisational structures for educational development within institutions
- consideration of a process for working more effectively with the Higher Education Academy including, for example, an equivalent of the Academy-facilitated PVC Network
- sharing views on how educational development can best contribute to quality enhancement of student

learning experience
- identification of a range of issues of institutional organisation and communication which act as obstacles to, or enablers of, educational development within the sector.

The Academy recognises that organisations and networks already exist to support educational development – SEDA; Heads of Educational Development Group; Standing Conference on Academic Practice and organisations for developers in Wales and Scotland – and the Academy has engaged in a number of discussions with representatives from these organisations. More recently, educational developers were included in the Staff Development Forum project looking at strategic staff development.

This Academy project is a response to a need expressed by higher education institutions during the first year of the Academy's institutional liaison scheme and will complement the work of these other agencies as well as developing a particular relationship between the work of educational developers and that of the Academy.

Barry Jackson is Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Learning and Teaching at Middlesex University and Higher Education Academy Senior Associate, and **Allan Davies** and **Steve Outram** are Senior Advisers at the Higher Education Academy.