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Can Academic Practice Make Perfect?

Professor Rob Cuthbert, University of the West of England

Some questions are persistently troublesome. Why do most people say teaching is important, but think that most other people think research is more important? Why is it hard to find effective ways to reward people for good teaching? Why do some people who really want to be good teachers resist help from educational developers? Why is research funded at less than full economic cost thought of as 'income generation', while teaching that earns more than its full economic cost is not? Why is it hard to find evidence that teaching and research must go together to ensure the best higher education? Why, if we believe teaching and research must go together, do we allow hundreds of thousands of students to do HE courses in places where there is little or no research?

These questions have not gone un-researched, but there is a shortage of persuasive answers, partly because our conceptual framework blocks our thinking. We separate teaching and research as basic concepts – and then we agonise about the problems caused by the separation. To improve teaching, learning and how they are valued by academics, we need to change how we think about higher education as a whole. In this article I suggest an alternative approach, which reintegrates teaching, learning, research and scholarship as the main constituents of academic practice. The way to do this is to start with academic practice and pay much more attention to contexts, purposes and academic freedom. By making those ideas explicit and primary, we can give fresh impetus to improving teaching and learning.

Improving teaching and learning

In recent years the UK has seen a series of national experiments in improving teaching and learning, with mixed results. Space does not permit description here of variations in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, but Scotland's recent Enhancement-Led Institutional Review method, in particular, has some features consistent with my argument in this article. For more than ten years it has been government policy that the quality and professionalism of teaching must be nurtured and improved. Following the Dearing Report (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education 1997) the Institute for Learning and Teaching (ILT) was established. HEFCE created the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (FDTL), then brought together various teaching and learning support activities through the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (TQEF), at institutional (learning and teaching strategy), subject (Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN)), and individual (National Teaching Fellowships Scheme (NTFS)) levels. TQEF stimulated educational development and the scholarship of teaching and learning (Summative Evaluation of the TQEF 2005), reinforcing contributions from the Teaching and Learning Technology Programme (TLTP) and Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC). ILT joined the LTSN and the HE Staff

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Development Agency in the Higher Education Academy. Later came further waves of investment in the 70+ Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), and in the ESRC's Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP). The scholarship of teaching and learning has become big business, and educational developers are everywhere. What difference has this investment and activity made to teaching and learning?

The Higher Education Academy has had mixed success (Oakleigh Consulting 2008). The formative evaluation of the 70+ CETLs (Saunders *et al.* 2008) and other research (Gosling and Hannan, 2006, 2007, Gosling, 2008) suggests that they have not yet had wide impact, perhaps because it is only now in the third year of their operation that most CETLs are planning to reach out beyond their immediate institutional environments. Trowler, Fanghanel and Wareham (2005) argue that improvement initiatives have been so disjointed and incoherent that they have obstructed rather than complemented one another. They also argue that most change efforts have focused either at the level of the individual course or at the organisational level, and a greater emphasis on the work group, the department, is needed.

HEFCE has emphasised teaching and learning strategy at the institutional level, and research strategy at the unit of assessment level. But RAE units of assessment only correspond to departmental staff groups in a minority of institutions, so most departments must reconcile an institution-level strategy for teaching with a unit-level strategy for research, neither designed to fit the department. To get funding and support, departmental academic practice must be separated into teaching and research, then submitted to different authorities for different kinds of evaluation. It is not surprising that many academics in these circumstances feel alienated from the management of their institution. Nor is it surprising that academics resist offers of help - framed in this uncongenial structure - from educational developers working at institutional level.

But this alienation and the artificial separation of the elements of academic work is largely academics' own fault. The way we think about higher education has failed to keep up with changes in what we do, and changes in why, where and how we do it. To see how this has happened, consider first what higher education is for.

What is higher education for?

Robbins' glorious statement of the purposes of higher education (*Higher Education: a report* 1963) proved irresistible to academics and policymakers. It fixed the idea of higher education in an age when universities catered for less than 10% of the population. It also fixed the idea of higher education to be synonymous with the idea of the university, something that has been less and less accurate ever since. It appealed because it described the kind of university which many academics and policymakers experienced as an undergraduate, and the kind of university which worldwide enjoys the highest academic prestige.

That idea had grown from von Humboldt's concept of the research-teaching-scholarship nexus, mediated by Newman, the Webbs at the LSE, by Robbins and others. Trow's (1974) elite-mass-universal model, coupled with the idea of the research-teaching-scholarship nexus as the defining characteristic of the university, has shaped thinking about higher education policy for the last 50 years, framed the way we pursue the scholarship of teaching and learning, and framed the practice of educational development. It idealised a mix of research and teaching of a kind which could be afforded only by a handful of institutions, fuelling endless arguments about the desirability or otherwise of concentrating research funding.

But many UK universities grew from a different, polytechnic tradition. The polytechnics' growth put the (pre-1992) universities under such pressure to justify their higher level of funding that they were driven to disaggregate their block grant funds between teaching and research - thus fixing the original amount of QR (quality-related research) funding, creating separate T and R funding streams and leading directly to the RAE. When HEFCE (2003) argued that institutional strategy should focus on some but not all of teaching, research, 'third stream' activity, and widening participation, some challenged the conclusions, especially after the 'teaching-only universities' proposal in the 2003 White Paper *The Future of Higher Education*. But no-one questioned the way the argument started by separating teaching and research.

Academics have looked hard for evidence that research and teaching must be linked for high quality higher education to be possible, even though many perfectly acceptable higher education courses are run in places, like FE colleges, where there is little or no research. We are looking at the issue in the wrong way. The realities of the whole of academic practice - research, teaching and learning - should be incorporated rather than ignored in the way higher education is conducted and studied. Instead, institution-wide strategies for teaching and learning, or for research, are at best semi-detached from each other. Teaching, learning and research need to be the foundation stones of the whole building, not separate annexes.

Teaching and research are the primary activities in any university, but not its primary purpose. Teaching and research are the means to a higher purpose. Ideas about purpose will always vary – the pursuit of truth or of knowledge for its own sake, the development of human potential or high level skills for employment, the promotion of economic development or social justice. Whatever our view we need to pay more attention to purpose, which reminds us that what matters is academic practice, not the subdivisions within it. The separation of teaching and research in the academic consciousness has led us to mistake what we do for the reasons why we do it. We need to think differently about purposes, and to do that we need a new scholarship of academic practice to reintegrate research and teaching.

How do we join up research and teaching?

Most academics believe research brings greater rewards than teaching, even in institutions which consistently promote more people for teaching achievement than for research. The belief is buried deep in academic culture, reflecting the differences between teaching and research. Rewards for research tend to be extrinsic, public and personal, while rewards for teaching are more often intrinsic, private and collective. Attempts to change the reward system and the culture for teaching have had limited success. Awards for individual teaching 'stars' go against the grain. There may be some successful institution-based teaching fellowship schemes, but there is considerable resistance to the idea of individual awards, and award-winners tend not to play an influential part in enhancing teaching and learning outside their own area.

This resistance is understandable. There is a strong culture of openness and collaboration in teaching and in the scholarship of teaching and learning, captured in the idea of the teaching commons (Huber and Hutchings, 2005). Such a culture naturally resists attempts to individualise reward for collaborative effort. But the question remains: how can we improve the rewards for those institutions, departments and staff who are truly excellent at promoting student learning?

Teaching and research have an asymmetrical relationship. Teaching, however good, does nothing for academic reputation. Research, on the other hand, creates academic fame and fortune. The asymmetry is a problem everywhere. In Britain we make it worse by separating the funding streams for teaching and research. That makes the reputational hierarchies steeper, it intensifies inter-institutional competition for resources, and it encourages academics and universities to fall into the trap of seeing teaching and research in competition with one another, instead of being interwoven.

The prestige of research encourages theoretical contortions to massage academic self-esteem. Boyer's (1997) four scholarships paradigm for interpreting academic practice dominates less for its achievement as a conceptual synthesis than for the politically inclusive way in which it places every HE institution and every academic somewhere on the scholarship map. It is a politically correct reformulation of the research-teaching-scholarship nexus idea. But it submerges the reputational hierarchy which higher education reinforces – discovery is top, integration and engagement are lower, and the scholarship of teaching and learning is often near the bottom. Our dominant perspective conceals rather than reveals one of the key issues we should examine. We need to look at academic practice more holistically.

Academic practice involves changing how people think. To change how we ourselves think, we must shift away from the scholarship of teaching and learning towards a scholarship of academic practice which addresses both research and teaching. How can we do this? By reinventing the idea of academic freedom.

We need a 21st Century idea of academic freedom. That is more important than deciding where and how to draw the boundary between teaching and research, and the boundaries between different kinds of scholarship. The four scholarships are not separated by those clear black lines in Boyer's diagram. They are completely interwoven. We need new ways of seeing the higher education world which focus our attention on the interplay between four ideas: academic practice; academic purpose; academic freedom; and academic context.

The narrowest freedom is associated with the narrowest purpose. In a commercial context where the purpose is high-level professional training, all you need is the freedom to draw on the results of other people's research to instruct trainees in developing work-related skills.

In an industrial research laboratory, where the purpose is commercial problem-solving or new product development, the freedom to conduct applied research and development means closer working relationships and exchange between university and industry academics, with correspondingly greater freedoms for the commercial researchers.

In a further education college the broader purpose of education for individual development calls for the freedom for teachers to express controversial opinions without fear of retribution.

A university dedicated to expanding our understanding of the world, where academic practice covers all kinds of research as well as teaching, can still claim the widest kind of academic freedom, to teach, research and publish in a spirit of relatively untrammelled intellectual enquiry.

If we do not pay close attention to academic freedom and its contingent justifications, we will damage what is most important for higher education. In general the narrower the academic purpose, the narrower the academic freedom. If we care about teaching, research and scholarship, and we want to respect and defend all the places where good research and teaching go on, we need to change our understanding of the academic world. The concepts of academic practice, academic freedom, academic purpose, and academic context can reunify higher education without homogenising it.

The idea of the nexus has made us focus too much on what we teach, and on how we teach, in a technical sense. The scholarship of teaching and learning has become unduly instrumental. We must pay more attention to why and where we conduct our academic practice. And we must pay more attention to how we do it in the sense not of technical proficiency but of moral proficiency – what our values are, and how we exercise our academic freedom responsibly. We need to replace the elite model of the research-teaching-scholarship nexus with a broader idea of higher education which recognises the range of academic practice and the necessity of academic freedom, conditioned by purpose and context. This means changes for everyone.

Higher education providers should be more subversive and more assertive in protecting their definition of academic practice, against the reductionist pressures of government and its agencies. For example, it is debatable whether a university needs a separate learning and teaching strategy. A university needs an academic strategy for the whole of its academic practice. Whether it needs to break this down to smaller elements such as teaching or research should be an open question.

The Higher Education Academy should rewrite its mission to reflect its primary concern for teaching as part of integrated academic practice. Subject networks and institutions are important, but within those subdivisions and beyond them the academy should try to reintegrate academic practice in all its diverse contexts. To start with, it might support a new stream of activities which explore the nature of academic freedom in teaching and the variety of forms it might take in diverse contexts, and with diverse groups of students.

SEDA need not rewrite its mission, but educational developers need to recognise the significance and variability of contexts for learning, and make more use of ideas that integrate teaching with other aspects of academic practice, rather than differentiate it. For example, induction/development programmes for new academics should not be narrowly focused on teaching, nor focus on only one institutional context.

To return to those troublesome questions:

- Why do most people say teaching is important, but think that most other people think research is more important? Because we live with reward systems which differentiate between the two instead of rewarding a balanced contribution to academic practice, fit for purpose and suited to the context.
- Why is it so hard to find effective ways to reward people for good teaching? Because we look for reward mechanisms too far removed from the department, the only place where essential tacit knowledge about teaching performance can be understood and applied.
- Why do some people who really want to be good teachers resist help from educational developers? Because some educational developers frame their efforts in an alienating structure disconnected from the realities of departmental academic practice.
- Why is research funded at less than full economic cost, thought of as 'income generation', while teaching that earns more than its full economic cost is not? Because preserving the research-teaching-scholarship nexus as the gold standard incites most institutions to do more research, inhibiting the development of broader ideas about the kind of academic practice needed in different contexts.
- Why is it so hard to find evidence that teaching and research must go together to ensure the best higher education? Because contexts vary, and academic practice varies accordingly; there is no one best way.
- And why, if we believe teaching and research must go together, do we allow hundreds of thousands of students to do HE courses in places where there is little or no research? Because we know that those students do get a good educational experience, but we cannot square that knowledge with our inadequate conception of a good higher education.

As academics we need to face the consequences of our own rigid thinking, and change it. We must remain reflective practitioners, but re-contextualise how we pay attention to teaching. We must pay more attention to the contexts in which teaching takes place, value their differences, and not unthinkingly devalue non-elite contexts. We must pay less attention to our freedom to research and publish, and more attention to how we use our academic freedom in teaching and in knowledge exchange, and whether there is enough of the right kind of freedom in all the contexts where academic work is done. We must switch research and scholarship away from research-teaching linkages and towards developing a new idea of academic freedom, calibrated for context and purpose, to take the place in our minds of the idea of the research-teaching-scholarship nexus. We must switch our teaching attention more towards the values which underpin our practice, and the way in which values, purposes and contexts interact. We need to re-imagine academic practice as a unified whole, wherever and however it takes place. Only then will we be able to re-think higher education as it should be for the 21st Century.

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SEDA Values – The Jewel in the Crown

Tony Brand, Anglia Ruskin University

Introduction

> *'Values are concerns about what ought to be. A value is a belief which need not rely upon facts or evidence, although a value position can be supported or challenged by knowledge propositions… Basic values are those which seek to monitor and maintain values within the system as a whole. These may include freedom, equity, the value of the unique individual, community, family and defence of society and social justice. An example of a values statement in education is found in the German Constitution which, in addition to general freedoms, safeguards specific freedoms in art and science, research and teaching.'*
> Le Métais (1997)

In the past I have been asked if SEDA discusses and changes its values – the simple answer is 'yes' but this is possibly more complex in regard to how the value statements arise and are confirmed within our community. The purpose of this article is to stimulate a wide debate, with the potential outcome being a revised set of values which are refreshed, shared and relevant to the broad community which forms SEDA.

Our values

I started this article with the proposition that values are about beliefs – complicated by the fact that they might be divided into several overlapping, and sometimes conflicting, sets: personal, community, professional, societal and so on. I recognise that for SEDA, acting as a professional association there is significant virtue in having a set of values. What is a great strength can also be a weakness. At inception SEDA used the title 'Values and Principles' but over time this has become truncated to values. It is my twofold contention that:

- In the current format of the wording we now have statements which are more like principles than values
- The tone of the value statements does not reflect the full community which SEDA represents *i.e.* they are very much about the academic teacher.

From as early as the 1990s the SEDA community attempted to embrace more than academics and this has been taken further through the SEDA PDF named awards. Take, for example, our recently added award 'Responding to Change in Higher Education' - 'this award has been established to accommodate professional development of all staff through engagement with the various themes and/or agendas affecting change in higher education.'

As part of the process for participants gaining a PDF named award they are required to show how their work is informed by the values. So take, for example, a university security guard completing a recognised course on diversity and inclusion within the 'Responding to Change in Higher Education' award – how would this person deal with the first SEDA Value 'An understanding of how people learn'? Many other examples, such as this, can be drawn from the community which SEDA now embraces through the PDF awards. One way round this issue is to say that participants need to re-interpret the values in their context. This rather weakens the concept that the values are about shared beliefs within a community.

Examples of value statements (in post compulsory education)

So what might be the appropriate wording for value statements? Here are some examples drawn, at random, from various sources which help to illustrate value statements.

The first set is from the now assimilated organisation FENTO (Further Education National Training Organisation). This had four statements:

> ***'Reflective practice and scholarship***
> *Teaching in FE involves working with a wide range of learners, using diverse methods of teaching and learning. Teachers are constantly assessing learners' needs and planning to meet those needs. The ability of teachers to reflect upon their practice and to employ appropriate methods, therefore, is a crucial one which any set of standards should seek to promote. Reflective practice and scholarship should also underpin the wider professional role of the teacher in managing the learning process, developing the curriculum and guiding and supporting the learner in partnership with others in the organisation and the local community.'*
>
> ***'Collegiality and collaboration***
> *Change is endemic to the sector. Any standards, therefore, should seek to promote flexibility and adaptability. The role of the FE teacher is extremely diverse and may change over time, reflecting both the developing interests of the teacher and the changing nature of the learner. Because teachers and teaching teams frequently work in partnership with external groups such as employers, parents, other members of the educational community, community groups and related agencies, they should value collegiality and collaboration to ensure the relevance and responsiveness of their learning programmes.'*
>
> ***'The centrality of learning and learner autonomy***
> *Teachers and teaching teams should value the centrality of learning and the autonomy of learners. They should seek to provide learners with the skills and abilities to work effectively on their own and promote an attitude to learning as a lifelong process rather than the short term acquisition of a set of specific skills. The development of key skills is an integral part of the promotion of autonomy.'*
>
> ***'Entitlement, equality and inclusiveness***
> *Equality of opportunity is a crucial foundation upon which good teaching, learning and assessment are based. All learners should have access to appropriate educational opportunities regardless of ethnic origin, gender, age, sexual orientation, or degree of learning disability and/or difficulty. Consequently, the values of entitlement, equality, and inclusiveness are of fundamental importance to teachers and teaching teams.'*
>
> FENTO Standards for teaching and supporting learning (1991)

This example refers to the FE sector but the term HE or (better) post compulsory could easily be substituted.

Now specifically from the HE context and to be found as special values on the Aalborg University web site:

> ***'Distinguishing values***
> *There are values that distinguish Aalborg University from other universities and which have fostered the particular organisational culture of the university. Having crystallized over the years, the values focus on:*
>
> ***Creativity***
> *Aalborg University sees it as a fundamental value to break new ground within research, education, administration, and the exchange of knowledge with the environment.*
>
> ***Openness***
> *The university considers openness to be a prerequisite for the continued realization of the university's creative and innovative potential. By implication this means receptiveness to dialogue and new ideas as well as to constructive criticism and alternative conceptions.*
>
> ***Cooperation***
> *Cooperation should always be characterized by confidence and respect. At the same time, however, it should transcend existing frontiers while searching for new forms, fields, and partners.'*
>
> Aalborg University (2008)

These special values are further amplified by an additional set which are claimed to represent research universities (see Aalborg University website).

Quo Vadis

Where to next? All I have attempted to do here is to initiate and stimulate a community discussion. I have not, for obvious reasons, proposed specific revisions to the wording here, since this must naturally arise from our community. However, I anticipate that the likely outcomes will be a transformation of the words and phrases and a reduction, through conflation, in the number of values. What needs to be established now the processes of community engagement and in a variety of modes both online and face to face.

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Responding to Change in Higher Education

Lynnette Matthews, University of Leicester

'Responding to Change in Higher Education' is an exciting new addition to the SEDA Professional Development Framework (PDF). This award recognises the shifting context of the sector and accommodates the assimilation of new ways of working. It is suitable for all higher education staff working with themes affecting change, and could include engagement with diversity, employability or issues of globalisation or internationalisation. The aim of the type of programme (suitable to be recognised for this award) is to encourage discussion of the rationales or drivers underpinning the theme or agenda under consideration. The specialist learning outcomes are generic to enable individual institutions to develop programmes to meet specific needs to enhance the student experience.

This new award is the result of liaison between SEDA and the University of Leicester. Like many other HEIs, the university is responding to initiatives like the Leitch report (2006) concerned with developing capacity for a flexible, knowledgeable and skilled workforce in a global society. Although the university is involved in a number of initiatives such as encouraging staff to play their part in reducing the university's carbon footprint and establishing overseas alliances to share knowledge and experience, findings from a quality review suggested that staff misunderstood internationalisation and its relationship with employability and sustainability (Grant and Chan, 2006). As a consequence, the university's Staff Development Centre embarked on a project funded by the university's Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Genetics (GENIE) to raise awareness of sustainable development and encourage a globalised approach to work practices.

The project has drawn on the experience and enthusiasm of personnel working in the university, many of whom belong to the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) forum. The chair of this forum, Paul Warwick, is also an active member of the East Midlands UN Regional Centre of Expertise on ESD. This project has supported a regional conference aimed at academics, researchers and managers. The event outlined the progress of ESD at national, regional

Lynnette and colleagues at the university's Support Staff Conference

and institutional level and explored how ESD might meet the needs of tomorrow's graduates.

Support staff, including administrators, technicians and operational staff, were also given the opportunity to learn about ESD during the university's Support Staff Conference. Forty participants, who attended the ESD sessions, pledged to make changes in their daily work routine to support sustainable development.

The second outcome of the project was to devise a programme for staff wishing to engage more extensively with this agenda. From experience at the Staff Development Centre, we have found that staff are more likely to undertake professional development programmes if they have national currency and are therefore portable. We also wanted the programme to offer staff the opportunity to develop appropriate skills for continued professional development such as self-evaluation and reflection. Consequently, we were keen to get support from SEDA. However, following a review of the existing awards, we felt that the award frameworks were not appropriate in this instance and so worked with SEDA to devise the 'Responding to Change in Higher Education' award. Unlike the other awards which are aimed at specific roles or functions, this new award enables all personnel to address current themes and, of course, those of the future.

The University of Leicester's 'Developing Global Approaches to Practice' is our response for this new award. This pilot programme will give staff the opportunity to explore the ESD agenda and develop their practice to accommodate more sustainable ways of working to address environmental, societal and/or economic concerns. The programme is extremely flexible and project-based. Staff will identify an area which interests them and work in small groups to devise a project which between them they will research, implement and evaluate. For example staff might wish to explore how they might make international students feel more welcome and in doing so learn more about their cultures and language. It will be up to the participants what they choose to do and they will devise their own development plan attending training events as appropriate. Advisors will be on-hand to assist participants throughout the three-month programme.

For this pilot programme, a collection of short Adobe presentations have been made by people at the university, including one of our students. These presentations are individual stories which explain why the contributors became involved in ESD and give examples of the type of work they have been involved in. These stories cover areas of ecological and environmental initiatives, accounts of contributors working with overseas organisations and institutions, as well as the exchange of knowledge and experience with people from other societies. At the end of the pilot programme, the teams will meet to disseminate their projects. It is envisaged that participants will add their stories to this library of personal accounts.

For more information about SEDA's 'Responding to Change in Higher Education' visit: http://www.seda.ac.uk/pdf/respondingtochangeinhe.htm

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'It wasn't me, guv!'

Bob Rotheram, Leeds Metropolitan University

Since early 2008 I've been leading a thriving educational development project, *Sounds Good*. It's popular with students, lecturers and managers in my university, it's been getting plenty of positive attention and – a year on – it's taking root elsewhere. Looking ahead, there is a good chance that at least some of the new practice will persist when the funding runs out. This is all very satisfying, of course. But why have things been going so well? Why does the future look rosy? Might it be something to do with me?

Let's be clear, this article wasn't my idea. I offered *Educational Developments* a fairly orthodox account of the project. Instead I was steered towards this, a piece focusing on my activities as an educational developer, especially my interactions with other lecturers and the challenges of trying to bring about change in institutions. I'm not entirely comfortable with this but, OK, let's give it a go.

What's the project?

Sounds Good: quicker, better assessment using audio feedback

Yes I'm leading it but, as with this article, it wasn't entirely my idea. The hypothesis being tested in *Sounds Good* is that if staff use digital audio to record feedback on students' work – rather than write it – they can benefit both parties:

- Staff save time because speaking is quicker than writing
- Students receive better feedback because the spoken word is a richer medium than plain text.

I have previously (Rotheram, 2007) given credit for this insight to Rust (2001) who recommended using audio to help with the burden of assessing large numbers of students. However, his suggestion was not widely adopted, perhaps partly because the technology of the time – analogue recorders and cassette tapes – was rather cumbersome. In contrast, my own preliminary experimentation with digital audio – MP3 files to give coursework feedback on a PGCHE programme – was very positive. After a little practice I was saving time and the students were enthusiastic about receiving audio feedback (Rotheram, 2007).

Sounds Good built on this experience. Funded by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), a team of about 15 teachers at Leeds Metropolitan University used digital audio to give about 460 students formative and/or summative feedback on their coursework. The second phase of the project, *Sounds Good 2,* extends the activity at Leeds Met., with the design calling for six of the original team each to mentor two colleagues new to audio feedback. In addition, I have introduced it to three other higher education institutions and, through intermediaries, I am overseeing experimentation there.

How has it been going?

Very well, on the whole. In the first phase, students overwhelmingly preferred audio rather than conventional written feedback. Staff appreciated that audio was giving students a better service and were keen to continue with it, even though only a minority had found that it saved them time. As I write this, the second phase isn't complete but the indications are again positive: students and staff like audio feedback and, with practice, some staff are getting quicker at producing and delivering it.

Others are pleased too. I have given many conference and workshop presentations about it and the idea of audio feedback is usually received positively or even enthusiastically. JISC has featured *Sounds Good* in its publicity and I've heard they think we've given excellent value for money. The project was shortlisted for a Times Higher award. My manager is delighted.

But let's not get carried away. Audio feedback isn't the magic bullet for assessment woes and it remains to be seen what happens when the funding runs out. That said, I'm hopeful that the team will continue to give audio feedback – they like it and find it useful. Also, some of their colleagues are getting interested, so they may join the club. I'm optimistic about 'embedding', but experienced enough to know it's not guaranteed.

Why has it been so successful? I'm not entirely sure. There have probably been several reasons, some external to me and some very much to do with my actions, style and personality. Let's first identify some of the factors that aren't about me.

- *It's a simple idea.* In essence, the project is straightforward: just using audio rather than the pen or word processor.
- *The focus is sharp.* Assessment feedback, rather than wider uses of the technology.
- *It benefits students and staff.* Well that's the aim anyway. Staff are busy and most will not be keen to take on extra work.
- *The technology is easy to use.* We deliberately chose recorders which produced MP3 files directly and allowed easy transmission to students.
- *The team are capable enthusiasts.* All are volunteers and most are university teacher fellows acknowledged for their energy and ability to support student learning.
- *The climate is favourable.* The University is fortunate to have a very supportive pro-vice-chancellor and a strong network of university teaching fellows.
- *Money isn't a problem.* The funding allowed us to buy good kit and make a small payment to each member of the staff team.
- *It has a catchy title.* 'Sounds Good' sounds good and has raised many a smile.

What is it about me?

It matters to some extent that I'm leading the project. Other people are better placed to assess my contribution, but these are the factors I can identify.

- *I've had the time.* My job gives me great freedom, which is an enormous privilege. So it hasn't been a problem to devote rather more time to the project than I expected.
- *I'm credible.* OK, the National Teaching Fellowship helps, but colleagues know I have long experience as a teacher and am 'a bit of a techie'.
- *I'm enthusiastic.* For proof, come to one of my presentations or chat to me about *Sounds Good*!
- *I try to say 'yes'* to invitations to speak or write about the project.
- *I'm reliable.* It's rare for me not to deliver on a promise. If I can't promise, I don't.
- *I have a perfectionist streak.* It's under control though. With my own work, I'm thorough and not easily satisfied. I used to have a reputation for 'not suffering fools gladly', but I've relaxed (and I meet fewer fools).
- *I produce good quality stuff.* Well, at least some of the time. For example, I created a simulation of a lecturer using audio to assess a piece of student coursework. It briefly demonstrates the technique and has repeatedly impressed audiences with the power of audio feedback.
- *I empathise well.* Maybe it's connected with my background in social work, but I can put myself in the shoes of the team and convey that I understand the pressures they face.
- *I'm flexible.* I have consistently tried to 'go with the flow' of what colleagues would like to do, rather than impose my requirements or expectations upon them. This has increased staff motivation but, of course, it has led to quite widely varying conditions and a collection of case studies rather than a large, standardised experiment. On balance, I think this has been for the best.
- *I write clearly.* It takes me a while, but team members have said my periodic staff briefings are very clear.
- *My style is informal.* Whether I'm writing, phoning or in a meeting, I try always to communicate with colleagues as if I am having a friendly conversation with them.

Have the demands changed?

Yes. As *Sounds Good* became *Sounds Good 2,* the project expanded, drawing in new participants in my university and in other institutions. As it has grown, so the way we operate has changed.

- *The communication chain is longer and feels less reliable.* I'm yet further removed from the action… In some instances [at Leeds Met.] the communication chain between me and students now has an extra link: me – mentor – mentee – student (and back again). There are indications that it doesn't always work perfectly and I occasionally detect a bit of 'Chinese whispers'. At this moment, I'm not confident that I have the full roster of Leeds Met. student groups who are, or will be, receiving audio feedback this semester. (Project blog)

- *I have less grasp of the detail.* I've visited all three [partner institutions], know my institutional contacts and have met quite a few of the staff intending to give audio feedback. Some of them have started to blog about their experience and information flows back and forth. Even so, I worry that I don't have the full picture and I do feel far removed from their students. (Project blog)

- *I've become the 'indirector'.* I believe [the project is] going well but, as of today, I don't really know. What I'm sure of is that other people now have far more influence over the outcomes than I do. Emphatically, I'm not the director, in the sense of being in full control, able to pull levers and make the intended actions happen immediately. So I've dubbed myself the 'indirector' of *Sounds Good 2*. 'Indirector' is, I think, a neat label for someone who is, sort of, in charge of something, but not with the expectation of control that a director may have. An indirector operates indirectly, through other people, along sometimes lengthy and rickety communication channels. An indirector can't or won't order people to do things and instead resorts to other strategies, including encouraging, facilitating and finger-crossing. Some indirectors seem to find this easy. Given my instincts for simplicity and do-it-yourself, I don't. But the new badge helps, a bit. (Project blog)

So whose fault is it?

If I'm right that we're thriving, the blame for the success must be shared. We've grown a great team and, as I've indicated, we've had lots of favourable circumstances. Not least, the timing has been right: higher education is more ready for digital audio in 2009 than it was for its clunky predecessor in 2001. But, if you insist, 'it was partly me, guv.'

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A Personal Journey of Academic Development

Richard Hill AFSEDA, Sheffield Hallam University

Looking back over the first year of a two-year secondment as a part-time academic developer, I have observed several things. First of all, I have changed my own practice as an academic lecturer. Secondly, I have seen changes in the practice of some of my academic colleagues. Thirdly, the experience has sparked my enthusiasm for institutional change. Finally, I have realised that this is very hard work. This is my story about some of the trials and tribulations when charged with the responsibility of leading change in an academic institution.

Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) received a sum of money over three years as part of the HEFCE Research Informed Teaching (RIT) initiative, the amount being inversely proportional to research income. This amounted to a reasonable pot from which to spend, and SHU chose to fund four secondees to work in their own faculties, to influence and lead change from within. As a secondee, I became the point of contact for all things RIT. Potentially I had the most interesting faculty out of the lot, Arts, Computing, Engineering and Sciences, a rich and diverse set of cultures and practices upon which to draw.

After successfully applying for the secondment I had to quickly get to grips with 'RIT'. 'A word of advice' said someone to me at a conference, 'don't define it, describe it.' At the time this appeared to be a little cynical. Now I reflect back on the comment with some empathy and better understanding. After many conversations, I decided that the title itself, 'Research-Informed Teaching', was misleading. Most of the responses from colleagues were 'we do that already', and of course superficially this is true. Very often the outputs of discipline research are presented to students. Frequently students are required to 'research a topic' and 'report back'. Only some of them experience a curriculum of enquiry. One of the conversations with the university's Head of Strategic Development, who has the institutional lead on the RIT initiative, centred around the inferred emphasis upon teaching, and no visible recognition of learning. At last, an opportunity to distinguish our approach to the initiative, I would refer to my work as the Research Informed Learning and Teaching (RILT) initiative.

This shift has proved useful in two ways. First, it has eased the communication of my work to academic staff who are passionate about the learning experience of both students and staff. Often these people are not interested in chasing research funding and shy away from writing bids and proposals. They pursue their passion quietly, and develop their practice and curriculum by a process of evolution. Secondly, it has rattled a few corners of the faculty into taking a little bit of notice. RILT is not 'just' pedagogy in the same way that research is not 'just' about income generation. It is a broader spectrum of activity that will encompass scholarly effort whether it be personal or public, private or published.

It has been interesting to see the wealth of good practice that already exists, albeit not widely proclaimed. Much of my work has been about exposing innovative practice, or at least transferring what might be 'normal' practice in one discipline to a disparate subject area. Whilst discussing the nature of research with a fine artist she said 'but exploration is the very nature of my practice. How can research and teaching be separate?' If only this were true of more disciplines. This work has been both exhilarating and frustrating. There was the enthusiasm generated by the potential of something new, set against the reality of engaging a community to make it policy. Here was the crux of the challenge: taking changes in thinking and practice forward in an inclusive way, without 'diluting' the rigour of scholarly activity.

Effective leadership of change should yield some visible results and so I faced a crucial dilemma in my role as an academic developer. How do I balance the demands of a managed institution, with a keen eye on the business case, against the need to develop sustainable improvement? How can lasting change be initiated in the complex environment of a university? For this I have turned to the work of Paul Tosey, whose 'teaching at the edge of chaos' provides a succinct representation of an educational institution. A significant portion of my time is spent advocating publicly through the various fora of meetings and committees, and more covertly in coffee bars and corridors. Much of the stealth activity has initiated real, tangible change. Established staff who are new to research have engaged with small development projects and now take more conscious steps towards their own development rather than looking for a non-existent training course to discuss during the annual appraisal. Staff who actively experiment with their own practice have promoted their work through case studies and new programmes have been validated that explicitly support RILT activities, thus embedding the change into the policies and practices of the institution.

As much as risk is perceived an essential characteristic of leadership, I have developed a new appetite for risky ventures. Enthused by the number of undergraduate research journals published in the USA, I confidently approached the planning and preparation of a similar venture. Similar projects at UK institutions gave added impetus - how risky could this be? The benefits are all highly visible, and it would provide an aspirational platform for our most talented students. Managed correctly it would also be a significant development opportunity for a student editorial board. As with most projects the technical aspects of creating an infrastructure to review, edit, publish and host student work as a journal were relatively trivial. The real work would be setting out to win hearts and minds, to promote excellence and garner participation.

Taking the plunge I told as many people as possible of my intentions. The reaction was varied, from unbridled enthusiasm through to 'it's not proper research'. I also applied for a small amount of money to ease production of the final, printed publication, and this was granted. Relatively quickly people started approaching me about the journal, wanting to get involved. Surprisingly (to me at least) other faculties enquired and offered to collaborate, and it was clear that other individuals clearly saw the benefits of such a project. Similarly, this could conceivably become sustainable from year-to-year rather than just a one-off project. I was adamant that this would not become a 'traditional' project with a working party or similar, who might debate the journal to its demise. This was a live demonstration of innovation, cooperation, collaboration and excellence of achievement that would emerge from the faculty, for the faculty, as a demonstrable enhancement of the student learning experience.

Of course not everyone shares the vision. There are those who genuinely believe that 'students can't do research' or 'it takes too long to get them [students] up to speed', and I have come to accept that this is typical of the reaction that I am guaranteed to encounter as an academic developer. But there have been a significant number of colleagues who have recognised the benefits and decided, of their own accord, to engage with an activity that they would not normally have taken part with before.

The production of a journal satisfied my desire to make a public display, not only of the RILT initiative, but also the wealth of work that our students produce and our staff support. It serves to demonstrate the rich diversity of the faculty and is evidence that change has occurred, without a need for a top down dictat. It is an example that significant change can happen from within, against many perceived odds.

Recognising that the whole secondment itself was a personal development opportunity I enrolled on the SEDA online 'Leading Educational Change' course. It is a while since I have been a student on an academic course and the distance-learning experience was enlightening to say the least, even though I regularly teach using that mode of delivery. I found the production of my first portfolio very challenging but, as a result, the process of recording and reflecting upon my own development has been quite liberating. In particular, it provided much needed support at the inevitable low points of my role. I also felt a need to understand academic leadership, and explore my role in the context of 'responsibility but no line management authority.' This notion was extremely difficult to get to grips with. Academic departments are strange beasts and the ability to 'get things done' requires unorthodox networks and obscure working relationships. How could I win over the discipline researchers?

I needed to change the culture. But how? I wanted to go beyond the project-managed 'culture change' and become more aware of the environmental conditions that enable change to emerge. Richard Seel's work on 'emergent inquiry' offered a perspective that seemed particularly relevant:

> *'…culture is the result of all the daily conversations and negotiations between the members of an organisation. They are continually agreeing (sometimes explicitly, usually tacitly) about the 'proper' way to do things and how to make meanings about the events of the world around them. If you want to change a culture you have to change all these conversations - or at least the majority of them. And changing conversations is not the focus of most change programmes, which tend to concentrate on organisational structures or reward systems or other large-scale interventions.'*

I had no desire to create upheaval, but I did want to change the conversations. Looking at the ten change conditions described by Seel (Table 1) I could see that if emergent change was to be facilitated, I would need to consider the command and control paradigms that existed in my context. As I progressively deepened my reflections, and provided new concrete experiences to work with, I discovered opportunities to make my development role discussions more effective. Recognising that conversations, if informed by a set of values, could prepare the ground, and waiting expectantly, would enable 'questions to answer themselves', I set about to cultivate my existing relationships with discipline-based research academics, and forge new links with other key players.

As a result I have been able to establish an emergent community of motivated individuals who now have a bigger stage for their risk-taking, and who can share experiences with like-minded colleagues. Some of these colleagues are even disseminating their work. Another conversation, this time with an established academic developer, went along the lines of 'but is anybody actually using it in their teaching?' The 'it' in question was John Biggs's 'Constructive Alignment'. I was especially pleased to reply that not only did I have two development projects implementing it at module level, but I also had colleagues addressing the need to make the approach more accessible so that others could easily adopt it into their own teaching.

In a world where we have to demonstrate results or impact, not only for our own motivation and sanity, but also to justify our existence, these are my measures of success: the resultant change of conversation and thus practice; increased engagement with learning from both staff and students; recognition of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL); dissemination internally through teaching, development workshops and externally via conferences and journals; and educational partnerships both in the UK and overseas.

From a 'bottom-line' perspective there are the marketing opportunities of a student journal, and 'less costly' (but very effective) staff development. Thus the institution has its successes as well, from the tangible to the intangible. Moving forward there is a clear case for finding new ways of evaluating the effects of these changes upon the institution. A lot of this activity is essentially qualitative and whilst 'performance indicators' can give the illusion of measurement, a much deeper activity must take place.

However, my acceptance of the concept of emergence has enabled me to take a much more strategic stance. As an academic developer I must demonstrate faith in my colleagues, and also let them discover their own development route. Embedded change comes from within,

Condition	Command and control paradigm	Emergent paradigm
Connectivity	Keep people in 'silos'	Build connectivity
Diversity	Ensure everyone 'salutes the flag'	Encourage diversity
Rate of information flow	Manage communication initiatives	Have conversations in corridors
Anxiety containment	Create bureaucratic processes	Acknowledge and deal with anxiety
Proportionate power	Make it clear who's in charge	Give everyone leadership opportunities
Identity maintenance	Announce new brand identity	Consult on identity change
Good boundaries	Tell people what to do	Tell people what not to do
Intentionality	Set objectives	Agree energising goals
Positive emotional space	Blame people for failures	Learn from events
Watchful anticipation	Keep busy	Wait expectantly

Table 1- Adapted from Seel

from people who are committed to a cause and believe in their own practice. Obtaining that commitment means giving them the room they need to nurture and develop their ideas, 'guiding not telling'.

One of the significant outcomes of the past twelve months has been that I am now able to consider academic development issues that either did not exist for me, or would not have been possible before. This has come about through my own development, and more importantly, my colleagues' development, with a legacy of practice that has changed for the better. As I continue to embrace emergence in academe, I see the need deepen my own understanding of the real value of academic leadership to align strategy with practice. Reflecting back I observe three things: values have informed my strategy; influence has paved the way for change; and academic leadership has maintained its momentum.

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Further Reading

Enquiry – the ACES Journal of Undergraduate Research (http://research.shu.ac.uk/aces/enquiry).

Seel, R., (2009) New Paradigm Consulting website (http://www.new-paradigm.co.uk/richardseel.htm).

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Book Review

Personal, Academic and Career Development in Higher Education: SOARing to success

Arti Kumar

Routledge, 2008

ISBN: 9780415423601

Arti Kumar's recent book takes a holistic approach to career development, providing information on theories and models as well as suggesting exercises and activities to engage students and ultimately assist them in 'SOARing to success'. SOAR stands for 'Self', 'Opportunity', 'Aspirations', and 'Results'. Kumar presents a theoretical and applied model which integrates personal, academic, and career development, and enables students to recognise the diversity of learning and personal learner development. In addition she encourages them to view learning as valuable for personal growth, along with intellectual ability and career progression.

This book would be of interest to anyone involved in implementing professional development planning, careers management skills, continued professional development and employability in higher education. 'SOARing to success' is reader friendly, and written in a style that incorporates theoretical discussion and analysis with practical suggestions of how the principles of the SOAR model can be applied and integrated into the curriculum. The use of exercises, illustrations, reflective sessions, practical activities, thought provoking discussion points and suggestions for further investigations, all assist the reader in making real life connections between theory and practice.

Part one begins by describing the SOAR model, the principles on which it is formed, the theories with which it shares values, and the assumptions and realisations of the model as a tool in learner integrated development. The author argues that central to this model is the reflective-active dynamic between the first two elements, 'Self' and 'Opportunity' (the internal self interacting with and reflecting on the external opportunities available to them). She argues that making these connections leads to realistic 'Aspirations' and effective 'Results'.

Part two deals with the 'Self', discussing concepts related to self awareness and providing exercises to facilitate students in building their own 'self-MAP' ('Motivation', 'Ability' and 'Personality'), to assist them in their navigation through life. Part three connects the 'Self' to 'Opportunity', and explains how to match the 'Self' with external requirements. Part four focuses on the 'Aspirations' in the 'SOAR process', discussing ways of enhancing decision making skills and effective planning. Part five concludes by focussing on the 'Results' of SOAR and how it can be evaluated.

This book brings together theories from a myriad of disciplines and combines theoretical arguments with practical evidence. The result is a fully comprehensive model which will allow students to take control of their career development by understanding and appreciating the complexity of the interaction between the self and the external world, and how integrating all aspects of development can enhance their life towards a more rich and colourful tapestry.

'Career' is no longer defined as one's occupation, but as one's whole life journey. This needs to be reflected in the approach to career development and how students can be assisted in their pursuit of career success.

Dr Susan Wilkinson is the Senior Research Associate at Foundation Direct (CETL), University of Portsmouth.

Changing Educational Development: whose values? whose agendas? whose future?

Report on SEDA's 13th Annual Conference, November 2008
Aston University Business School Conference Centre, Birmingham

Julie Hall**, Roehampton University**

'Excellent focus of topics related to my practice' (delegate feedback, November 2008).

Over 120 delegates attended this year's conference, many contributing to the 36 workshops spread over the two days. As is traditional, the annual conference aims to provide development for the developers and this year's theme encouraged delegates to consider their work in relation to values and change. It began with a keynote speech from Professor Liz Beaty, the former Director of Learning and Teaching at HEFCE and now the Director of Academic Practice and Strategic Partnerships at the University of Cumbria. Liz responded to the conference theme by sharing with delegates significant lessons learned during her impressive career in educational development. One delegate commented on the evaluation form:

'Liz's keynote was excellent - a really thoughtful distillation of experience and pointers for working with the current situation.'

After thanking Liz Beaty for her presentation, Liz Shrives (SEDA Co-chair) presented her with the SEDA Roll of Honour for her services to staff and educational development over many years. A tree has been planted in Cumbria by SEDA to mark this.

The keynote reminded us that we need to consider when to embrace change and when to resist it and that our values and principles are key in aiding us in this task, but that they too need to be reviewed and at times challenged. Liz Beaty also suggested that we need to be carefully observant of where we are in relation to the processes involved in shaping the momentum for educational development. We need to continually evaluate what we gain from change, what we have lost and what may need keeping. She went on to explain that good ideas can be pointless if no one is listening, that we need to choose where to put our energy and get involved in detail and strategy. She also encouraged us to use our experience of 'scaffolding learning' in the classroom to inform our practice by focusing on process - being aware of defensive reactions, looking after the front runners, the main marchers and the stragglers and helping support and structure change.

The keynote was followed by workshops spanning topics from engaging the professoriate, to the student skills agenda, to evaluating the impact of our work and reflections on values. SEDA prides itself on the interactive nature of its conferences and the workshops provided the opportunity to debate, reflect and critique practice. Discussion groups on both days allowed delegates to come together in larger

Delegates in the final plenary session – a multi-faceted weave of stories, visual representations and ideas reflecting and challenging the conference themes.

groups to share learning from the workshops and reflect on conference themes. My discussion group detected an academic maturity in the SEDA conference which, it was suggested, reflected growing confidence amongst educational developers to ask the hard questions about practice and consider a greater range of perspectives. Delegates reported that the annual conference provided a welcome opportunity to share and critique ideas and to examine the different personalities, resources and agendas that impact upon our work. One delegate commented that, she,

'welcomed the intellectual rigour applied by presenters and delegates which exceeded other conferences I've attended.'

Other delegates were particularly appreciative of opportunities provided beyond the traditional workshops, commenting:

'I especially liked the planned-for interactivity.'

'Very stimulating, especially because of scope for reflection.'

This was a new venue for the annual conference, providing improved internet access, better IT infrastructure, and food and was chosen in response to previous delegate feedback. In general, evaluations indicate that people were pleased with the move and so next year's annual conference will also be at this conference centre, on 17 and 18 November 2009. The call for proposals lasts until 27 March 2009. More information can be found at http://www.seda.ac.uk.

Julie Hall is the Head of the Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Unit at Roehampton University, and a member of SEDA's Conference and Events Committee.

Exploring the Labyrinth

Jan Sellers, University of Kent

Introduction
As part of my National Teaching Fellowship, I have been exploring use of a labyrinth to foster reflection and creativity. The Labyrinth Project now forms part of Kent's 'Creative Campus' initiative for Change Academy 2008. This article outlines my journey of discovery, and the possibilities of labyrinths as a creative resource in teaching and learning.

Labyrinth or Maze?
First things first: a labyrinth is not a maze. A maze, with many paths, is designed to confuse. A labyrinth has a single convoluted path, winding between entrance and centre; the path is usually fully visible, creating a safe space to explore. The image of the labyrinth dates back over 3,500 years and appears in many countries, cultures and faith traditions, from Iceland to Ecuador. It takes many forms: rock carvings, pottery, ancient coins, constructions of earth or stone (Saward, 2002, 2003).

I first encountered labyrinths in an article featuring Di Williams' work as Chaplain of Edinburgh University (Fox, 2007), I was intrigued and wanted to know more. From the 1990s, there has been a growing interest in the labyrinth as a resource for spiritual development, pioneered by Lauren Artress and her training organisation, Veriditas (Artress, 2006). As I visited labyrinths and labyrinth enthusiasts, the possibilities seemed to grow. The labyrinth offers a quiet, contemplative space for students and staff of all faiths and none. I saw ways of building on this, within a secular university context, to support teaching and learning in two ways: by providing a structured time and place for individual reflection; and through workshops with groups, within or across disciplines, fostering reflection and hence creativity with this extraordinary, and beautiful, resource.

Permanent labyrinth, Canterbury Campus, reproduced with the kind permission of Jim Higham, University of Kent.

First steps
In September 2007, a Labyrinth Group was set up at Kent. With NTF funds, we purchased a hand-painted canvas labyrinth and after initial training, established a programme of open walks. Our first workshop, 'Wellbeing for 2008', was led by external facilitator Jay Edge at the request of the students' union. From this point on, interest and enthusiasm gathered momentum at a whirlwind pace; I've never experienced a project where so many people said 'yes' so quickly. Four members of staff (from the counselling service and UELT) trained with Veriditas as facilitators. Meanwhile, a permanent labyrinth, the Canterbury Labyrinth, was proposed, agreed, funded and built on campus in three months, formally opening in October 2008 as the first labyrinth (to our knowledge) to be built as a teaching and learning resource across the disciplines (Sellers, 2008).

How does it work?
There is little existing research on the impact of labyrinth walking (Rhodes, 2008), but there are numerous accounts of practice (including Artress, 2006, Buchanan, 2007, Curry, 2000). The labyrinth presents the walker with metaphors of journey and exploration. The narrow path requires concentration, keeping the mind focussed on the present. To let go of the concerns of the day, to enter the labyrinth with an open mind, can be a very peaceful and quietening experience, a walking meditation, sometimes leading to unexpected insights. These reflections are from students and staff:

> *'It gave me time to think and reflect on my own journey as a whole, but also my journey as a student and through different experiences and relationships.'*

> *'I've had a rough week, not really sure about my future, and I found at first walking round I was rushing, maybe I'm in a rush to grow up?'*

> *'…a different and enlightening experience. The labyrinth unblocked*

> *my creative pathways and brought about a lot of creativity questions.'*
>
> *'A very calming experience. I felt like I could let loose and my mind wandered, but was grounded at the same time. Felt like nothing was too big to handle.'*

Labyrinth events may focus on a specific theme for exploration, as in these recent examples:

- MBA students, Cass Business School: building reflectivity in relation to academic and career journeys, and as future managers.
- Staff development, University of Kent: mindfulness course, with the labyrinth as a key component of a one-day retreat.
- SEDA Conference, Birmingham: exploring personal and professional values.
- Counselling Service, University of Kent: for graduating students to share concerns and build confidence on leaving university.
- MA Creative Writing, University of Kent: fostering student creativity and overcoming writers' block.

There is no right or wrong way to walk a labyrinth: people walk, pause, rest as they wish (and some may choose not to participate). There is a freedom in this experience, as illustrated in the quotations above. Each facilitator will work differently, but labyrinth workshops are likely to include exploration of any agreed theme; an introduction to the labyrinth and to labyrinth walking, as needed; the walk itself; and time for shared reflection. Features of the SEDA workshop included a slide-show of labyrinths in different contexts (countries, cultures, faiths); initial discussion about our values, identifying topics for further reflection; time to explore resources such as literature and a hand-held finger labyrinth; and reflections that participants chose to share. A labyrinth walk is a deeply individual, and private, experience.

What next?

At Kent, though these are still early days, the labyrinth is already proving a powerful resource to foster reflection and creativity. We are extending its use to other campuses and external events, and learning how to create temporary labyrinths with masking tape and other materials – increasing our scope (Buchanan, 2007, Curry, 2000). Our next step is to build up a body of practice, within Kent and in collaboration with colleagues elsewhere, and to explore ways in which to research the effectiveness of this initiative. We hope to hold a symposium to share experiences – and a training day for practical work with the labyrinth. I would be delighted to hear from anyone who would like to know more, do get in touch.

Useful Links

Jay Edge (http://www.journeyofthesoul.co.uk/).

Labyrinths and related resources (http://www.tlslabyrinthmarket.co.uk).

Labyrinthos (maze and labyrinth research) (http://www.labrynthos.net/f_homepage.htm).

The Labyrinth Society (http://labyrinthsociety.org).

Veriditas (http://www.veriditas.org).

World Wide Labyrinth Locator (also lists some local facilitators) (http://labyrinthlocator.com).

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Librarians and Academics – Partners in Learning and Teaching

Sue McKnight, Nottingham Trent University

Context

Students are demanding digitally enhanced learning environments to supplement traditional face-to-face teaching. In some countries, such as Australia and Canada, many students undertake entire degree courses without regularly attending a university's physical campus. These off-campus students are supported by print and multi-media resources, and virtual learning web sites. In Great Britain, because of the expectations of current and forthcoming generations of university students, online learning spaces that provide a virtual door to the university campus are becoming mainstream. These 'Net Generation' students expect and demand flexibility in their studies: alternatives to on-campus lectures; online access to lecture notes and resources; and online access to all the traditional university campus services, including library, student advice and support services.

With expectations of 24/7 access to virtual learning environments, to library catalogues and to digital resources, there is a great opportunity for academic colleagues to work with librarians to enrich the virtual learning space and thus enhance student learning opportunities. This article demonstrates the importance of forming multi-disciplinary teams, including academic discipline experts, educational and curriculum designers and librarians, to design and deliver online learning spaces and integrated services.

Student Expectations of a Virtual Learning Environment

Research undertaken at Nottingham Trent University in 2005 and 2006-2007 provided an insight into the expectations of students for an 'excellent virtual learning environment' (Enzyme International, 2005, Nottingham Trent University, 2008). In addition to flexible access to lecture notes and discussion forums, students described an online learning space that incorporated many library services and resources, including access to relevant reference resources, reading list items and full-text journal articles. They did not differentiate between service providers, as they described their interactions as 'with the university'. Their 'excellent' space had everything available in a seamless manner from a single sign-on to the virtual learning space.

As the expectation increases for students to engage in more online learning, it is important that these student perceptions are considered in the initial design phase of a virtual learning environment at the module, course and subject level. Good design requires a full understanding of what needs to be incorporated, based on how students are expected to use the learning resources and services. It should not be tacked on at the end as something that has been forgotten or neglected in the initial design phase.

Librarians making a contribution

Librarians can supply range of services and resources to academic staff to help them enhance student experiences. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it does illustrate the value of bringing a liaison or subject librarian into the learning and teaching team.

Reading Lists

The Reading List needs to be embedded in the virtual learning space and, where at all possible, linked to the library's catalogue so that students can click on an item to check its availability and loan status. Access to items on a reading list is the most valued service provided by a library.

Academic staff must make sure the reading list is appropriate: not too long or too short; identifying the textbook (if recommended); and differentiating between recommended and background reading resources. If librarians have early access to the lists they can advise on newer editions of titles, check availability and perhaps order more copies. Many libraries have formulae for how many copies of a reading list item to purchase, based on the total number of items on the reading list, the number of students likely to enrol in that programme, whether the item appears on other reading lists (and therefore will be in higher demand), and the mode of study of the potential students. Flexible attendance indicates that more copies of an item should be made available. So, timely advice on reading lists is very important if students are to have the best possible chance of accessing resources. Librarians can also ensure that high use items are made available through short loan collections so as to maximise access. Librarians also provide other services, such as current awareness services and benchmarking collection levels and usage, for instance, that help academics in compiling and reviewing reading lists.

eBooks

The potential for providing access to digital versions of textbooks and recommended reading resources is expanding rapidly as publishers make more and more resources available in an online format. Librarians can advise what eBooks are available, and these items need only be a click or so away from the embedded reading list.

The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) has a two year observatory project under way on the availability and use of e-Textbooks in the United Kingdom (www.jiscebooksproject.org). This research will provide valuable data on the reading habits of students and the usage made of eBooks. Anecdotal evidence thus far indicates that students do value 24/7 access to eBooks where the licence provides sufficient (or unlimited) simultaneous access to the same item. Online access was the highest value item identified by students, 'easy access to resources when and where I need them', in the research at Deakin University and Nottingham Trent University (McKnight and Berrington, 2008, McKnight, 2008).

Reference Resources
In the same way that reading list material can be made accessible from the module page of the virtual learning environment, so too can links to subject-specific reference databases, indexing and abstracting services, online dictionaries, encyclopaedias and handbooks. However, cooperation between the academic staff and the library is required to ensure that these resources are available and can be made accessible through the subject/module site.

Full Text Digital Journals
The proliferation of online full-text peer-reviewed journals means that there is a wealth of articles to consider for inclusion on reading lists. Where journal articles are required, liaison with the library can ensure that there are direct links to the online resource, license permitting. The aim is to provide seamless access to resources, enabling the student to work from the virtual learning environment without having to negotiate separate applications.

Depending on the copyright statements, individual articles in eJournals can be added at anytime to the virtual learning space, as new resources become available that are relevant to the course of study. Again, liaison with the subject librarian can make the inclusion of additional items easier and ensure that it is done in compliance with license provisions.

Online Tutorials for using Library Resources and Self-Help Guides
Librarians have been developing online tutorials for providing just-in-time training for library customers on using the myriad of services and resources available through the library. Increasingly, the efficacy of these tutorials is being enhanced by the qualifications of librarians who undertake post graduate courses in adult learning. The skills of librarians as teachers, in addition to their professional library qualifications, make them ideal partners with lecturers and tutors. Simply by adding links from the virtual learning space to these online tutorials provides added value for students.

Bibliographic Management Tools
Libraries can facilitate access to appropriate bibliographic management software (such as RefWorks and End Note) and provide training to students (and academic staff) on using the tools to manage references to articles and books included in essays, dissertations and theses. Advice to students on managing their information appropriately should be included in the virtual learning space, along with the training resources.

Virtual Reference Services and Library Chat Channel
Library reference services have been provided through a variety of media over the years. In-person queries at the reference desk were most common but librarians, especially in universities that provide off-campus or distance education, have been providing reference services by telephone, email, fax and post. Today, virtual reference software, such as Live Person, enables real-time chat between library staff and students to help solve information problems.

Online links to a virtual reference service are possible within the virtual learning space. Lecturers and tutors should be aware of this service so that they can encourage their students to use it.

Virtual learning environments (such as Desire2Learn, BlackBoard, Moodle) provide a multiplicity of communication tools to facilitate interactions between student and teacher, students and students and staff and staff. A 'Library Chat Channel' can be enabled, monitored by library staff, to facilitate discussion on reading resources, information queries and the like. While many discussion groups involve peer support and students respond to queries posted by fellow students, librarians can moderate the discussions and also add information when required, thus adding an additional service that cannot be provided without the online learning system.

My Library Services

All these services and resources have been described as if embedded into the virtual learning environment and/or links provided from it to the library. The catalogue link from the reading lists is an example of this. These are not personalised services but relate to the services and resources appropriate for a particular course of study.

It is possible to embed a link to the 'My Library' page from the virtual learning environment where the identification of the user is known through the sign-on information. This can provide access to services for an individual to renew items on loan, request books on loan to be reserved, receive notices about loan periods, or the availability of inter-library or inter-campus loan items.

Librarians and Academics – Partners in Learning and Teaching

The concept of librarians and academics working in partnership is not new, nor is the concept of working together to support e-learning. In 2005, SCONUL, the peak body for university librarians in the United Kingdom, held a conference with the theme 'E-learning strategy through partnerships: the art of the possible' (Reading, 2005). It covered a broad range of topics and highlighted the importance of librarians being engaged with e-learning.

Many librarians have dual qualifications in library and information science and in teaching and are equal partners in learning and teaching with their academic colleagues. Here are just a few areas where a proactive partnership can enhance the experience of students, and also support academic staff in their scholarship and research.

Subject Blogs
There are numerous examples of librarians providing access to up-to-date information on new resources and services to provide added value to the academic community. For example, see:

- University of Bath Library: Health News (http://bathhealthnews.blogspot.com)
- Cambridge University Medical Library Blog (http://cambridgemedicallibrary.blogspot.com)
- Princeton University Engineering Library Blog (http://blogs.princeton.edu/englib).

By being in close contact with library colleagues, academic staff can advise on the most important subject areas or services in which to concentrate blogging effort. They can also provide valuable feedback on the effectiveness of the blog so that the communications can be constantly improved.

Plagiarism versus Correct Citations
Academic staff are wary of the potential for plagiarism when marking assignments. The web opens up a vast quantity of information that can easily be cut-and-pasted by students into assignments. Services such as Turnitin can help detect plagiarism after the piece for assessment has been submitted. However, librarians can help teach students how to correctly cite information and so tackle the problems of using other's work in essays. By working with librarians, academic staff can reduce their own workload and students can be better informed about using intellectual property created by others, which is a very necessary skill at the postgraduate research level.

Embedding Information Skills into the Curriculum
Librarians are expert in helping students gain skills in seeking, assessing, using and managing information, which is a graduate attribute that most universities hope their students develop. The best way of achieving this is to embed information literacy training into the curriculum so that it becomes part of assessable learning activities (Lupton, 2004).

By inviting librarians into the classroom, to introduce the basics of information literacy and then to extend the level of skills and knowledge of students over the course of their study as assignments become progressively more challenging, is the most effective way of delivering this learning outcome/graduate attribute. The alternative is for librarians to offer non-compulsory training programmes in the library that may not be directly related to a piece of assessment. The number of students gaining the skills will be far fewer than if the training is conducted in the classroom, whether virtual or face-to-face.

Working with the Educational Developers and Academics

Librarians can be 'additional hands' in the work of educational development /learning and teaching support units in universities. Their proactive role in the academic community necessitates regular communication with lecturing and tutoring staff and so can be an adjunct to the services provided by specialist central units involved with curriculum design, development and support in the online environment (Agyei, 2007).

Supporting Academic Use of the Virtual Learning Environment
The training of academic staff in using the virtual learning environment is often provided by specialist learning and teaching support staff. These specialist units normally have a small staff to serve the entire academic community. By training the librarians to 'train the trainers', the resources available for providing academic staff with initial training, refresher training and training on new features of a virtual learning environment is probably more than doubled.

In the one-on-one interactions with academic staff, librarians may be able to answer a particular query about the virtual learning environment, its use, or the resources embedded in it. Alternatively, they can put academic colleagues in contact with the right specialist.

Additionally, the library information desk can provide first line support for student queries that relate to the virtual learning environment, thus freeing the educational developers to help academics to use the online environment to enhance their teaching and their students learning.

Legal Compliance: accessibility and copyright assistance
Libraries can also play a valuable role in helping raise awareness of and compliance with legal obligations, particularly over copyright and accessibility. The library's role in copyright matters can include: making intellectual property and copyright information readily available to the academic community; providing services that obtain permission for use of copyrighted resources that academics want to include in the virtual learning space; managing copyright clearances for audit purposes; digitising copyright print material for reuse and managing the administrative data required for this to be done under specific licences.

It is because librarians have been informed about legal and ethical obligations regarding managing information (in addition to copyright, they are involved with data protection, censorship and freedom of information, for example), their understanding of the need to provide accessible information resources for disabled and disadvantaged library customers helps them work with academic colleagues on raising awareness of disability discrimination legislation, especially in relation to online learning and teaching. While it is not normally the role of the library to provide assistance in accessibility compliance, librarians can refer academics to those who can assist in this important matter.

Excellence in Learning and Teaching

The aim is to help students learn. Librarians and academic staff must work together to truly enhance the academic experience of students whether it be on-campus or in the virtual learning environment. Academic staff have a variety of challenges in their working day: helping students with varying degrees of capability and dedication; mastering a blend of pedagogic styles to cater for individual learning preferences; delivering lectures and marking assignments; maintaining the currency of their discipline expertise and their course content; balancing commitments to combining teaching, scholarship and research; and supporting university administrative and community obligations.

The information world is becoming more and more complex. Many of the services and resources provided by the library may not be clearly badged as 'library provided' when access to these is provided through the virtual learning environment. The 'rich resources' do not 'just happen': they are purchased or licensed; the information is tagged to facilitate retrieval and evaluation; the variety of formats and technologies that have to be mastered is increasing, not decreasing; and the library's role is to make this access as easy as possible.

Librarians are there to help academics and students be successful. Library services are for everyone and librarians can add a great deal of value to the learning experience if they are embraced as partners by the academic community. Their skills and expertise can be harnessed to reduce some of the workload of academics and to provide important training (and assessment) in information literacy that will help students progress through their degrees. Librarians will make sure the needs of the academic community are addressed by new library services and resources.

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A liminal space about liminal spaces

Caroline Baillie, Queen's University, Canada

Ok, so we have now had our second international conference on 'Threshold Concepts'. Now we know what they are, sort of. We were delighted that 90 attendees came to Canada, from 9 countries, 47 universities and 27 disciplines to explain everything to us.

Note: I can get away with saying this in the UK as no-one would ever take me seriously. I have to be more careful in Canada where I have been told, quite literally, by my head of department 'Caroline, if you are going to be sarcastic in Canada, you need to smile while you are doing it.'

The threshold of culture is an enormous one, transitioning space, time, values and influencing ways of thinking. It was in fact one of the areas examined at the 'Threshold Concepts: from theory to practice' conference, during the summer of 2008. Dagmar Kutsar and Anita Karner were exploring the 'liminal space' (Latin 'limen' - a threshold) of societal transitions in Estonia, whilst sitting in our Integrated Learning Centre, interestingly located at the corner of Division and Union Streets in the small town of Kingston.

One of the most amazing things about the educational focus, framework, field, lens or idea of threshold concepts is that we get to enter the world from so many different disciplines. Variation theory would suggest that we are doing the right thing if we want to pass through the threshold of threshold concepts. At the conference we learnt about academic numeracy in biology (Rosanne Quinell and Rachel Thompson), personhood in philosophy (Cowart), comparative advantage in economics (Pete Davies and Jean Mangan), context driven practice in educational development (Susan Wilcox and Andy Leger), confidence to challenge in industrial design (Jane Osmond and Andrew Turner), transformational learning in education (Leslie Schartzman) and surface area to volume ratio in nanoscience (Eun-Jung Park, Greg Light, Su Swarat, Denise Drane and Tom Mason).

It's clear that we have a long way to go before we start to make sense of the insights learnt in each of these disciplines about thresholds in learning. The very challenge is at the same time the excitement, that often only the subject specialists really get the point of the study on thresholds in that domain. And even then, they struggle, because they were the ones who passed through the liminal space with no trouble when they were first learning the topic.

Alongside concepts, one of the interesting points of discussion in the threshold community at present is how the threshold concept work can be applied to broader 'ways of thinking and practising', especially when these ways of thinking fall outside the current 'common sense' views. In some previous work (Baillie and Rose, 2004, p. 20) we noted that for something to be known, it must fit within the relevant community's paradigm or thought collective. The term 'thought collective' originates with Fleck (1979, p. 99) who warns:

> *'It constrains the individual by determining 'what can be thought in no other way.' Whole eras will then be ruled by this thought constraint. Heretics who do not share this collective mode and are rated as criminals by the collective will be burned at the stake until a different mode creates a different thought style and different valuation.'*

Metaphorically of course, but I've certainly felt burned at the stake on occasion. Or perhaps that was a past life.

And when two different thought styles collide, Fleck (1979, p. 109) informs us that :

> *'The alien way of thought seems like mysticism. The questions it rejects will often be regarded as the most important ones, its problems as often unimportant or meaningless trivialities.'*

Wenger (1998, p. 175) discusses, on a related note, the potential consequences of belonging to a community of practice:

> *'Through engagement, competence can become so transparent, logically ingrained, and socially efficacious that it becomes insular: nothing else, no other viewpoint, can even register, let alone create a disturbance or a discontinuity that would spur the history of practice onward. In this way, a community of practice can become an obstacle to learning by entrapping us in its very power to sustain our identity.'*

So what both Fleck and Wenger are saying is that the established ways of thinking within a community or a group can serve as barriers or create thresholds to new and important progressive ways of thinking. We need to question, therefore, one of the key areas of threshold concept work, that of 'learning to think like a… physicist, doctor, economist etc.' What if these professionals think in a problematic way in the first place? My work on seeing engineering through the lens of social justice, instead of profit, provides a perfect example of this new line of critical reflection (Kabo and Baillie, 2008).

One of the most important challenges we face as caring educators is to avoid creating even more thresholds than are already present. We need to avoid becoming this insular group with an exclusive thought collective. A key area of the troublesome knowledge considered to be associated with threshold concepts (Perkins, 1999) is that of troublesome language, or jargon. So, what do we do? We create an area of educational theory to deal with thresholds and start to generate more jargon and more thresholds. 'No', we are told, when we start to enter this new area, 'that's not quite how you are supposed to understand liminal space'. I maintain it's just silly to imagine that there is only one way of understanding something and that that way is the one suggested by the person who came up with the idea. Facts evolve don't they? So let's focus on the liminal space for a few moments and see whether we can shed some light on this elusive concept.

Due to their transformative qualities the process of internalising a threshold concept can be seen as a transition from one state of knowing to another. This transition can be quick or drawn out over a considerable period of time depending on how troublesome a learner finds the concept in question. Meyer and Land (2003, 2006) use the terms liminality or liminal space to describe this transition. The liminal space idea has been expanded through the idea of pre-liminal, liminal and post-liminal variation (Meyer, Land and Davies, 2008) that is, variation in the ways in which students see the concept come into focus, pass through the threshold and come out the other side. An illustration of this can be seen in Figure 1. The problem comes when you, as the teacher, are the one who passed through straight as an arrow. How can you ever help the poor wiggly-lined variety of student? Or the one that rushes head first into the void - only to come to a dead stop and never exit the confused space.

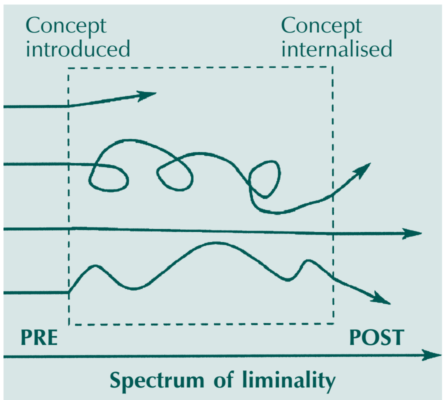

Figure 1 The liminal space (Kabo and Baillie, 2009)

We did of course have a lot of fun at the conference. We decided to explore this liminal space in some detail, by entering into one. The session involved the co-creation, in groups of 6-8, of a plasticine sculpture depicting 'liminal space'. Once the sculptures were complete, the groups swapped with another group and 'improved' their sculpture, without communicating with the first group. Discussion and small amounts of fighting followed. The session was experienced as a liminal space in which the learning object was also the liminal space. The following words were expressed about what it feels like to be in the space, and we have framed these as dimensions of variation from one to the other.

'Fear - Enlightenment; Horror - Illumination; Maze with no escape - Escape; Vulnerable - Exciting; Trying to get out - Trying to get in; Distressing - Enabling; Empty - Full; One exit - Many exits; No heart - Heart, Pessimistic - Angelic; Confusing - Structured; Blind alley - Productive cave; Unfamiliar - Familiar.'

In Figure 2 below you can see the 'before and after' of one sculpture. The presence of an angel on one side of the threshold did not please some of the pre-swap sculptors. Yet this is similar to what students experience when we mark or alter their work to the way we think it should be done.

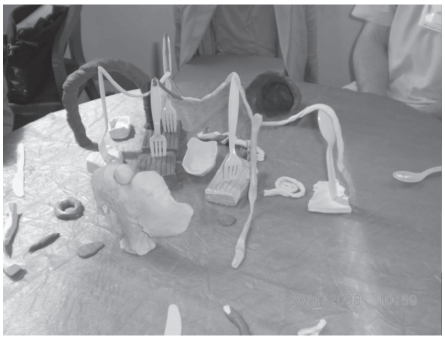

Figure 2 Before and after: liminal space

There are many analogies between this situation and the learning situation for students. Some participants were angry, some amused and some playful. Some learned about liminality and what the liminal space means in more depth. Some may have felt it was just a game and not to be taken seriously. There is no doubt that for some students, learning is about 'let me in' and for some it is more like 'let me out'. And if we understand this, and start to focus on what the liminal space looks like, in its many guises, for the students who have difficulties, we might be able to help. Only when we start to question what the threshold looks like as it comes into view; what the threshold feels like when someone is stuck inside with no perceived way out, what causes the refocusing, that allows the student to see the doorway and to track a pathway through, can we really be of any assistance. Only when we understand that there are many ways of knowing and many pathways, that students don't necessarily want to end up thinking like us, that 'learning to think like a...' should be replaced by 'learning to think', are we in a position to be a teacher. Only then can we begin to teach and to move forward through our own liminal space.

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ePioneers: Taking ownership of e-learning

A balanced account of capacity building.

Rachel Scudamore and **Elaine Arici,** University of Nottingham.

People

Do Coyle, Mike Sharples, Gordon Joyes, Tony Fisher, Elaine Arici, Matthew Nilan and Brett Bligh are the school e-learning strategy group and ePioneer mentors and Helen Frost, Richard Pemberton, Jane Evison, and Rolf Wiesemes are the ePioneer project participants.

The School of Education at the University of Nottingham is not alone in having some staff who are active with e-learning, and others who are not, or not perceived to be. Why is this so common?

Identifying the issues: a school-wide audit

By questionnaire and interview, the school investigated attitudes towards e-learning and knowledge of activity within the school. Gordon Joyes found a critical awareness with staff saying things like 'Yeah, we're aware of new learning technologies, but it doesn't always work, does it?' and 'It takes a lot of effort, maybe, to get the thing to operate, and what maybe is the value?'

As Tony Fisher identified 'We knew we'd got our innovators in the school… we knew we'd got some early adopters. What we hadn't done was, we hadn't moved e-learning into the majority phase of adoption.'

Gordon Joyes stated 'the audit and the interviews we did with the senior managers indicated there was a willingness to change. It's just that people didn't know how and didn't have the confidence'… despite there being access to all the usual university central IT support arrangements.

The aim

The school's e-learning strategy group, made up of a cross section of academics, administrative and support staff, designed the ePioneers programme to bring e-learning closer to everyday practice. The project was funded from the university's TQEF allocation, with technical support provided by existing university services and the Visual Learning Lab CETL, hosted at Nottingham.

As Matthew Nilan noted '…a lot of the strategies and policies badge e-learning as being something completely different from the learning and teaching agenda, then it seemed to us that there was a gap there that didn't quite feel right… We're partly interested in the idea of taking the 'e' off e-learning, because the technology should be a natural part of it, in the way that some technologies are a natural part of our everyday lives anyway, now.'

The ePioneers mentoring programme was set up to run over two years. In Elaine Arici's words, 'To make e-learning part of the everyday processes of the school.'

The programme

The ePioneers programme is a new approach to e-learning adoption, based on mentoring of quick gain projects, with individual and school-wide outcomes. It offers a way to move e-learning beyond early adopters and into mainstream learning and teaching practice.

The programme's flexibility arises from its emphasis on addressing the teaching and administrative issues raised by staff, and mentoring has created an environment where staff can take ownership of change.

Do Coyle was keen for academics to take ownership of how e-learning was developed in the school, 'The very people who need to be the designers of these tools, because they understand the context much better than some of the technical experts, they were the ones that needed to be in there, leading.'

As Mike Sharples explained, 'Rather than impose from the top-down that you have to use this technology in your teaching, we wanted to draw on the enthusiasms, the interests of people that we knew were starting to work with technologies, to identify them and then support them.'

The approach echoes Carlopio's (1998) emphasis on shared decision-making, common vision and collaboration in a move to establish sustainable change.

Barriers to e-learning uptake

'There's a myth that surrounds the magic of the technology and the huge amount of skill and knowledge that you need to have to make these technologies actually work.'
Do Coyle.

Why mentoring?

Encouraging and supporting staff through mentoring seemed a natural choice for the school with, as Tony Fisher put it, 'a familiarity with it in a range of contexts, not least in the context of initial teacher education and the experience of new teachers in schools.'

In Gordon Joyes' view 'it was so obvious that we were working away as individuals, typically as academics, doing our own thing on our own courses, when we could have been learning an enormous amount from each other, and working together… For a lot of people we're dealing with, at this stage, technology's been around for a while, and they're not actually incorporating it, so we know that they're going to feel - even though they're willing - we know that they're going to feel less confident at the beginning.'

Identifying appropriate mentors

The ePioneers were grouped according to their needs and interests and paired with an early adopter (mentor) with appropriate skills and expertise, forming a dyad. The mentor's role would be to provide advice, guidance and support in the use of technologies appropriate to the project. This role was initially envisaged as one of support in personal and professional transition, as identified by Klasen and Clutterbuck (2001).

Potential mentors were selected from within the school. Do Coyle describes how 'it wasn't necessarily that they were experts in that area, but they had some experience, or they themselves wanted to update themselves or upskill themselves in a particular technology.'

For Gordon Joyes, mentors 'needed to be aware of the need to help people solve the problems themselves, because they'd been through that and understood how to go through that process. So they weren't necessarily people that you would look at as being just good with the technologies because they use it. A key quality is to have empathy for where those people are at, and recognise that incorporating technologies, no matter how small a step you may think it is from where you are now, was a big hurdle, and it is a big hurdle for people who actually have maybe experienced it, and have felt - well, have found it problematic in their first attempts.'

ePioneers project: podcasting – recording conversations

TESOL lecturers Richard Pemberton and Jane Evison took up the ePioneers invitation to explore how to give students who were non-native English speakers access to informal spoken language. Their proposed project involved recording their conversations about journal articles, for students to use outside the class.

In Richard's words, *'We just started thinking about, you know, what, sort of - what would we like to do, related to our teaching? And so we came up with two ideas, and I think we were lucky that they were both approved.'*

'I think the fact of having those monthly [mentoring] meetings meant you were saying 'Okay, well what should we be talking about that's taking it a bit further'?'

'The big help [from Mike Sharples, their mentor] was in terms of setting us up with somebody who could provide the recording equipment, do any necessary editing, actually get it online.'

'The first semester we developed quite a useful resource, but it actually wasn't accessed very widely. Second year, there were some weeks within the syllabus, where one of the class activities was listening to one of the podcasts, and then there was an activity around that. In terms of them seeing us as having opinions, disagreeing with each other, that's worked, I think. In terms of them getting access to informal spoken English, and the sort of thing that we wouldn't necessarily use in class, that's been quite useful'.

Jane comments, *'I've not been in the school a very long time, so I've got to know a different group of people with something, you know, we have this thing that we share.'*

Both Richard and Jane agree that their confidence in using e-learning has grown: *'We can use some of the terminology, so we're able to liaise and discuss… we're able to talk about it and say 'We would like it to be able to do this'.'* (http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/epioneers/outcomes/podcasting/)

Launching the programme

Helen Frost noticed the invitation to join in the programme, 'They quite simply [put up posters and] sent round an email to everybody within the school, roughly outlining what they were trying to achieve. It was something quick. There was some money to outsource expertise if required. And it was a just a rapid response thing, so I went along to the initial talk, to learn a bit more and see if I was still interested.'

Identifying e-learning projects

Interested staff were invited to submit a short proposal, and as Elaine Arici noted 'we didn't want to turn anybody away, so we thought of ways of grouping projects and ideas together, and once we'd done that, we decided on mentors who could best support them, and we then had a formal launch of the projects, where all the project managers and their mentors came together.'

Approximately 50 members of staff attended the two organised launch meetings. From those staff, 19 project ideas were submitted for consideration.

As for financial support, Gordon Joyes explained that 'there wasn't an enormous amount of money going to go alongside it, just maybe a little bit to maybe buy some sandwiches for a focus group, you know, to support maybe a conference attendance. You know, so there was some money to be drawn on, but that wasn't going to be the motivator.'

In Do Coyles' view, 'often, just a small amount of support, both human support through the mentors, and also cash support through the funding, can go a long way.'

ePioneers: a quick outline

'It has helped individuals to become more knowledgeable and confident as users of e-learning approaches, and that helps the school towards its organisational goal of becoming more of an e-learning school.'
Tony Fisher.

Working with learning technologists

'It's recognising that academic culture is often about people working on their own... and they are the professionals. They understand their courses.'
Gordon Joyes

The aim of the ePioneers programme was to normalise e-learning for those who are not early adopters. Not unexpectedly then, the projects themselves were not groundbreaking in e-learning terms, although they were new areas for those involved. Typical projects included staff using WebCT, podcasting or discussion boards for the first time.

Mentoring in action

The mentor's role tended to be broad and varied with each project and participant. Mentors and mentees met approximately once a month and four common themes emerged from these interactions:

1. *Mentor as pedagogic advisor*
   For Do Coyle, 'In order to advise, one has to discuss and share. And what happened was, some genuine sharing of what issues were in a learning and teaching scenario, with specific learners, who had specific needs – they became conversations… So it wasn't that we were fixated on the technology that was being used, but rather, it shifted immediately into, 'Okay, so what do we want for our students?', 'How will this improve student learning?'.'

2. *Mentor as implementation advisor*
   Jane Evison noted how her mentor, Mike Sharples, 'would actually call Terry [technical support] at that point, you know, on speakerphone, so we could all hear and all join in… When you're dealing with technologies and a whole set of jargon that you're not familiar with, it can prevent you from asking the kind of questions you need to ask and approaching people. So I think, having Mike do that, was very, very useful.'

3. *Mentor as facilitator*
   Do Coyle described the role as 'understanding the

needs of the ePioneer group that you were working with and then, standing back and looking at what existing networks might also help and support the implementation of the individual projects.'

4. *Mentor as motivator*
   Do Coyle underlined how 'once you have a sense of value, I think that is incredibly motivating, and it happened because we were exploring the same issues together. So it was on a collaborative basis, but this whole notion of motivating colleagues by colleagues was, I think, very, very powerful.' Gordon Joyes confirms that 'part of the role I saw, was one of actually confirming with them, what they've done was actually a phenomenal step forward.'

Across these roles Mike Sharples found mentoring to be 'a cycle of coming up with ideas, seeing possibilities, trying them out, critiquing them, and then going onto the next stage.'

Do Coyle also noted the importance of having a co-ordinator to keep projects moving and to arrange the whole group meetings, 'It involved a certain amount of sensitivity, because if people really felt that it was the top-down, 'You must do...' then that would have changed the ethos of the group. On the other hand, without somebody gently reminding us that a report needs to be done, we're halfway through, how about meeting, and don't forget to check, and all those kind of reminders […] it was crucial.'

Disseminating progress

Sharing progress with other participants and with the rest of the school happened in two ways. As Elaine Arici explained, 'we set up a 'Show and Tell', where all the ePioneers set up shop downstairs in the atrium to share with the wider school exactly what they were doing with their projects, and how far they'd got... That worked out really well, because it gave them an opportunity as a group, as a community, as this widening community, to actually show what they were doing.'

The group also attempted to generate an online community, but it didn't prove suitable. In Matthew Nilan's view 'people didn't feel that was the way in which they could most openly talk about what they were doing.' Jane Evison had concerns about the permanency of blogging, 'Okay, you can edit it, but it's there for people to unpick, whereas discussing something, sharing your feelings, may be admitting more failure, or more concerns, or more - it's much better to do that face-to-face.' For Rolf Wiesemes 'there's no real dialogue, at least in my thinking, in posting messages on the web.'

Outcomes

Alongside specific project outcomes, wider themes emerged:

- staff gained confidence in identifying relevant e-learning approaches
- evaluating where technology can contribute is becoming embedded in normal practice
- the school is building its capacity to own its e-learning developments.

In terms of professional development for individuals, Rolf Wiesemes remarked that 'what was important was the whole the independence and the autonomy that I got through being involved in the ePioneers project For Tony Fisher 'it has helped individuals to become more knowledgeable and more confident as users of e-learning approaches, and that helps the school towards its organisational goal of becoming more of an e-learning school.'

Gordon Joyes noted that, 'we now have a group of people, learning technologists, as well as the mentors around the school, as well as the people who were involved in those projects who are now beginning to act as mentors. We've created a much wider network.'

References

Carlopio, J. (1998) *Implementation: making workplace innovation and technical change happen*, Australia: McGraw-Hill.

Klasen, N. and Clutterbuck, D. (2001) *Implementing Mentoring Schemes: a practical guide to successful programs*, Butterworth-Heinemann.

Through 23 video conversations, and supported by 29 documents, 11 School of Education staff offer a balanced view of e-learning adoption (http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/epioneers/).

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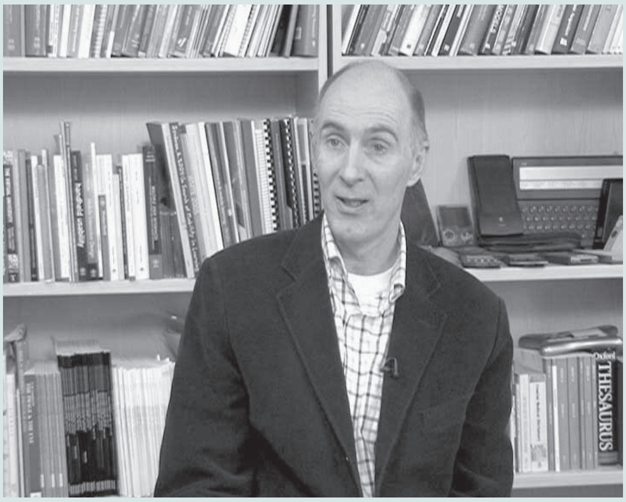
Building an online community: a critique



'I think there are a number of reasons why face-to-face contact works better than a blog…In a blog you're putting your thoughts and ideas into the void, and hoping that other people are going to take them up.'
Mike Sharples

A Reflection from the Editor

The years 2005 - 2014 have been designated 'The United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable Development' (ESD), which UNESCO defines as '*learning that enables students to':*

- *respect, value and preserve the achievements of the past*
- *appreciate the wonders and the peoples of the Earth*
- *live in a world where all people have sufficient food for a healthy and productive life*
- *assess, care for and restore the state of our planet*
- *create and enjoy a better, safer, more just world*
- *be caring citizens who exercise their rights and responsibilities locally, nationally and globally.*

UNESCO also outlines specific challenges for higher education to include:

- *improving the quality and efficiency of research*
- *bridging the gap between science and education and between traditional knowledge and education*
- *enabling students to obtain the competences needed to work together in multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural teams in participatory processes*
- *bringing the global dimension into individual learning environments.*

As we already engage in a scholarship that could contribute to achieving these aims, staff and educational developers have a unique role to play, and there is plenty of evidence within this issue of *Educational Developments*.

Rob Cuthbert asserts that teaching and research are not ends in themselves but have a higher purpose. As the separation does not help us see this purpose clearly, he argues for a reintegration that emphasises the interaction between our values, purposes and contexts. Tony Brand also proposes a re-examination of purpose and values, suggesting that over time SEDA's Values have been conflated with principles and that some are now inappropriate for the working practice of an organisation that crosses professional boundaries. Both Rob and Tony argue for a review of HE – a review that will contribute towards building a higher education system able to equip us all for life within the 21st Century. With the 'Labyrinth', Jan Sellars is respecting, valuing and preserving the achievements of the past, using a traditional knowledge and practice which is resonant with significance for us today.

The new Global Approaches to Practice Award described by Lynnette Matthews is quite clearly engaging with ESD. This award recognises the interconnected global and local context and acknowledges the need to collaborate across and beyond academic disciplines. Interestingly, Sue McKnight also emphasises multi-disciplinary collaboration for the enhancement of student learning and promoting full participation in the learning process – a key theme for ESD. Perhaps this could be a topic for a 'corridor conversation' with Richard Hill.

Richard's own 'personal journey' as an academic developer has provided him with the opportunity to explore values-based conversations as an effective mechanism for change. His approach has synergies, for me, with the 'Conversation Theory' pioneered by Gordon Pask, breaking down the barriers between the sciences, humanities and arts, enabling participative dialogue and promoting social justice. Is there a relationship here, I wonder, with Caroline Baillie's advocacy of critical reflection through the alternative lens of social justice within engineering?

Whether or not colleagues are working consciously with ESD, it is always fascinating to discover ESD-type activity. One of the ways we develop capacity is to identify practice and then build upon it. Perhaps it is now time to do this with the ESD agenda. If we are to achieve its ideals we also need to engage in a participatory process through which, as Rob Cuthbert suggests, we explore our values, purposes and contexts.

Elizabeth Grant is Principal Teaching Fellow, UCL's Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching, University College London.

Correction

In *Educational Developments* 9.4 (page 23) 'The Development of a Generic Work-Based Learning Programme' by Dr David Johnson, the final paragraph of the middle column should have read:

This paper then is a practical 'how to' guide to designing a generic work-based learning programme, setting out the issues that need to be considered. It will be for practitioners, charged with the design of new programmes, to decide the extent to which it could be adopted it in its entirety or which parts will need to be left out, given the context of their institutions and their regulatory frameworks.

Initial Considerations

The project was to produce a generic work-based, learning programme that could be contextualised according to the needs of the learner, employer, professional bodies, sector skills councils, or national occupational standards. This would avoid the need commit resources to design bespoke programmes.

Contextualisation would be achieved through a combination of:

- *the focus of the learner's study* (continued).

News from SEDA

Institutional Membership Update

SEDA is very pleased to welcome the following new institutional members thus increasing our institutional membership total to 97:

- University of Bradford
- University of Bedfordshire
- University of Brighton
- Leeds Metropolitan University
- University of Lincoln
- Liverpool Hope University
- Loughborough University

Committees Update

Fiona Campbell from Napier University and Celia Popovic from Birmingham City University have taken over from Julie Hall as Co-Chairs of SEDA's Conference and Events Committee. A big thank-you to Julie for all her hard work chairing this committee over the past three years.

New Associate Fellowship Holders

Congratulations to Tanyasha Yearwood, Giles Polglase, Tina O'Donnell, Graham Lewis, Sue Beckingham and Rosemary Cooper who have been awarded the Associate Fellowship of SEDA.

New publication

SEDA Special 24: Supporting Academic Writing Among Students and Academics
Edited by Sarah Moore. Price: £12.00

Written by a team of experts from across the sector on how to write effectively in academia.

Explores the challenges of learning how to write, when to write and how to improve both the standard and the ease of writing.

Written for both students and staff.

Includes a series of thought-provoking exercises.

Useful when creating writing programmes or informal courses at all levels of F&HE.

Download an order form from http://www.seda.ac.uk/publications.htm

Professional Development Framework (SEDA-PDF)

We are delighted to report that the *ifs* School of Finance has been recognised as a provider of SEDA-PDF.

Latest pass in the Supporting Educational Change qualification:

Annette Edwards, Centre for the Development of Staff and Academic Practice, Aberystwyth University.

Forthcoming events

SEDA Fellowship Briefing and Development Day

Monday 30 March 2009, London

SEDA Professional Development Framework - Mentoring and Recognising: an initial and continuing development day

Wednesday 29 April 2009, London

SEDA Spring Learning Teaching and Assessment Conference 2009: Underpinning Academic Practice with Research and Scholarship

Thursday 7 - Friday 8 May 2009, Thistle Hotel, Brighton

Turning a Conference Presentation into a Publication

Wednesday 10 June 2009, London

SEDA Summer School 2009: Supporting Educational Change

21 - 23 July 2009, Cumberland Lodge, Windsor Great Park

14th Annual SEDA Conference 2009: Changing Educational Development: New Ideas, New Approaches, New Contexts

17 - 18 November 2009, Aston Business School Conference Centre, Birmingham.

See http://www.seda.ac.uk for further details of all of these events.