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Turning Coffee Drinking into Key Performance Indicators: creating meaningful educational development measures

Susannah Quinsee, City University

As Director of the Learning Development Centre (LDC) at City University London since 2008, I have always been concerned about how, as a team, we can measure the impact of what we do. My interest in this is threefold:

- Wishing to evaluate the work of the team and usefulness of service for others, particularly in terms of demonstrating impact
- Exploring pathways and ideas for new developments and innovation, as well as revising existing activities that no longer matter
- Enabling others to understand what we do.

In this article, I outline some of the challenges involved in measuring educational development and outline what we have done at City University London to address this.

Why is measurement important?

Given the current economic pressures on Universities, demonstrating how we make a difference as educational developers is even more important. Central services departments are often regarded as 'overheads' that do not directly contribute to the main income generation activities of the institution. It is not merely about 'value for money' because this is extremely difficult to articulate in an educational development context, but more about how we make a difference. Sadly, there is sometimes complacency around this issue. Anecdotal arguments I have heard say that what we do as educational developers is too subtle to measure or that a measurement culture is tantamount to some kind of management control and heresy; that it is too reductionist; that it is obvious that we are necessary; that the measures are useless. Furthermore, the notion of a service culture can sit uncomfortably with our work as academic departments and could be seen as an anathema to our academic freedom. Whilst there may be some truth in these statements, if we do nothing then unsuitable measures will be imposed upon us. If we believe that what we do is important and does make a difference then we need to demonstrate how and where we add value and why we are relevant for staff.

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In my experience, educational developers are often highly value driven individuals who have made a commitment to making a difference and wish to see that difference realised in the work of others. Leading a group of staff who on the whole feel passionately about what they do and have moved into the area of educational development because they want to make a difference, it seems obvious that they should be given the opportunity to evaluate this.

Sector context

How and what to measure is of concern to many educational developers. Nationally, the Heads of Educational Development Group (HeDG) and SEDA have been discussing these very issues. Internationally, the Australian Council of Academic Development sponsored *National Teaching Quality Indicators Project (2007-2009)* explored how to recognise and reward quality teaching in HE with a view to implementing a set 'of agreed indicators and metrics in universities and across the Australian university sector' (2010). Part of this attempt to define a national set of standards was to indicate who was responsible for measuring these and the role of educational development units in both monitoring such standards and whether their work could be measured through this framework. The resulting set of eight KPIs was wide ranging and comprehensive covering areas from strategy to SoTL. Could such a method be useful for UK HEIs?

Discussions within the UK have raised a variety of concerns about this approach, particularly the focus on senior management satisfaction. Could just working to a senior management agenda lead us to become too political in the delivery of our services? Nevertheless, there was an acknowledgement of the importance of agile rhetoric in communicating with different stakeholders to demonstrate our impact. What came out strongly was an urgent need for educational developers to take the initiative as there was a concern that if we did not demonstrate capacity to measure our own impact, we ran the risk of having measures foisted upon us. That is not without problem though, as what constitutes a meaningful measure is contentious. Given that in institutions often the subtlety of the role of educational development units is not always fully appreciated, it is frequent to find discussion of measures such as accreditation, NSS scores, audit reports, student evaluations, retention, distance learning programmes and so on being lauded as appropriate methods of measuring our impact. Yet these cannot be measures of the work of educational development staff because you cannot attribute direct cause and effect. Other measures just generate the 'so what?' question; so take up of new technologies, number of National Teaching Fellows, number of HEA fellows and so on, may all be things we may think we want to measure, but why? What difference does this make? We need to work through a process of understanding how and why these measures may be useful by closing the loop between the numbers and then the impact.

David Baume (2010) has used Kirkpatrick's work on evaluation as one method of potentially assisting with the measurement of impact. Kirkpatrick's (1994) four areas for evaluation of learning are:

- Reaction - how the learners react to the learning process
- Learning - the extent to which the learners gain knowledge and skills
- Behaviour - capability to perform the learned skills while on the job
- Results - includes such items as monetary, efficiency, morale, *etc.* (Kirkpatrick, 1994)

Baume paraphrased these into the following questions:

1. Did people like it?
2. What have they learned from it?
3. Have they applied what they learned to their practice?
4. Have results improved? (Baume, 2010)

This resonated with me in terms of my own team. We spend a lot of time on questions one and two, the kind of 'happy sheet' culture. This may not be a problem, but it is not enough. We need a more systematic and deeper approach.

The City context

The LDC came into existence at City from the merger of two existing teams, with common interests, but different cultures. It performs the common functions of most central educational development units – providing academic accredited programmes, supporting academic staff in education and research, and developing innovation, particularly through the use of technology.

The creation of the new team provided the opportunity to rethink what we did and focus our minds on the measurement issue. My main driver for this has been the desire to introduce more of a measurement and evaluation culture to improve motivation and work, as well as ensuring we meet what is required by our stakeholders. As an educational development team we need to be agile and find measures that we are happy with, that we believe have meaning and that can be adeptly handled to give information to others that they can understand. And without sounding patronising, this notion of understanding and being able to communicate that value to others is very deliberate. Often we get too close to our work and are then unable to articulate clearly to staff the breadth, value and extent of our work.

We have tackled this in a number of ways over the past two years. Initially we ran a service development workshop with key staff across the institution to ascertain what shape they would like the LDC service to be, what value they saw in it for the staff and those areas of the service that needed development. This workshop was very successful. We were able to gather some significant information from stakeholders about what they would like from us in terms of offer as well as determining what they thought of as good service, and where we embodied this. The notion of the LDC as the 'emotional intelligence' of the organisation came to the fore – a friendly, approachable and supportive service that acted as a refuge and place of comfort for staff struggling with competing demands and pressured workloads.

We then commissioned a consultant to work with us on designing some KPIs. Commissioning a consultant was met with some scepticism, but although our consultant was not an expert in educational development she is an expert in branding and had worked in the HE sector. She gave us a valuable fresh perspective and brought in new ideas to our thinking. The consultant built on the work from the workshop and spent time talking to key stakeholders formally and then chatting to other staff informally. She did a very sensitive and thoughtful piece of evaluation which outlined our core 'audiences' and how we could reach them, as well as identifying the types of things we wanted to measure and why. Her work made me realise that firstly we needed to select a few measures and stick to these – the 'keep it simple' approach – and secondly that we could use a variety of methods in measuring the same thing. So we could mix and match approaches, which would give us the agility we required. This work formed the basis of a full team away day where we considered different areas that we wanted to measure and how. Key to this work was:

- The area had to be measurable, and preferably in more than one way
- It had to be something that we were used to measuring otherwise we wouldn't do it
- The measuring and recording had to fit with our vision and values
- We had to produce meaningful data
- We had to demonstrate impact.

Some of these areas were easier to address than others, for example 'what do we mean by impact?' did cause a significant amount of discussion. Additionally, there was some resistance from the team because there was concern that they would spend all their time completing hugely time-consuming spreadsheets without purpose. Others could not commit to a helpful measure or were not convinced the data would be useful. Some others had issues with the notion of us being measured as a service and found this antithetical to our role as an academic department. On a more positive note, there was a general acceptance of the notion of evaluation and continuous improvement even though some of the tactics were more problematic. At the end of the day we came up with a set of seven areas that we felt we could comfortably measure. However, we were still left with the 'so what?' question. What did any of this actually mean?

Resolving the 'so what' question

In order to address this we spent a few mornings as a team over a two month period trying to work out what was the essence of the team, how we could couch this in some clear objectives and then how would we know we were successful. What did success look like? How could we get there? And how would we know what to do to get there? These sessions were positive in refocusing the team and enabling us to think about our propensity to take on too much which could result in us clouding our communication about what we did and where we made a difference. At the end of the two months, we agreed the following objectives:

1. Recognition - collaborate with staff and students to celebrate and publicise successes
2. Expertise - demonstrate expertise through thought leadership, developing practice and/or research informed practice
3. Development opportunities - create and promote opportunities for staff to engage with new learning and teaching techniques and dialogue around their practice
4. Team - exemplify good practice by actively participating in knowledge sharing and cross-skilling within the LDC team and collaboratively contributing to the LDC environment.

What could have resulted in a rather clichéd and managerial process actually was enjoyable and fruitful, uniting the team in common thinking and ensuring that we were able to describe our work to others clearly without falling back on a couple of tried and tested activities (usually the MA in Academic Practice and our work with *Moodle,* both of which are great in themselves but don't demonstrate the breadth of what we do). It also enabled everyone to see what they gave to the team and pitch their work in relation to these broad, common purposes.

Building the *Lego* solution

However, although we had a much more sophisticated understanding of the breadth of our work, we still had a key issue that we could not codify: what were our success factors and how did we capture much of the intangible work we do? Those 'coffee conversations' for example. By 'coffee conversations' we meant those 'bread and butter' areas of educational development work where we frequently have informal and serendipitous conversations with staff that don't necessarily produce a tangible output but are vital for building trust, developing relationships and sowing the seeds of ideas to change practice. These conversations are often regarded as the raison d'être of the team and essential for us performing that emotional intelligence role, yet almost impossible to codify and measure in a meaningful manner.

This was where the consultant working with us told us of a genius idea which has truly helped us embed the culture of evaluation and measurement in our work. *Lego.* Or, to be more precise, *Lego* timesheets. The idea came from an IT developer who wanted an easy way to quantify his work on different activities (Taylor, 2008). We suddenly realised that this could be a low maintenance, easy way to measure those serendipitous meetings and 'intangibles'. By attributing a different colour to each thematic area of our work (determined in our KPIs), and a green *Lego* base to each school, we could see easily how much time we were spending in schools and on what activity. Each block represents half an hour and staff from across the team add blocks to their schools on a daily or weekly basis – whenever they can. Staff from the LDC are allocated to work with specific schools in our school liaison model. On a monthly basis, we record the results which are used as part of our evaluation activities.

The *Lego* idea has worked for the following reasons:

- It is a quick, simple and easy way of recording things that usually cannot be recorded
- It is fun – no really! People have built all sorts of shapes and there is a low-key element of competition between the staff. No-one has yet built the Eiffel Tower but we have time…
- People like doing it and can immediately see how much time they have been spending with schools and on what activities
- Staff from the schools come into the office and notice the timesheets – they prompt comment and discussion. Some schools have even been shocked at their figures, so much so, they go and work to get the sheets more populated
- It is flexible - we have changed the categories over time - and also enables meetings that cover a variety of topics to be codified easily
- It keeps evaluation and measurement in our minds as we can all see it in the office and so it is helping to change the culture into one where we appreciate the value of measuring our activity.

The downside is that is still does not immediately work on those third and fourth levels as defined by Kirkpatrick (1994) and Baume (2010), but what we have been able to do, by encouraging staff to think differently as well as engage in something that is more creative, is free their time from mechanistic measurement to get them to then capture elsewhere good case studies or stories where these conversations or activities have influenced practice. By demonstrating how much time we spend working with others, the inevitable 'so what?' question is answered as staff have more time to think through what they were actually doing in those meetings. Merely being able to capture the 'coffee conversations' has been massively beneficial and has succeeded in improving the team perception of the value of measuring impact.

But…so what? What have we done with all this information?

Our work on measurement and KPIs is continually evolving but has given us a wealth of valuable data that we have been able to repurpose in a number of different ways.

Firstly, we created quickly a '10 things about the LDC' document that gives information at our finger tips from the data we have collected. It is a snapshot of our work and attempts to get to the impact question. This has helped the team communicate clearly the range of activities we do.

Secondly, we were able to easily create a Critical Success Factors report (LDC, 2010) which comprehensively captured the range of what we do as a team. The team felt proud of the report and could clearly see the benefit of our work on KPIs. This report is available online and contains a range of data and measures and attempts to capture the 'so what?' angle.

Thirdly, we are building a set of case studies and examples – termed *vignettes* – which outline the impact of our work on practice. Now we are more focused on this activity we are more attune to possibilities. A *vignette* could be any activity that we do and in any format, but we are focusing on how we can use these in multiple ways. Examples of this are our case studies about *Moodle* adoption.

Fourthly, we have changed our services. For example, based on a more systematic evaluation, via the KPI work, we changed our researchers' programme from seminars into a much more successful full day event and we have transformed our professional development programme. We have gone for a more bespoke model, with some central activities and include built-in follow-ups and sessions with attendees to ascertain what changes they have made to their practice and why. The frequent question that we now feel more comfortable asking is

'OK but so what?' and we are more confident to answer this.

Fifthly, we are able to engage with institutional measurement initiatives on our own terms. Recently, the University undertook a zero-based review (ZBR) of all services to ascertain staffing levels and service offerings. In contributing to this activity we were able to provide data that we were comfortable with and demonstrated that we were measuring ourselves as well as being aware of our own development needs. Having a comprehensive set of metrics, agreed KPIs, and an awareness of and practice of an evaluation and measurement culture, was enormously helpful in meeting with the ZBR team to describe what we did and why.

Sixthly, we are planning a longer activity around user journeys as part of an extended user needs analysis piece of work to ascertain the real impact of what we do on a few staff members, so we can see in practice their challenges and needs and how we can better support them.

Finally, improvement in the motivation of the team and an understanding of where everyone fits has been demonstrable. In all appraisals, our four objectives were matched with appropriate objectives for that staff member and everyone had to complete an extended development plan that included how they would measure success and how they would know they were successful. Staff can see their value and their impact as well as being much more confident in representing the scope of the LDC work. We can also truly say we are evidence-based practitioners, in all senses of the phrase.

Coffee in the future?

We're still learning and constantly re-evaluating and re-assessing our measurement systems. Over the next few months we will be undergoing a strategic planning exercise as part of our new university vision which will include creating meaningful evaluations and success measures. As a team we are much more confident that we can do this successfully.

We need to marry the perhaps insular nature, or better still ensure our measuring does not become too insular, with that drive to collect examples, case stories and data. We need to continue to resist a culture that is mechanistic in terms of measurement and just measure for measurement's sake but we need to remain mindful of our obligations or requirements to provide evidence for the value of our work, in ways which are required by others but is still in line with our values. By sharing our evidence we will be able to improve the work of others as well as continue to improve our own work. We need to still trust our gut instinct since measurement data may not give us the entire picture and is only one way of supporting our work. Although we can continue to question and interrogate we can feel more motivated and confident in our work and our abilities if we know we can demonstrate that we are giving value and making a difference. None of this will make us immune from budgetary cuts and efficiency measures but will make us more agile and give us a deeper understanding of where we truly add value. And ultimately that is all any of us can hope for.

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Engaging students in shaping their curriculum

Alex Bols, National Union of Students, and **Rebecca Freeman,** Birmingham City University

Introduction

Student engagement in higher education is high on the political agenda as can be seen through the rise in student satisfaction surveys (the National Student Survey, Postgraduate Research and Taught Experience surveys, and the International Student Barometer) and the emphasis on student choice (UniStats, Key Information Sets). The introduction of tuition fees and the upcoming increase in financial contribution has meant that universities are more alert to the views of students and are keen to be seen to respond to rising consumer-traits. A greater recognition of the importance of involving students in active learning as a counter-balance to the idea of students as consumers has emerged in a number of institutions. Students are being repositioned as co-producers, researchers and partners ('Students as Producers' project at the University of Lincoln, The Reinvention Centre at the University of Warwick and Oxford Brookes University, 'Student Academic Partners' at Birmingham City University) who seek to involve students as part of a learning community.

The NUS has been working closely with the HE Academy on a HEFCE-funded project on student engagement. This project has looked at three key strands of student engagement: student feedback, student representation and students shaping their curriculum, and considered how the HE Academy and the NUS can support students, students' unions, academics and institutional managers to better engage students. The project builds on research from the *NUS/HSBC Student Experience Report* (2011) which shows an untapped well of enthusiasm amongst students for more engagement. The research asked students to identify the extent to which they felt engaged and the extent to which they wanted to be engaged. The question probed not just superficial engagement but the extent to which students wanted to be involved in shaping the 'content, curriculum and design' of their course. In the most recent report only 29% of students felt that they were currently engaged compared to the 58% of students that said they wanted to be involved.

The Student Learning and Teaching Network (SLTN) is a network of students committed to promoting active student engagement in learning and teaching. With over 200 members, the network brings together students who are actively shaping the learning and teaching at their institutions to share practice and offer support. The network has worked closely with the HE Academy and NUS to inform the student engagement project with its members providing many of the case studies and examples. Drawing on examples from the HE Academy, NUS and SLTN this article will focus on ways that students are engaged in shaping the curriculum and how they could be better supported to engage with this.

Students as active participants in learning communities

There has been a shift in student attitudes in recent years about the purpose of university with the majority now citing instrumental reasons for going to university such as 'improving the chances of getting a job' or 'improving earning potential' (NUS/HSBC, 2011). In contrast to this approach, writers such as Barnett (1994, 1997) and Brockbank and McGill (1998) have called for a focus on higher education for the development of students as critical beings able to take on an active role in society. As student fees increase it has been suggested that an instrumental approach to higher education has the potential to shift student expectations to focus more on achieving that all-important 2:1 than engaging actively in the learning and assessment process. If we are to challenge these attitudes we will need to invest in the model of students as active participants in their learning. It is more important than ever that we work to ensure that students are meaningfully involved in shaping the learning process and see the value of their engagement.

Without being involved, or having the opportunity to be involved, in the shaping of their education, the consumer model of higher education will only be exacerbated, and a service deliverer–product–consumer relationship will be encouraged. McCulloch (2009) identifies a number of reasons why the notion of students as consumers may be inadequate including:

- *'Over-emphasises one aspect of the student's role and the university's mission*
- *Suggests undue distance between the student and the educational process, thereby de-emphasising the student's role in learning*
- *Encourages passivity on the part of the student*
- *Fails to encourage deep learning*
- *Implies in the student a level of knowledge and information, and the possession of tools to use them, that are unlikely to be present*
- *Serves to de-professionalise the academic role and encourage the 'entertainment' model of teaching*
- *Compartmentalises the educational experience as 'product' rather than 'process'*
- *Reinforces individualism at the expense of the community.'* (McCulloch, 2009)

McCulloch's criticisms illustrate the importance of moving away from the idea of the 'consumer' if students are to be active and empowered within the learning process. This means challenging the notion of students as empty vessels waiting to be filled up by their teachers as described by Paulo Freire's 'banking concept':

> *'Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués, and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorise and repeat.'* (Freire, 1970)

It is through well executed engagement that students can be fully empowered and feel ownership of the learning process. The goal of higher education should be to create a shared ethos of learning whilst enabling students to understand learning in the context of their individual experience and aspirations. In order to do this, there must be recognition of what students can bring to the academic community. It is only through working together that students, their representatives, and their institutions can gain the great benefit of effective and authentic student engagement, shared ownership of the learning process, better-informed decisions and an improved learning experience.

Moving from consultation to partnership

As part of the NUS/HEA Student Engagement Project we produced a toolkit that aimed to help students and institutions to reflect on the extent to which student engagement is embedded within the institution. We used a four-stage process developed by Helen May at the HE Academy which provides a model for considering how institutions can move from the consultation approach (as seen in student surveys and module questionnaires) to more meaningful partnerships in which students are able to shape the learning experience (Figure 1). The consultation process is a rather passive one, whereby students are asked their opinions through course evaluation surveys or similar, which could be described as the 'autopsy approach to education' *i.e.* seeing what went wrong after the event.

Moving from consultation to involvement, participation and finally to partnership should be the aim of both students and institutions in order to engage students and to help them to get the most from their learning. The tool encourages institutions to consider their own practice in relation to the stages of engagement, to provide the evidence for this and to consider how they might enhance their own practice and progress through the model. It is deliberately non-prescriptive so that it allows the flexibility for different types and sizes of institutions with different cohorts of students to be able to reflect on what would work within their own scenario.

The workbook provides some examples of ways in which students could be involved in shaping their curriculum which can be used to prompt reflection on the stages of the model:

- The Psychology Department has responded to comments on course evaluation questionnaires, and discussion at the staff-student committee, by introducing a module involving second-year students in staff members' current research projects
- The institution has introduced consultation with faculty student representatives as a routine part of the validation process for new modules by including students on course validation panels
- The Product Design Department has introduced a final-year project enabling students to work with academics to develop course components on a range of specific topics around sustainability. These components will then be reviewed, with a view to incorporating them into the module the following year
- The institution has consulted with the students' union as part of its development of a comprehensive work-placement strategy, to ensure that students' concerns about work-based learning were taken into account
- The French Department has used information from course evaluation questionnaires to modify its 18th-century literature module, by increasing the amount of small-group teaching and reducing the amount of lectures
- The Faculty of Media and Communication has responded to students' concerns about the fairness of group assessment by introducing an element of peer assessment, to recognise variable team members' contributions of time and effort.

Consultation describes student engagement in which staff obtain the views of students. This could include designated time set aside in meetings, focus groups led by staff or questionnaires.

Involvement takes that next step to enable students to take a more active role in shaping learning and teaching. Activities such as collaborative workshops between students and staff in which students are involved in shaping the agenda and course evaluations based on dialogue are examples of involvement. Crucially for the level of involvement to be achieved students must be involved in shaping the discussions.

Moving beyond these stages to partnership or collaboration students take a much more strategic role in

Consultation:
Opportunities are provided for students to express individual opinions, perspectives, experiences, ideas and concerns.

Involvement:
Opportunities are provided for students as individuals to take a more active role.

Participation:
Decisions are taken by students to take part or take a more active role in a defined activity.

Partnership:
There is a collaboration between an institution/faculty/department and student, involving joint ownership and decision-making over both the process and the outcome.

Figure 1 Moving from consultation to partnership model shaping the curriculum. Students identifying projects for course development and students leading discussions and developing action plans for learning and teaching development are examples of work in which students take joint ownership of initiatives and decision making processes.

Each of these levels of engagement has repercussions in terms of its effect on the students involved. For students engaged in consultation there is some potential for students to inform the development of learning and teaching but this is largely dependent on the way that staff utilise the information gathered. This can lead to tokenistic involvement of students which is often the cause of 'engagement fatigue'. A commitment to involvement and participation is likely to result in a curriculum which is not framed exclusively by staff and which has much clearer links to student agendas. Students being engaged as partners results in greater equality between staff and learners, and learning and teaching is able to develop through collaborative activity, enabling students to feel a greater ownership of the curriculum.

The student engagement toolkit includes a card-sort exercise designed by the University of Exeter's 'Student as Change Agents' project which acts as a starting point for exploring values around student engagement in institutions. The cards feature a series of statements about ways that students might be engaged which participants work through and sort based on the level to which they agree with each statement, providing an approach for institutions to reflect on the differing attitudes and perceptions. The toolkit also includes a number of case studies which describe the ways that institutions have engaged students. All the materials can be downloaded from the student engagement online hub: (**http://tinyurl.com/33e48ch**).

A case study example of students engaged as partners in shaping the curriculum

Over the past couple of years the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT) at Birmingham City University has developed the Student Academic Partner (SAP) scheme in order to provide students with a significant opportunity to shape learning and teaching at the University. The development of the scheme was prompted by the desire for culture change to enable the development of new, more collaborative forms of engagement between students and staff at the institution.

The scheme offers an opportunity for paid employment for students (up to 125 hours of work) to enable students to work in equal partnership with faculty staff to strengthen the learning and teaching development of the University. Students and staff are asked to identify educational development projects in which a student will play an active role. This provides students with the opportunity to guide the development of projects in an academic employment setting in a paid post at the University.

Following the success of the scheme last year, the scheme currently funds 50 projects across the University in all faculties and central services. The majority of projects are initiated by students whilst other projects are generated by staff based on student feedback and consultation. One of the unique benefits of the scheme is that it enables meaningful, student-led change to occur. Students and staff are empowered to make the changes that really make a difference in their own context.

Example projects in 2011 include:

- The introduction and management of a live project in the School of Architecture in which students are engaged in designing and building a bridge to develop their practical experience outside the studio environment
- 'Multi-agency working in schools', a project run by PGCE Drama students who use drama to engage fellow PGCE students with the Every Child Matters agenda
- *Leaving Prison Behind* – a series of seminars for BA Criminology students featuring speakers who have experienced going to prison and putting their lives back together again following release
- Media Employability 2.0 – a project developing resources for Media and Communication students giving guidance on the use of Web2.0 resources such as *twitter* and *facebook* for industry networking
- The development and evaluation of laboratory practical sessions to support bioscience teaching in the Nursing curricula.

For the Student Academic Partners and other students who engage in associated work, these projects provide tangible ways in which they are able to enhance the curricula to improve their experience on the course. The scheme has been evaluated throughout the two year process and has identified a number of intended and unintended outcomes for students, staff and the institution. Students have reported feeling empowered to make a difference to the experience of their peers and to conduct work in the areas that mattered to them. Partnership and dialogue with staff gave many student partners a greater insight and understanding of provision at the University and many students reported a sense of autonomy which led to greater confidence about their work and learning. One student remarked:

> *'I've really enjoyed working with my staff partner, I mean, it's a partnership but at the same time there is that independence. We will have a list of objectives and we will discuss how we are going to achieve those objectives. We then delegate tasks to each other and then bring it all together. I like the mix of independence and team working.'* (SAP, Academic Skills Centre)

Staff partners also valued the opportunity to work on a more equal level with students. The scheme provided staff partners with an opportunity to engage in the development of provision since by working in partnership with students they increased their capacity to undertake work in a particular area. Significantly many staff partners were inspired and motivated by the opportunity to work with students with a passion for learning and teaching. Working in a reciprocal way with students provided an avenue for the development of shared enthusiasms to develop around learning:

> *'I wanted it to be her piece of work and me just to be there as a support mechanism really so… have I gained anything? It's just her enthusiasm; it's been like a breath of fresh air so that's been quite uplifting for me really.'*
> (Staff Partner, Health)

We evaluated the perceived impact of the scheme on the wider institution with the students and staff involved. The scheme was seen as valuable as it sends the message to all at the institution that the University recognises the value which students bring to the organisation and builds a greater sense of community across faculties. SAP was seen to promote ownership of learning and teaching development at a local level and provides a real opportunity for timely, creative, student-owned change.

At a time in higher education in which there is an emphasis on students as passive consumers, the SAP scheme empowers the students and staff at the centre of the learning experience to take ownership of programme enhancement. Students and staff have developed transformative relationships which have changed the way that they see their role within the University.

Conclusions

Student engagement means recognising the value that students can bring to the curriculum. Case studies such as SAP at Birmingham City University show how positive opportunities for partnership between students, staff and the institution can lead to tangible benefits for the community of the university. However, student engagement is not straightforward. For meaningful engagement to take place institutions and staff must make a genuine commitment to student involvement. Universities seeking to engage students must be willing to provide students with access to areas of higher education which have previously been shaped behind closed doors.

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Transitions in action? Exploring vocational learner progression into and out of higher education

Wayne Clark, University of Westminster

Introduction

The progression of vocational learners into, through and out of university has become an increasingly significant issue in the emerging higher education landscape. The new Office for Fair Access Agreement framework has forced universities to push non-traditional learner provision to the forefront of their strategic planning, whilst changes to post-compulsory vocational qualifications advocated in the Wolf Report are generating increased pressure on the sector to improve progression opportunities for learners who have not travelled through the traditional A-level route. Yet tuition fee increases from 2011-12 and increased pressure on universities to improve graduate employment destinations may have a profound impact on the extent to which universities are able, or indeed willing, to meet these challenges.

Although a great deal of effort has been invested at the national level in supporting level three to four progression through the work of Lifelong Learning Networks and other adult learning bodies, the transition to life at university remains a particularly challenging experience for learners from non-traditional educational backgrounds. There is a future role for educational developers in advising lecturers, course tutors and even admissions or marketing staff on how to meet the changing needs of students from an increasingly diverse range of educational and employment backgrounds. However, relatively little is known about the actual educational expectations, motivations and aspirations of these learners. The student voice has remained largely absent from debates over the extent to which higher education can enhance 'lifelong learning' in the UK (Schuller and Watson 2009), and our understandings of the impact of higher education on students from non-traditional backgrounds are consequently often too abstract or theoretical.

Researching educational transitions

This article reflects on the implications of 'FE to HE Transitions', a qualitative research project exploring the experiences of learners making the transition to degree level study from non-traditional or vocational qualification entry routes. Funded by Linking London Lifelong Learning Network (**http://www.linkinglondon.ac.uk**), the research also looked beyond the students' university experiences by examining how a group of graduates from vocational backgrounds have moved into, and in some cases returned to, the graduate labour market.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with non A-level students from a further education college in London considering applying to university (including those studying for Access to HE, BTEC and HNC qualifications). Staff responsible for delivering Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) at the same college were also interviewed. Finally, interviews were carried out with students and graduates at the University of Westminster who had entered via non A-level routes, including students undertaking a degree as part of their continuing professional development and mature students who had returned to study.

The vocational learner landscape is complex. Students can include those in employment who want to up-skill or acquire recognised professional qualifications, mature students looking to return to study, students with incomplete higher education qualifications, or, more commonly, college leavers who have taken one of the many alternative qualification routes to applying to university. This article is not a technical discussion of vocational qualification routes into university but seeks to raise awareness of how these different types of learners experience the transition across higher education is crucial to the development of responsive forms of educational development. In this article, I will set out what I consider to be the implications of the student testimony for educational developers interested in working with the further and higher education sectors to improve progression opportunities.

Pre-entry perspectives

For the further education students, the opportunity to progress to university was, in the words of one student, about wanting to give 'something back to the society and be a positive role model'. The potential for personal development and taking on leadership roles in the future was very important to these students: 'I am going to university to be empowered'. These aspirations were linked to the development of employability skills, often in preparation for a specific career, but there was also a deeper sense of wanting to develop a citizenship-style experience by progressing to university. The assumption that students in an increasingly marketed mass higher education system are motivated exclusively by graduate employment prospects, or 'getting a job', was not the case in this example.

The IAG staff we interviewed at the college felt that there are relatively low levels of knowledge about university amongst their non A-level students. They also identified weak forward planning, with students seen as reactive rather than proactive in seeking out advice. Yet the students themselves were keen to receive more information about university life and to hear directly from university staff: 'come and talk to us, sell yourselves'. Applying to university was generally perceived as confusing.

Role models were highlighted by both staff and students as a genuine asset in improving vocational student aspirations towards higher education. These findings are particularly important in view of the fact that non A-level students often view themselves in a negative way according to the IAG practitioners:

> *'they're already under the feeling that they are second class…in fact some of them feel that they can't go on to university.'*

Clearly, there is still significant work to be done by universities in reaching into colleges and other educational bodies delivering vocational education or training. Educational developers can play a role in encouraging universities and colleges to produce emblematic case studies of successful non-traditional students in higher education. This material would be valuable for marketing purposes and as a source of encouragement to vocational entrants to university. An example is the fe2he website launched in support of the 'FE to HE Transitions' project (**http://www.westminster.ac.uk/fe2he**).

Studying at university: a step up?

For those students who had made the transition to higher education from level three via vocational qualifications, studying at university was initially experienced as a severe culture shock. Interviewees described university life as 'demanding' and 'intense':

> *'I remember my first lecture when the lecturer was going through what the requirements of the module were and what had to produce, and I was doubtful that I would be able to do it.'*

Learning styles were experienced as more 'difficult' than further education, with independent learning being seen as particularly challenging:

> *'It is the transition from being spoon fed to having to do your own research and self motivate yourself.'*

The amount of work was also raised as problematic:

> *'the workload was immense…there was a lot of work all the time.'*

For those students we interviewed who were undertaking a degree as part of their continuing professional development, the work/life balance was especially problematic.

Assessment was raised by a number of respondents as a particularly difficult aspect of studying at university. Degree level work was described as 'more formal' and 'much stricter' than college-level assessment. Small seminar work was more familiar to non-traditional entrants, with large scale lectures being experienced as overwhelming in many cases. One to one contact was seen as a more productive form of delivery. The respondents also felt that there was much less contact with teaching staff at university, an issue of concern given that strong personal relationships with staff are generally seen as crucial to aiding retention and enhancing student belonging. A number of the students recalled other vocational entrants on their courses withdrawing from university in the first year of a degree because they 'couldn't cope'.

The research highlights a disjuncture in learning styles between further and higher education, and this was generally experienced by vocational learners as problematic when attempting to make the transition into higher education. Educational developers can promote targeted level four support to non-traditional entrants. Innovative schemes which can support learners in adjusting to an unfamiliar learning environment can be particularly useful in this respect.

Learning and identity

When asked about their sense of identity as learners, the current university students echoed the comments of the college IAG staff by demarcating themselves from traditional university entrants:

> *'It is so difficult when you come from a route that is not A-levels because **they** know what they are doing.'*

Another student commented:

> *'…you can tell they did A-levels because they seem brighter, they seem more into the game.'*

Another observed:

> *'There is still a stigma attached to people who are doing the vocational qualification route…in my opinion they are not seen as elite as A-level students so I think there is a difference there.'*

There was a general perception that A-level entrants were better equipped to study at university.

The students referred to a need to work harder than A-level entrants in response to the difference in learning styles between further and higher education. This discourse of self-reliance was closely entwined with the feeling of making progress and gaining confidence:

> *'It gave me a lot of confidence, being able to see the finished article and knowing that I produced it and had given it my best shot. That gave me a lot of satisfaction.'*

The interviews showed just how far some vocational learners have travelled when they successfully graduate from higher education into the labour market or postgraduate study. In an era where statistical measures of graduate employment destinations have become the predominant indicator of graduate success via the 'Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education' survey (**http://www.hesa.ac.uk/**), it is important that educational developers do not lose sight of the personal impact of progressing to university:

> *'When I got an email on the system to say that I'd been accepted on the course, I never shouted as loud in my life…because I always thought that it was for very brainy people. It's not a case of you being academic. It's about applying yourself to the subject you've actually chosen. And if you apply yourself then you can get through it. So to me, it's a major achievement to come to university.'*

Nonetheless, the research has provided evidence of stratification between learners, based on entry routes and prior educational experience. The implications of this for educational developers involved in learning and teaching are complex, particularly in relation to retention and progression. Enhanced forms of academic tutoring or learning support may offer opportunities alongside the curriculum for vocational learners to develop academic skills aligned with established forms of degree level learning. However, there is a much deeper cultural level at which higher education needs to become more flexible in responding to diversity in the learning styles of entrants.

Using information, advice and guidance

The majority of the students we interviewed in higher education said that they were aware of the IAG services offered at university. Interestingly, however, they did not tend to see themselves as potential users of such support, and preferred to draw upon their own resources rather than make use of support services. As one graduate put it, student support 'wasn't really relevant to me' whilst another remarked that 'I didn't need to look for it.'

Again, the research found that vocational entrants to university generally identified themselves as learners who preferred to rely on 'working hard' and 'being committed'. Drawing upon personal resources in this way, rather than using support services, was generally seen as desirable, and indeed necessary, to be a successful non-traditional entrant in the university environment. Accessing 'support' services seemed to be perceived as a sign of weakness. Undoubtedly, this reluctance amongst vocational learners to engage with support services is a challenge for IAG providers and for educational developers working with careers services, particularly given that some of these students may well be some of those most in need of support.

Student belonging, in the sense that educational developers might normally understand it, was similarly not generally seen as desirable by the interviewees. As one student put it:

> *'I don't have any social life. I just go to work, go to uni and then go back home.'*

Another remarked that:

> *'I see people I know by their face but I don't really talk to them that much. In terms of my social life, it's just my private friends from different places rather than university.'*

Generally, vocational entrants, particularly mature students and students undertaking continuing professional development, adopted a distinctly 'individualised' approach to higher education.

On the other hand, vocational entrants seem to respond to targeted stand alone schemes designed to support student development outside the curriculum and alongside existing identifiable services. Initiatives based on one to one modes of delivery seem particularly successful. For example, at the Career Development Centre at the University of Westminster we have recently launched a pilot skills award at levels four and five based on flexible one to one career coaching and student participation in employability-related events. Preliminary evaluation indicates that the scheme is engendering high levels of efficacy particularly amongst vocational entrants who respond positively to the flexible nature of the scheme:

> *'It's very helpful because you're used to having everything structured for you...that would have put me off…because I want something which is more easy to fit around what I do study wise and family wise and everything else. And it helps you to actually be independent…it's you being more proactive because you want the award.'*

The graduate perspective

Turning to those non-traditional learners who had successfully progressed out of university, there was much more of a focus on skills development and employability when they reflected on their higher education experiences. Generally, following the vocational learner route via university was seen to have prepared them well for the labour market. For some, the course had been linked to a specific professional development route, whilst for others higher education had opened up a number of new potential career directions. As educational developers, there may also be scope for us to be prepared to learn more from these students themselves, especially in the case of those adult learners who bring substantial work and life experience with them to university.

Interviewees referred to developing confidence in relation to their skills and gaining an advantage in the job market. The sense of achievement was again tangible for those vocational learners who had made the transition to the labour market:

> *'I felt that I learnt so much and felt confident to go and apply my skills and knowledge in the workplace.'*

It is clear from the testimony of these graduates that their progression is deeply inscribed into the personal lives and their self-identity as active learners. However, the graduate facet of vocational learner progression remains under researched. Whilst Lifelong Learning Networks have focused on level three to four progression, more attention needs to be given to routes out of university for those following non-traditional routes through post-compulsory education.

Looking forward: implications

The 'FE to HE Transitions' project shows that higher education still has the potential to raise aspirations and achievement amongst those socio-economic groups underrepresented in post-compulsory education. The personal accounts collected from the learners themselves bring these stories of educational and career progression to life. Being able to contribute to educational development which supports the progression of learners from underrepresented groups continues to motivate me as a practitioner to work in the university sector.

Take this one step further, and the research suggests that successful post-compulsory educational progression is not just about the supply of economic and workforce development. From a broader perspective, the research raises the issue of the thorny relationship between education, citizenship and social justice (Fryer 2010). This research has shown that vocational learner progression taps into more than just a desire to 'learn to earn'. It is crucial that this facet of learner progression is not lost as higher education undergoes fundamental change over the next few years.

Nonetheless, 'FE to HE Transitions' has shown that existing models of higher education undergraduate provision are not always conducive to supporting vocational learner progression. Despite national efforts to develop a wider range of learning opportunities for a more diverse range of learners via Widening Participation programmes, the undergraduate degree-based system still prioritises young, full-time, first-time students. This is not just a pedagogical issue. Equally, efforts to 'raise aspiration' or 'broaden access' to level four study amongst socially disadvantaged groups can only go so far. Arguably more important is establishing mechanisms capable of supporting a genuinely effective ladder of progression into and out of higher education. It could also be argued that more work needs to be done at the further education level to prepare students for entry to higher education through study skills development. These require strategic buy-in at the senior management level in higher education. Educational developers can grasp the nettle by encouraging universities to develop more accessible and flexible forms of vocational progression. Exploring these issues from the learner perspective in this article is just a first step in this challenging journey.

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What about dialogue? An alternative assessment mechanism for professional learning

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Introduction

This article reflects on the use of dialogue as a tool for assessment in learning and teaching programmes. It has been widely used at the University of Central Lancashire since 2000 for assignments within the SEDA-recognised PG Certificate in Learning and Teaching in HE, and this use has expanded considerably as programmes have grown at UCLan. It is now being used within a range of professional learning modules on the Masters in Education (Professional Practice), and has been adopted for the assessment of professional learning within the HEA-accredited Continuing Professional Development (CPD) framework. Dialogue as an assessment tool for reflective professional learning now forms the focus for an ESCalate-funded research project involving four UK institutions.

The article will introduce examples of how dialogue is being used, provide a brief introduction to some of the scholarly underpinning to its use and invite readers to consider its value for assessing reflection and professional learning within the context of SEDA PDF recognised programmes.

A short exploration of scholarly underpinnings

Dialogue plays an important role in the process of learning and meaning making (Vygotsky, 1978). It is the tool for communication by which messages sent are received as intended or explored further so that understanding (hopefully) ensues (Dimbleby and Burton, 1998). Dialogue is viewed as important for the construction of meaning and identity within 'learning communities' (Wenger, 1998), and is widely and effectively used to support critical reflection on practice (Brookfield 1995; Brockbank and McGill 2007). It allows professional or adult learners to share understanding and construct a culturally situated knowledge base.

Within assessment, dialogue is seen as valuable because it enables the deconstruction and reconstruction of understanding and helps make criteria and learning outcomes meaningful to the learners. It is therefore recommended for engaging students in understanding the process and task associated with assessment and what is important and required of them (O'Donovan *et al.,* 2004; Bryan and Clegg, 2006; Boud and Falchikov, 2007).

In professional learning and development, dialogue makes a considerable contribution on two levels, for both organisational learning and in practice learning. It is central to mentoring and coaching techniques, counselling (Brockbank and McGill 2006), and has been developed usefully as a reflective and organisational learning tool by Pedler (1996), Laurillard (1999), and others. In organisational contexts, the value of dialogue for supporting experiential learning and change is well established (Cunnliffe and Easterby-Smith 2004; Chivers 2003), and in HE organisations it is recognised for its function in promoting and supporting disciplinary knowledge formation and cultural development (Becher and Trowler 2001).

In practice, dialogue is widely applied in teaching for the purpose of helping teachers learn from peer observed mentoring and review, in health it is often used to engage the learner's conscious competence in performance of tasks and interventions. It is effectively used for the support of reflection on placements and experiential learning. Kahn *et al.* in the HEA sponsored project (2006) highlighted this value of dialogic process. They found dialogue contributed significantly to reflective practice in postgraduate certificates of teaching and learning in HE as evidenced in a review of the practitioner literature: the role of the peer in supporting reflection on practice, providing invaluable alternative perspectives and insights to the learner, for example. A case study of dialogue for assessing teaching and learning was presented within *Educational Developments,* 6.2 by Stevenson (2005). This article takes the story further.

Using dialogue: a series of examples from practice

When we redeveloped our PG Certificate in Learning and Teaching in 2000, we moved away from portfolios to small, practice-focused assignments. This was a deliberate choice because we had struggled for many years with completion rates using portfolios. Most of these new assessment tasks were written, however, and when challenged by Sally Brown to do something different, we identified a 'critical discussion' as an alternative way of assessing participants' reflection on their learning and development for the final assignment in the 20 credit module 'The HE Teaching Toolkit', through which participants gain the SEDA award in Supporting Learning.

The critical discussion involves two participants and is observed by a member of the course team, who also marks the discussion pass/refer against module learning outcomes. The two participants engage in a dialogic exchange, exploring and reflecting upon the impact of their learning for themselves and the learning of their students, and they are encouraged to consider how they have developed and where they wish to further develop their practice. Some have a genuine conversation; others share a question/answer approach; some take turns in covering the topics. As a general rule however the stilted beginning will mutate into an engaging sharing and exploration of their teaching and learning practice. The observing course team member listens, makes notes and towards the end of 20 minutes may ask direct questions where he/she feels that learning outcomes have not been met or more detail is required. This means the assessment when complete can be passed and oral feedback is given immediately summarising key points for the participants, after which the notes and written comments are photocopied and also given to participants. The dialogue is digitally recorded for moderation purposes. Participants find the experience reassuring, energising and extremely positive. They love the immediacy of it: it takes around an hour to complete, and participants walk away knowing they have passed.

Two sample comments on the process of the critical discussion by Toolkit graduates sum up participants' general feelings about the value of it:

> *'Enjoyed the critical discussion. It was a way of discussing teaching issues that I hadn't been able to do in any other forum in my own school.'*

> *'Really enjoyed it, great way to share experiences; provided a good vehicle to really insightfully examine my own teaching practice about whether it was appropriate to students' needs. For me, it was far more appropriate than a written assignment'*

As we gained confidence with this tool, our first expansion of its use was into the PG Certificate in Learning and Teaching (LTHE), and also the PG Certificate in Research Student Supervision (RSS). Both of these are SEDA recognised and HEA-accredited. We adopted critical discussions on the PG Certificates in several ways. We incorporated online discussion around three topics into the core teaching, learning and assessment module (20 credits, level seven). The topics address assessment, feedback and diversity. After completing the discussions, participants are offered a choice either to write a reflective detailed assignment exploring their own practice for one of these areas using the on-line discussion as a wider reflective framework, or to do a presentation, or to have a critical discussion. For the latter two options, participants accompany the oral performance with an annotated bibliography providing a scholarly and academic context for the assignment. Since adopting this approach we have observed a fairly even division into the three forms of assessment. As with the Toolkit, the procedure involves digitally recording the assignment, but in this case we use two observers. Participants walk away knowing they have provisionally passed the oral assignment. Feedback is given in written format amalgamating the comments from both assessor-observers and a review of the annotated bibliography.

On the PG Certificate RSS, the critical discussion forms the first part of a larger reflective assignment. Two participants undertake a reflective exploration of the supervisory practice following the established model from the Toolkit, but they then write up the reflection as a formal critique of supervisory practices. The dialogue stage provides a reflective stepping stone that supports the individual's more detailed critical reflection on his/her own and the institutional processes for PG supervision. The dialogue is observed by the course leader and formative feedback and comments provided prior to completion of the written assignment.

Finally, in the MEd programme dialogue provides an oral complement to a second written assignment on several modules. It is used as part of the assessment for the 20 credit professional learning module which focuses on participants' identification of professional learning goals and a critical reflection on their achievement. This is accompanied by a learning agreement and final reflective assignment. A second module uses paired oral discussion as a formative interim assignment to support reflection and progress on curriculum design. The programme team has developed confidence in the use of discussion in this way, adopting paired and even group discussions at times across the programme. In all cases, recording and dual marking ensures quality assurance and moderation.

Adapting professional dialogue for CPD assessment

The use of dialogue for the CPD framework was an easy decision to make with this experiential background. We had accredited formal awards with a variety of assessment but in developing the wider CPD framework for UK Professional Standards Framework (PSF), we wrestled with how to assess the professional learning and achievement of experienced HE professionals seeking accreditation for UK PSF. We did not want to rely on e-portfolios or written submissions because that too closely mirrored the direct application route used by the HEA. We wanted something that was celebratory and supportive, formative and probing, and primarily peer-led as well as offering potential for embedding and sharing practice. Given our experience of discussion, a dialogic tool appeared appropriate. We adopted a formal model based on Brockbank and McGill (2007) and Boud and Falchikov (2007). Both sources apply a mentoring/coaching model which scaffolds learning and meaning-making between mentor and mentee, then involves a gradual phasing out of support, culminating in an assessment. Brockbank and McGill outline several preconditions to the successful dialogic process ensuring a collaborative approach emphasising process-oriented, active, peer-supported, reflective learning:

- *'Ascertain a reflective dialogue has taken place (ideally with others)*
- *Establish evidence of learner's participation in dialogue*

- *Identify evidence of developmental process over time, regardless of the start/end point*

- *Ascertain evidence that process review has taken place, enabling students to take away understanding of the learning process and replicate it elsewhere.'* (Brockbank and McGill, 2007: 194)

Boud and Falchikov (2007), on the other hand, suggest a model of cognitive apprenticeship as a viable, appropriate method of structuring support for professional learning in HE. Their model focuses on dialogue over an indefinite period in which an apprenticeship learning model is applied. This involves a structured process of 'modelling, scaffolding, fading and coaching' (Collins *et al*. 1991: 2; cited in Boud and Falchikov, 2007: 130). Coaching forms a thread that runs throughout. The meta-cognitive skills and knowledge are developed in partnership with the experienced 'other' who initially models behaviours, scaffolds professional learning using reflective processes, encourages interrogation and engagement with self assessment and then gradually fades out as 'expert'.

Our model for the 'professional dialogue' involves a mentoring relationship over a minimum of three meetings in which professional activity, values and knowledge are introduced and explored, using evidence from practice. Meetings are recording briefly by mentor and participant, with the participant determining the end point at which a recorded professional dialogue takes place. This final stage involves a second assessor, the mentor and participant. The outcome should be a 'done deal' because of the preceding discursive process and support, and the fact that it is a dialogue in which further probing and clarification can occur. The mentor is familiar with the participant's subject and context as well as having an understanding and commitment to UK PSF through his/her own background and qualification; the second assessor comes from outside the subject and currently brings a generic teaching and learning perspective within the assessment. We have found in comparing reflections on judgement that this different background generates rigour by providing a dual perspective regarding the content of the professional dialogue. What we also value is the opportunity for the mentor-mentee dialogues to explore the mentee's individual meaning making using the UK PSF descriptors and values.

The ESCalate project has revealed that this approach to professional assessed dialogue can be very flexibly but rigorously applied. Project members are using the dialogue:

- Accompanying a formal accreditation of prior learning (APL), used as a 'viva voce' confirming the APL

- As an accompanying mechanism for exploring leadership linked to a CPD portfolio

- On its own for accreditation of prior learning within a formal framework

- As a critical discussion for professional award using a selection of evidence as focus.

The project is currently analysing recorded dialogues and transcripts, as well as written process evaluations from assessors and participants. Already the project team is convinced of the contribution of an oral dialogic assessment which allows immediacy of judgement on the basis of observed behaviour and non-verbal communicated responses, deep probing of views, assumptions and decisions, and a more natural reflective narrative. On-going reflection and analysis of data suggests that findings will inform assessor training, the management of dialogues for assessment of professional learning, how judgements are informed, and evidence to support the value of wider application of dialogic assessment for a range of experiential learning purposes.

Conclusion: relating this to SEDA PDF

What I find interesting and exciting about this research and my experience of dialogue is the way this could potentially enhance the use of SEDA PDF as an organisational learning and professional development tool. SEDA PDF uses values to frame a core development cycle (plan - implement - reflect - review), along with a set of specific outcomes to focus participants' learning around their role or an activity. The result is an organisation-wide framework for professional learning and development that is flexible, respects changes to role, function and career path, and embraces a wide range of educational practitioners and practices. Dialogue is already a significant element within professional and reflective learning processes around these awards. Given that evidence of engagement in professional development activity is a fundamental component of how so many of these awards are delivered and structured, I wonder whether dialogic assessment should be given serious consideration. I feel the use of dialogue for assessment purposes can fit very effectively within a SEDA award framework where the dialogue can allow values and attitudes to be exposed, participant reflection on their development and learning, and also focus attention for assessment on practice and learning around the specialist outcomes. In an educational environment where assessment often takes the written form as a guarantor of rigour, perhaps there is room for us to explore dialogue with fresh eyes? Its use might additionally provide permission to situate talk about teaching and learning in the open as a respected and essential part of academic practice.

Website

ESCalate project 'Using reflective dialogue to assess professional learning' (**http://escalate.ac.uk/6333**).

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Don't underestimate my potential

Ruth Lawton, Birmingham City University

Introduction

The November 2010 SEDA Conference was about staff developers considering their own career and professional development. In a workshop about career options I mentioned my 'DUMP' CV concept and acronym and I realised how it seemed to resonate with a very wide audience. In this article I will explain my thinking and how this works in practice, and hopefully will inspire you not only to check your own CV and diary (more on that later), but also to pass on the idea to your staff and students (and friends and relatives).

'Dump': the concept

My job is to work with academic staff to support them as they embed employability and personal development in the higher education curriculum. I also run workshops around 'managing your academic career' for staff. For many years I have recommended that participants create a 'dump' CV. I called it this because what I am describing is the unedited portfolio of our working lives that we need to be able to call to hand when an application or CV is required. This CV is the dumping ground for everything you have done/are doing that involves skills, behaviours, attributes *etc.* and it is a 'just in case' resource that is at its most useful when regularly updated.

Before working in educational development I was a careers adviser working with school pupils, students, graduates, school and university staff and 'drop-in' adults for 24 years, and during that time every single one of the CVs (and applications) I reviewed was missing something amazingly relevant and appropriate simply because the writer had forgotten, ignored, or underestimated its value. There are so many techniques for writing CVs, articulating evidence, presenting our best profile, all of which will be a waste of time applying if we have failed to recognise and record some of the wonderful experiences we have had in our lives, not just at work! We need to be presenting our best professional self, not our second best.

Hence my advice to create the 'dump' CV. It needs to be habitual, unedited and must never be used professionally (other than when used for demonstration purposes). When I have shown people my 'dump' CV the most common response is 'my CV is longer than this and I still have to add the last *x* years to it'. I suggest that people book a time in their calendar, preferably every few months, where they go back through their diary and reflect on all the activities they have undertaken and start to analyse the skills required or behaviours and attitudes demonstrated, the values exposed and so on.

For many years I actively promoted this idea of the 'dump' CV and encouraged students and staff to create one for themselves without actually taking my own advice. A former boss teased me into a 'physician heal thyself' moment when she realised I had 'media experience' because I had been on a regional news TV programme and interviewed by *Kerrang* radio and had never recorded either. Once I started to update my CV (which was two years out of date) I had conference presentations and co-authored papers that I had not listed. It taught me a lesson and now I try and check my CV three or four times a year. Because I demonstrate to staff my own pages on the university ePortfolio as part of embedding Personal Development Planning (PDP) I regularly need to update my profile, which includes my CV. Guilt is a great motivator!

Using a 'dump' CV

My 'dump' CV is over four pages long, has many headings, and is a mish-mash of experiences. Since creating it I have used it a couple of times for research bids and projects. I simply 'save as' and rename the CV for the particular purpose and then have loads of fun (not) editing it down to manageable proportions – in one case a single side of A4! The discipline of renaming means you will never have to worry 'what did I say in that CV/letter/application' again. For students applying to multiple employers/graduate schemes this is important. If you are sending a CV speculatively and it is called, for example, 'Ruth Lawton: CV for IBM' you might also score your first point. Of course if it is called that and you send it to Microsoft, then think again!

It is not easy for me to do this editing - these are my stories and achievements and I find it very hard to see the wood for the trees, or I am 'precious' about everything. Most of us have trouble with editing ourselves and a critical friend is crucial when that time comes, but the priority with the 'dump' CV is to make sure the information is there in the first place.

'DUMP': the acronym

A few months ago during a personal development workshop for staff a participant asked me what 'dump' stood for, assuming it was an acronym. At the time I replied 'nothing' but later that day the question popped back into my head and my internal answer was instantaneous: 'Don't Underestimate My Potential'. I shared this with the workshop participants who 'oo-ed and 'aah-ed' very gratifyingly. But what was good was not only that the acronym was 'clever' but it also explained succinctly and exactly my concept of a 'dump' CV and what it was for. Having run many more workshops since then with staff and students and always receiving the same response to the acronym I thought it was time to claim it and share it.

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New technologies and holistic development in higher education

Lesley Jane Gourlay, University of London

Introduction

Arguably, the introduction of new technologies into HE contexts has tended to be dominated by a techno-rationalist worldview in which the new technology is introduced via a competence-focused training model, positioning the new practices as a straightforwardly technical set of steps. The complex contextual dimensions of this type of change are not normally taken into account, and in developmental terms, the impacts on individual identities, groups and situated work practices are not generally recognised, with the associated challenges for staff/academic development underestimated as a result.

This article will report on the JISC/SEDA/Strathclyde University 'Embedding Work-with-IT' project, which in its first phases conducted a range of case studies across the sector into technological change in HE workplaces, covering a range of academic and administrative contexts. On the basis of this work, a framework was developed to capture the contexts and dimension of this type of change. In a recent phase, 'Embedding Work-with-IT' has applied the framework in six varied settings across the sector, looking at contexts in which new technologies impact on and change working patterns, relationships, procedures and identities. This has resulted in the collaborative development of a 'toolkit' which focuses on helping managers, teams and individuals to plan and manage the introduction of new technologies in a holistic manner which takes into account the complex range of contexts involved. This article will also reflect on the project from a development perspective, and discuss 'lessons learned' when seeking to embed resources in a range of complex settings.

Background

The Strathclyde University/JISC-funded 'Work-with-IT' project set out to examine the evolution of working practices across FE and HE, and through this work revealed many examples of good practice across the sector. However, it also became apparent to the Strathclyde Project team that this area of development presented serious challenges. In particular, the team identified the need to develop strategies, procedures and structures to support these new working practices and to help staff embrace and embed technology in their working practices. In order to facilitate this type of change, the project team concluded that a holistic and arguably transformative approach would be required and five key areas were identified where change to a more integrated holistic and embedded approach would be advisable. These areas were: organisational development, human resources management, staff development, horizon-scanning and change management.

To address the gaps and help embed effective practice throughout the sector JISC commissioned the development of the following outputs:

- **A framework for embedding effective technology-enhanced working practices** (Figure 1) which was intended to identify key areas which need to be addressed when developing and embedding new technology-enhanced working practices

- **A self-assessment toolkit** which aimed to enable individuals and institutions to reflect on their capacity to embed effective technology-enhanced working practices across teaching and learning, research, business community engagement and professional services activities.

The framework emphasised the importance of considering multiple aspects of the environmental and social context surrounding technological change, as opposed to viewing it as a straightforwardly technical challenge for an institution, department or unit. In this respect, it potentially represented a useful heuristic for change agents in HE (including academic developers) seeking to apply a holistic approach to supporting staff dealing with new technologies, work practices and therefore potentially changes in status, identity, and professional confidence. However, in order to convert it into a useable resource, it was felt by the Strathclyde team that a further round of institutional pilots would be necessary in order to create developmental resources. Additionally, as the aim was not just to establish these principles only in the local institutional practices of the project pilots but also to disseminate and hopefully embed them more widely across the sector, JISC sought to involve a range of HE sector bodies in the embedding phase. These aims lead to the commissioning of the Embedding Work-with-IT project.

Project aims and methodology

To achieve this, the following objectives were set:

1. To work formally with key sector organisations and partner organisations to target and effect change in five key areas:
   - Alignment of institutional strategies, leadership and organisational development
   - Change management to embed new ways of working
   - Staff development to support effective working
   - Human resource strategy and procedures and standards frameworks
   - Horizon scanning.
2. To develop well-targeted and tested support materials that could be used by institutions to assess the implications of, implement, and embed innovative technology-enhanced working practices within institutions
3. To disseminate the Work-with-IT and Embedding Work-with-IT resources collaboratively with the key HE sector bodies to maximise uptake by their members.

The Work-with-IT project team had identified a number of potential support resources such as intervention frameworks, self-assessment toolkits, competency frameworks and refined human resource and organisational practices. However, the consensus was that these would only effect sustainable change if they had achieved a degree of 'buy-in' from the key sector organisations and professional bodies. As a respected and well-established sector-wide organisation concerned with all areas of educational development, it was felt that SEDA could act as a conduit to enhance the possibility that any resources developed by the project could be adopted and embedded by HE developmental organisations, so the Embedding Work-with-IT project engaged SEDA for the management of the project.

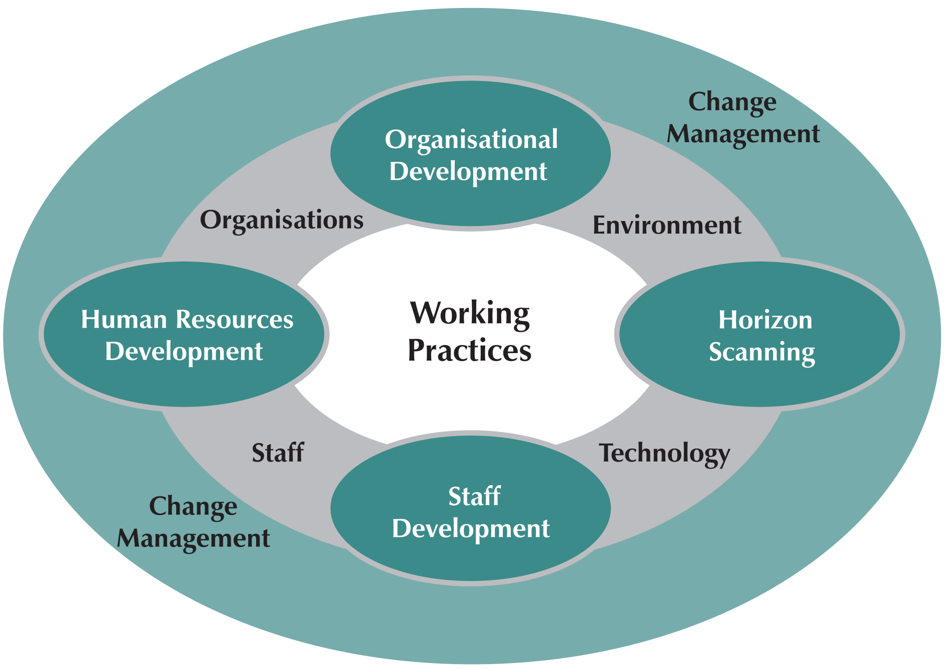


Figure 1 Framework for embedding effective technology enhanced working practices

Pilots

Six intervention pilots were commissioned by SEDA at HE institutions in partnership with a professional or sector body, with the pilot phase running from May to November 2010. Each of the six brought together one or more UK HE institution and a sector professional organisation. Table 1, opposite, shows individual pilot details.

Initial discussions were undertaken between the pilot sites and the Strathclyde project team to gather information on the context and the institutional aims and objectives relating to embedding the new working practice and participation. The Strathclyde team then developed a workshop based around the embedding framework for key members of the implementation teams within the pilot institutions. Within the pilots, a focus was placed on particular aspects of embedding new working practices, as the timescales did not allow for development of all five aspects of the project in most cases. Thus pilots explored aspects such as alignment of institutional strategies, leadership and organisational development or change management to embed new ways of working and staff development to support effective working. Work with the pilots was facilitated through a number of consultation documents, the Embedding Work-with-IT website and blog, and through a Toolkit workshop held by the University of Strathclyde, in September 2010.

The self-assessment toolkit was envisaged as an interactive web-based resource, the development of which was undertaken by the Strathclyde team in four steps. First, a specification was developed in collaboration with key stakeholders based on four steps – Preparation, Self-Assessment, Prioritising and Embedding. A pilot toolkit was then developed using this specification. The toolkit aimed to help users to rate their institutions relative to an idealised situation, using indicators of good practice created from evidence gathered during the Work-with-IT project and refined by feedback from team members, pilots and professional bodies. The toolkit was designed with supporting materials to help the user to reflect on the questions and also to assist prioritising changes, obtained from a range of sources including the Work-with-IT project, a web and database search, requests to the professional bodies and also the pilots.

Outcomes and impact

This project generated a range of outcomes and impact across several dimensions. In terms of the project objectives, the first objective was broadly met in terms of working formally with a range of sector-level partner organisations. This was largely successful – particularly in terms of relationship building and networking across several communities which have related interests, but may not frequently interact. One important point arising from the project was the very different roles of the various sector bodies, and subsequently the inevitable variance in degree of involvement with the project as a proactive concern.

At institutional level, the project was successful to varying degrees, with some reports containing strong evidence that the project had been very beneficial in supporting and guiding change in these settings, and supporting individuals in a holistic manner. The pilot institutions tended to view the framework more as a set of reminders to focus on a range of aspects of change in addition to the technical challenges, as opposed to a reflective starting point – however, this is largely as a result of their not being involved at the beginning of the change process. Where pilots were perhaps less successful in implementing change, local constraints or challenges such as technical delays or institutional restructuring were often major factors. As the decision was taken at the outset for the pilots to harness existing HEI change initiatives, the project team accepted that inevitably it had limited or no control over the progress of these projects in structural terms at a local level, but could only support and guide as appropriate.

Objective two was met in that the framework and toolkit were developed and evaluated via a dedicated workshop and reflections in the pilot reports, although the toolkit was not developed as a live resource during the pilots. The project team felt that this was a methodological issue and that in retrospect the toolkit should have been brought into play in the pilots earlier in the project. However, it was agreed that the real-life experience of the pilots in implementing change around technologies was seen by the team to be extremely relevant to the broader aims of the project and valuable in generating recommendations for the sector.

	HE Institution	Professional Body	Focus of pilot
1	University of Winchester/ University of Middlesex	Organisational Development Group (ODG)	Implementation of Wimba collaborative educational software
2	Roehampton University	Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA)	Implementation of IT-enhanced administrative processes to support programmes
3	University of East London	The Student Services Organisation (AMOSSHE)	Implementation of *SmartDiary* appointments software for student support services
4	University of Bradford/ University of Wales, Newport	Higher Education Academy (HEA)	Implementation of more effective ways of using IT in new academic development unit
5	Bournemouth University	Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE)	The development of a collaborative lifeworld-led transprofessional curriculum for health and social work disciplines
6	University of Bolton	Higher Education Academy (HEA)	Implementation of a new virtual learning environment

Table 1 Overview of pilots

Objective three was judged to be more complex and elusive, as within the timeframe of the project it has been more challenging to evaluate the extent to which embedding of the key ideas has been facilitated via the sector bodies. The SEDA project team in particular feel that this type of sector-level development is likely to be longer-term, as it depends on several conditions which will be discussed in the next section.

Implications for future projects

The project was felt to be highly successful in stimulating a great deal of focused reflection and practical knowledge about how to run a large-scale, complex development project of this kind in the future. This section will explore some of the learning points arising for the team in terms of development process and project management.

Firstly, the project underlined for the team that any success in disseminating and sustaining development of this type depends on the resources offered being highly relevant to the particular and situated communities of HE practitioners that it seeks to support. In order to achieve this, the slow but crucial process of bottom-up situated development and negotiation of priorities and focus was felt to be crucial.

It was also very apparent that timeframes on meaningful change at sector level are inevitably longer than the standard length of small projects such as this one, and the change processes are more complex and challenging. Therefore, any project of this type in future should adopt a 'long thin' model in terms of timeframe and contact.

Additionally, it was recognised that the various sector bodies partnered with HEIs were very diverse in their relationships to constituent members, their histories and developmental and dissemination practices. They ranged from the government-funded HEA which has a national regulatory remit and a relatively large staff, to the ODG which is effectively a special interest group with around 70 members. They not only differed in terms of scale but also mission - for example AMOSSHE provides a largely informative function to its members, while the LFHE interacts with HEIs largely via courses, workshops and consultancy. This served to further underline the weaknesses of a monolithic approach to development over a range of contexts, and the need for a more diversified and context-sensitive approach to these types of partnerships.

A further learning point related to the toolkit itself, which was felt by some pilots to be rather too large and generic to be useful in its original format. It seemed to address a somewhat idealised context of advanced preparation for change which some participants argued did not match their institutional contexts - attempting coverage of a wide range of aspects which arguably no one individual or even body would be likely to hold within their gift. A further key finding was that as change processes are situated in local circumstances and have particular aims and stages, a change intervention is unlikely to meaningfully address all five aspects identified in the framework at one time or even within a timeframe of several months.

The toolkit workshop revealed a considerable difference of opinion regarding preferred layout, style, tone and language for the resource. Feedback also indicated that some participants found the language of the toolkit reminiscent of quality assurance discourse, with a slightly 'tick-boxy' feel. After taking this feedback into consideration, the Strathclyde team re-wrote the resource and adopted a relatively informal 'chatting' tone. This observation also lead to wider discussions regarding language, tone and intended readership or users of developmental resources such as this. The project team speculated that there would be more value in the creation of a diversified and more focused set of resources generated within various communities of users, for different stages in the change process.

The project involved academic developers and educational technologists, and the team was struck by the degree to which the different communities used language differently, interpreting seemingly 'common sense' terms such as 'soft skills', 'toolkit' and even 'resource' very differently. A valuable learning point arising from the project was the vital need to set aside adequate time and space from the outset - before writing the project plan and setting the intended outcomes – to negotiate shared understandings and agree points of difference where appropriate. This is particularly important when working within the adapted PRINCE 2 methodology used by JISC, as success of projects is judged on the basis of a series of 'deliverables' arranged in related work packages.

The SEDA team also felt that in future more project time ought to be devoted to building dedicated resources, using developers familiar with creating materials for a range of development contexts. Specifically, a dedicated work package (WP) could be included, devoted to converting the findings of the pilots into useable resources tailored for the needs and interests of the various HE communities. This would avoid the creation a 'one size fits all' output, instead developing a range of resources amenable to embedding and a sense of ownership by communities. This WP should ideally include a rigorous evaluation cycle, trialling the resources under development both at pilot level, and also at the level of the sector body membership.

Conclusions

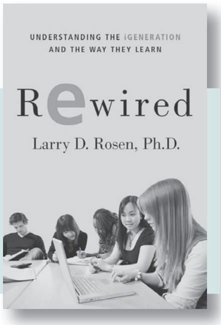
At this time of great change and instability in the sector, with resources increasingly constrained in terms of funding and time, meaningful embedded development around technologies in HE, and more generally, is arguably even more important than ever. For these reasons, this multi-level, distributed model of development trialled by JISC potentially represents a valuable new approach which might harness a range of community expertise and situated practice for the wider development of the sector. However, in doing so fundamental questions need to be asked about the nature and aims of funded development projects operating across several HEIs with national sector organisations. As this paper has recommended, success in this type of project would be made more likely by slowing down the process, spending more time on shared understandings, also recognising the 'messy', haphazard nature of change in HE settings characterised by complex committee and management structures populated by multiple social actors. Perhaps most crucially however, future projects should consider diversifying and distributing the developmental focus across the highly diverse range of potential users to maximise a sense of ownership, situation and sustainability. This makes for an initially more complex, longer and more sustained engagement, but would arguably result in longer-lasting and more meaningful impacts over time. In this regard, this project has played a vital role in testing the ground and has provided some invaluable insights into the nature and process of complex change processes in HE.

Project team and website:

Diane McDonald, Donna Cullen and Archie MacDonald, University of Strathclyde; Julie Hall, Lesley Gourlay and David Baume, SEDA (**http://ewds.strath.ac.uk/work-with-it/EmbeddingWWIT.aspx**).

Dr Lesley Jane Gourlay is the Director of the Centre for Academic and Professional Literacies at the Institute of Education, University of London (l.gourlay@ioe.ac.uk).

Book Review



Rewired

Larry Rosen

2010, Palgrave Macmillan

Given the bright yellow cover with a distinctive font for the title it might be anticipated that this book will not appeal to a UK audience. This would be unfortunate since it is certainly worthy of a read and provides thought provoking materials.

The sub-title is 'understanding the igeneration and the way they learn' which might indicate a lengthy exposition about digital *natives* and digital *immigrants*. Thankfully this is not so, with only a single passing reference to this concept. So what does the book contain?

The book starts with an exploration of teenage learning in schools, commenting upon the dislocation between traditional delivery styles and the expectations of a generation steeped in the uses of current technologies. While the majority of the evidence presented derives from the USA the conclusions drawn are still valid across other western contexts. The text continues with a comparison of what are described as three generations – the 'baby boomers' (1946 – 1964); 'Generation Xers' (1965 – 1979) and the so-called 'Net Generation'. Here I felt a little uncomfortable since the tone might give support to a taxonomy which included *natives* and *immigrants*. My personal contention is that the baby boomer generation was much associated with developing the technologies which are now currently linked with the Net Generation. Even so, I'm pleased to report that the author presents a balanced view of the three generations in the context of learning with technologies.

The chapter on multi-tasking presents and examines data associated with the three groups and clearly all engage in this with, as we might anticipate, different preferences. So while there are differences it is not simply the case that some do and some do not. Then moving onward the author explores the opportunities afforded by simulation in a chapter titled *Real Life* or *Screen Life*. Here we start to explore the potential of Web 2 technologies in learning and teaching plus a brief look at personalised learning. I was greatly heartened to see a reference to Carl Rogers included in this chapter.

In the penultimate chapter, *Concerns, Worries and Barriers*, Rosen presents a realistic and convincing twelve stage implementation model for the introduction of technological change. Acting as a check list, this takes into account many factors which can limit the engagement with technologies in the learning and teaching context.

Overall I found the book to be well written with the appropriate use of a wide range of source materials. While the author sees and identifies differences in the three generations this does not imply that over the last fifty years there has been a major evolutionary change in human brain function, rather that each responds in their own ways. I recommend this as a thought provoking read.

Tony Brand, Independent Educational Consultant.

Copyright

SEDA Recognition of Programmes: overseas developments

Stephen Bostock, Chair of the SEDA PDF Committee

SEDA's Professional Development Framework (PDF) for programme recognition is ten years old and continues to develop. The number of named awards has grown to 16, and the number of programmes currently recognised, and registered for recognition, grows steadily. One interesting feature has been the recent growth in interest overseas. The SEDA scheme is unique not only in the UK but internationally, and academic developers have been searching it out. The last two overseas programmes to be recognised were at Windsor University, Ontario, Canada, and at King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. It has been interesting to see how the PDF applies to universities in very different educational cultures.

Windsor University is the most southerly university in Canada, sitting amongst the Great Lakes, over the river from Detroit USA. The Center for Teaching and Learning is lead by Dr Alan Wright, a leading figure in the Canadian equivalent of SEDA, the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (SLHTE). Having met Alan at a couple of STLHE conferences, the last one at Windsor, he later contacted me about SEDA recognition of a new programme they were developing for their faculty (which ultimately developed into three, linked programmes).

It might have been possible to mentor the programme development and the preparation for recognition at a distance, but the process was helped enormously by Windsor offering me one of their Visiting Fellowships, to cover the costs of me spending three weeks with them over Easter 2009. For some of that time I worked with Alan and his colleagues Mike Potter and Erika Kustra to develop three linked programmes, each awarding an academic diploma. The first two were subsequently recognised for the PDF awards 'Supporting Learning', and 'Learning, Teaching and Assessing'. Some of the components of the programmes already existed, others were created for the purpose. The process of developing the programmes was helped considerably by using the requirements of the awards (the SEDA values, the Core Development Outcomes and the Specialist Outcomes) as a framework (hence the name!). One aspect of the discussions involved translating between Canadian and British English! This proved helpful in checking that everyone thoroughly understood what was intended and required. Alan and I gave a presentation at ICED2010 on this international collaboration in programme recognition (Bostock and Wright 2010).

Windsor University, Canada

The recognition of the two programmes was done at a distance by two recognisers in the UK, who were provided with some contextual information by me. The third programme's recognition is planned. These were the first SEDA-recognised programmes in North America. We hope that they serve as an example and a catalyst for STLHE, for example, to consider creating their own recognition scheme for programmes for new teaching faculty, perhaps based on the SEDA PDF. As academic developers we are pleased to give it away!

King Saud University is the oldest and largest of the 37 universities in Saudi Arabia, ranked first in the country and 247th in the 2009 THE global rankings, but with ambitions to rise up the rankings quickly. With over 100,000 students it has separate campuses for male and female students, and for faculty and faculty development activities. The absolute separation of genders gave some pause for thought when the university registered for recognition, but it is not explicitly against the SEDA values so we decided to go ahead.

King Saud University, Saudi Arabia

Mentoring was done by email by Jessica Claridge, and the recognition was done on site during a one-week visit. There would normally be two recognisers for an institution new to SEDA PDF, but in this case they had to be a male and a female to be able to meet both courses since only females are allowed on the female campus. After one postponement due to difficulties in obtaining visas, Vicky Davies and I visited Riyadh in December 2010. We were warmly welcomed by the Dean for Skills Development, Dr Mohamed Al-Sudairi. His deanship is relatively new and it has made rapid progress in establishing faculty development activities, using expertise from visiting academics from North America and Australasia. We were given excellent facilities and, although the course is delivered in Arabic, everything we needed was translated into English. When we visited, the third year of the programme had recently ended and we were able to read the participants' teaching portfolios, some of which were in English. We made a number of suggestions for improving aspects of assessment in the programme, which were readily agreed to and put in place. The programme achieved recognition for the award 'Learning, Teaching and Assessing', the first PDF recognition in the Arab world.

The gender separation is inevitably interesting for a westerner. The Dean's headquarters is on the male campus and on one occasion two female staff developers who deliver the programme on the female campus joined a meeting of all the academic developers ('trainers'), in traditional dress. We were given a guided tour of the male campus, next to which a new female campus is being built to the same standard and size. For one day Vicky visited the existing female campus and had a relaxed time with the faculty there in an all-female environment. Meanwhile, I performed the same activities on the male campus, in parallel. In the evenings, we had time to visit downtown Riyadh, with its impressive skyscrapers, and also an archaeological dig on the city outskirts. One evening we visited the old central market; all the stalls closed briefly for evening prayers, when everyone went to the central mosque.

It is fair to say that the developmental side of PDF mentoring and recognition was appreciated in both these, very different, universities. It demonstrates the wide, if not universal, developmental value of the PDF awards and its recognition proves that universities in such different cultures found them valuable for programme development, and worth the trouble and expense of being validated against.

We are always looking for new recognisers for the scheme, so if you have any involvement with a SEDA recognised programme, or experience of other forms of validation, we will be pleased to hear from you. All recognisers are trained every two years. We can't promise you foreign travel, but it is a possibility!

Reference

Bostock, S. J. and Wright, W. A. (2010) 'Accreditation of faculty initial professional - an international collaboration' (http://tinyurl.com/3taur9u).

Stephen Bostock is Chair of the SEDA PDF Committee.

Rethinking engagement: towards an ethos of facilitation

Stuart Boon, University of Strathclyde

Introduction

As staff and educational developers, facilitation is a word and a concept that most of us are comfortable, if not intimately familiar, with. It is synonymous with assisting, guiding, aiding and helping, and is therefore descriptive of much of the work that we do. Indeed, for many of us facilitation is a central or core activity, a part of our everyday work, perhaps even a part of our remit, while for others facilitation might be a more occasional task or objective to be met. In classrooms and meeting rooms we facilitate discussion and interaction between individuals, groups and assemblies. We are facilitators of personal, career and professional development, of student learning, and of organisational change and enhancement. In short, facilitation in one form or another is something that staff and educational developers do and, I think we can fairly say, do well.

Yet our use of facilitation is often limited to particular contexts or oriented to specific tasks. For most developers, facilitation is perceived as a contextual pursuit: it is an activity that takes place within a specific environment or with specific participants for a specific purpose. Taken as a set of skills or a task-oriented activity, facilitation is quite narrowly defined and its purpose and potential are similarly constrained. I would argue that defining and thus narrowing facilitation in this way limits its potential for engagement with other audiences, within other arenas, and for us personally and professionally as staff and educational developers.

What if we were to look beyond the limits and constraints that have unconsciously, even naturally, formed around facilitation? What if we took facilitation out of its metaphorical box, taking it not as a contextual activity or set of skills, but as an ethos, a disposition or way of thinking and acting? How then might we consciously re-imagine facilitation and its potential for engagement and interaction? How might this ethos of facilitation serve us as staff and educational developers now and in the future?

Developers today function within increasingly diverse and complex organisational cultures, themselves host to multi-layered strata (managerial levels, administrative directorates, *etc.*) that embrace and espouse manifold ideals, motivations, approaches and ethics (Land, 2004; Trowler, 2010). Within these varied cultures and structures, staff and educational developers have to find new ways of engaging and interacting with various audiences, developing empathy and trust, and enabling successful and sustainable relationships. Underscoring this change in approach is a need for rethinking the way we manage communication and intervention with different groups at different levels within and outside the Higher Education (HE) system.

One potential means of meeting this need exists in a re-conceptualising and re-purposing of facilitation. Altering our own perception and awareness of facilitation - in essence, mindfully reconsidering and re-imagining its role, circumstance and intention - can inform and help develop new approaches to engagement. Adopting an ethos of facilitation gives us both critical distance and a method for re-evaluating and rethinking engagement and how we interact at all levels. For example, reflecting upon and re-examining how and why we engage with different audiences (e.g. considering in depth the motivations, discussions, processes and agendas that drive us) presents us with an opportunity to discover how we can best facilitate constructive development with those audiences. In this regard, an ethos of facilitation provides us with a new perspective on our roles and relationships and, more significantly, an opportunity to discover new approaches to fostering and enhancing engagement.

The point here is not to suggest that we need to re-educate ourselves or undergo radical change, but to reconsider our relationship with, and the usefulness of, facilitation as a means of rethinking our engagement and interaction with key stakeholders and strategic partners. What follows then is a discussion that goes some way to describing the broader dimensions of facilitation, what an ethos of facilitation might look like and how this ethos might inform our approach to engagement.

Dimensions of facilitation

The initial driver for my own re-examination of facilitation was working on the SEDA Special publication *Creating a discipline: building careers in educational development* with Bob Matthew and Louisa Sheward (Boon *et al.,* 2010). Over the course of editing and crafting the publication, the importance of facilitation as a means of navigating organisational spaces became obvious. Shades or aspects of an ethos of facilitation were in evidence in each of the reflective vignettes submitted and, when brought together, they suggested a different way of looking at how we operate and interact with others as staff and educational developers.

Later that same year, I was approached to give a presentation on facilitation at the November 2010 SEDA conference. The presentation I gave intentionally questioned the nature and boundaries of facilitation and our roles as facilitators, highlighting some of the complexities uncovered in Cook (1997), Hogan (2002), Schwarz (2002) and others. The discussion that resulted was extremely useful in further broadening my own conception of facilitation in the context of staff and educational development. Taken in concert with the literature, this rich discussion and debate suggested that there was a much larger picture worth exploring.

Within our own field, however, much of the research available on the subject of facilitation is driven by the practicalities of facilitating group work and student learning (e.g. Brockbank and McGill 2007). Outside our field, particularly in business, facilitation is concomitant with negotiation, decision/policy-making, and line management, and again focuses on the effective facilitation of groups (e.g. Hunter 2009). Little research looks beyond these useful, but narrow boundaries.

That said, if we bring together these disciplinary literatures, the self-reflections of developers, and critical discussions with colleagues and then take these 'out of the box' as it were - essentially moving the argument outside the confines of context or orientation - we begin to see four broad dimensions of facilitation emerging: the internal, external, organisational and global. Considering each dimension in turn offers us a simple means of focusing on, questioning and re-interpreting our own relationship to facilitation and engagement.

The need to explore and understand our own motivations and drivers for engagement is a requirement common to each of these four dimensions. Hence, in each dimension, you will see the question posed: 'what are the drivers for facilitation and engagement?' Developing this understanding helps situate us as facilitators and highlights our relationships with the subject(s) of engagement. Put more simply, we need to step back, to know where we ourselves stand, in order to move forward.

A brief description of each of the four dimensions of facilitation is provided below along with a few indicative questions that might be used to initiate reflection and/or discussion.

Internal dimension
Facilitating personal and/or professional understanding, awareness, and development.

Indicative questions:

- What are my motivations? What are the drivers for facilitation and engagement?
- How can I facilitate my own engagement with *X* or *Y*?
- How can I best facilitate my own personal and/or professional development?

In this first dimension, the focus is on the individual and the exploration of our own relationship to facilitation and engagement. Second to the external dimension, the internal is probably the one we are most comfortable working in as developers. The most significant outcome of focusing critically on this internal dimension is the development of an awareness and understanding of our own reasons and motivations for engaging with different audiences. Meaningful communication and successful negotiation with any party heavily depend on this awareness.

External dimension
Facilitating interpersonal and/or professional understanding, awareness, and development.

Indicative questions:

- What do I hope to achieve from this engagement? What are the drivers for facilitation and engagement?
- How can I facilitate meaningful exchange, discussion or collaboration?
- How can I successfully facilitate the development of *X* or *Y*?

The external dimension is the locus of traditional facilitation, which we might describe as working with small groups or audiences to assist in the progression of a process or some form of development. As noted earlier, this is something that most staff and educational developers do very well. Thus, the challenge here is to find ways of improving, augmenting or challenging our current practices. How, for example, can we make our interactions more meaningful or successful?

Organisational dimension
Facilitating institutional or organisational understanding, awareness, and development.

Indicative questions:

- What is the purpose of this engagement? What are the drivers for facilitation and engagement?
- How can I successfully facilitate organisational change?
- How can I meaningfully contribute to knowledge exchange or strategic decision/policy-making?

In this dimension, the focus is less on interacting with individuals and more on navigating, and negotiation with, complex organisational cultures and structures. Perhaps the most challenging dimension to work in, organisational facilitation requires that we develop shared visions and collaborative working practices, emphasising inclusivity and mutual understanding. Respect, empathy and trust are important goals here but are often hard won against a backdrop of competing ideologies and power relations.

More than in any other dimension, successful engagement requires the careful juggling of a complex set of personal, interpersonal, professional and organisational agendas. Keeping all the balls in the air can be a daunting task, but the reward for success is achieving meaningful and impactful change that benefits not just the participants but also potentially the entire organisation.

Global dimension
Facilitating cultural or global understanding, awareness, and development.

Indicative questions:

- What can I achieve through this engagement? What are the drivers for facilitation and engagement?
- How can I meaningfully facilitate the cultural or global development of *X* or *Y*?
- How can I best facilitate and contribute to cultural change?

In this broadest dimension of facilitation, engagement is less situated and more aspirational, though no less significant. In practice, global facilitation often involves contributing to, or collaborating on, an aspect of development or change. However, as with organisational facilitation, collectively and constructively moving ideas and processes forward can prove a real challenge. We need to consider how to best facilitate our engagement with these diverse and distributed audiences.

A further challenge can be found in ensuring that the facilitated interaction achieves significant or meaningful impact. More than in any other dimension, one needs to consider how the message will be communicated and received. The potential for meaning to be lost in translation is very real. That said, successful engagement on a global level has obvious rewards.

Moving towards an ethos of facilitation

As I stated in the introduction, facilitation as it is used today and generally conceived by staff and educational developers is a contextual skill that is 'turned on' when the situation calls for it. It informs our role within the confines of a specific activity or objective. An ethos of facilitation describes a re-imagining and opening up of facilitation to cover multiple dimensions and inform engagement and interaction across the broadest spectrum. In other words, turning on facilitation and keeping it turned on as a matter of course, making it part of our *modus operandi*.

Adopting an ethos of facilitation thus requires a re-examination of our roles and practices and, more significantly, the ways in which we engage with others. By considering the role of facilitation in every dimension of engagement - from the individual to the global - we can begin to see how an ethos of facilitation might provide us with a renewed perspective on all communication and interaction. What this ethos requires is a conscious choice to adopt a disposition or inclination to continual development as well as a mindful and considered approach to interaction at every level. Put another way, it asks that we see and approach engagement differently, as a process to be actively and meaningfully facilitated.

Such an approach recognises and takes into account much of what we already do, but widens its application and emphasises successful engagement. It involves active participation in establishing constructive communication, developing trust, respect and empathy, and in coming to inclusive and negotiated decisions and outcomes. As staff and educational developers, an ethos of facilitation requires that we develop understanding and awareness of both internal and external factors that impact upon our interactions (e.g. motivations, drivers and agendas as well as pressures, constraints and barriers) and then use that knowledge to facilitate engagement.

These are processes that we are familiar with and skills and competencies that we already possess. The challenge again is not to learn something new, but to successfully apply what we know in a new and different way. The resulting change is two-fold as a re-imagining and re-purposing of facilitation brings about the facility to rethink and redefine engagement. An ethos of facilitation should thus be an ethos of active development and empowerment.

Of course, change comes at a cost. Successfully facilitating engagement with any group is neither a simple nor quick process. Adopting an ethos of facilitation could require a significant investment on the part of the developer in terms of time and mental effort. Those unfamiliar with facilitation might find the demands particularly challenging. While the internal and external dimensions are relatively simple to navigate, the organisational and global are far more intricate, requiring much greater care and attention. I would argue, however, that the investment is worthwhile and that the potential benefits for developers far outweigh the costs.

Conclusions

In the current economic and socio-political climate, staff and educational developers need to consider, if not act upon, every available opportunity to increase their visibility and have greater impact within and without their institutions. Rethinking engagement and moving towards an ethos of facilitation could be one way of both achieving impact and contributing to meaningful change. As we already possess the knowledge and skills to act, this constructive re-imagining provides us with a means of quickly improving or enhancing our communication and interaction with significant stakeholders. Additionally as the outcome is more effective, and therefore efficient, engagement, an ethos of facilitation also helps us respond to the prevalent managerial mantra of 'do more with less'.

In all of this discussion, the will to change must be present. Perhaps the will to act will naturally arise from the need to negotiate evermore diverse, complex and demanding organisational cultures. Or perhaps some as yet unknown catalyst will drive the change. In discussions with staff and educational developers at meetings and conferences across the United Kingdom, one thing is becoming clear: we need to take a more active role in facilitating discussions, driving agendas and making ourselves indispensable to our institutions. As a mechanism for constructive negotiation and engagement, facilitation seems ideally suited to meeting that need.

Staff and educational developers have always inhabited contested spaces within higher education structures, often contradictory and hybrid spaces, sometimes being at once central and peripheral. In light of the dramatic changes taking place in universities and changing perceptions outside our institutions, developers must find ways to adapt and be the agents of our own development. We need to be the ones asking: 'how can I facilitate this conversation or this process?' We must explore new ways of building and sustaining relationships and successfully engaging at all levels. Moving towards an ethos of facilitation is a way of beginning that journey and developing a more active and considered approach to engagement.

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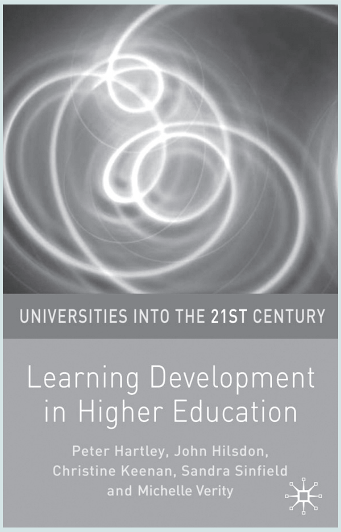
Book Review



Learning Development in Higher Education

Edited by Peter Hartley, John Hildson, Christine Keenan, Sandra Sinfield and Michelle Verity

2011, Palgrave Macmillan

You may think that staff and educational development is a new field, certainly in comparison to traditional academic subjects such as philosophy or physics. But 'learning development' is an even newer addition to the world of higher education. In years gone by, when universities educated an élite, students were expected to develop their own study habits. With the rise of mass higher education, institutions have found they need to offer specialist support.

This text opens a window onto learning development in higher education. This encompasses support for student learning, whether provided directly by learning developers in the form of study skills, socialisation into academic discourses, academic advice and so on, or indirectly through other members of staff.

The book's five sections provide a good guide to the preoccupations of learning developers. Not surprisingly for such a new field, the book initially seeks to conceptualise learning development. Next there is a concern with the transition into higher education (although only one page specifically on the transition out of higher education). Creating a distinct field does mean that there are the inevitable challenges in integrating one's work into the mainstream, a challenge that this book does not dodge with its focus on academic practice in the next section. A further section follows on technology, although the relevance of technology also pervades the book as a whole. Finally, and it is difficult for editors to avoid succumbing to this sort of temptation, the book 'looks into the future'.

Even now, though, it is evident that institutions have to rely less on government initiatives and more on their own ingenuity. Increased fees from students are already opening up new avenues for learning developers to explore, and to highlight to potential students.

For me, the value of a text such as this derives in good part from the personal engagement that one brings to it. Perhaps there are some issues you currently face that mean you need to engage with your own students around their learning? Or you might be looking for ways to catalyse the initiative of colleagues.

Let me pick out two chapters that reflect some of my own pressing concerns. Judy Turner makes the case for one-to-one academic advice to students; I'm currently developing a package of individual support for a group of doctoral students. Andy Hagyard and Sue Watling consider learning by doing research; my next task is to write a 'one-page briefing guide' on research-led teaching. Students, readers of this book, and colleagues all need to be proactive in their own situations, as does a book reviewer.

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SEDA News

Research and Evaluation Small Grants: 2011 winners

The following have successfully applied for small grants. See the SEDA website (http://www.seda.ac.uk/research.html) for further details of the projects they will be undertaking.

Jennifer Bright and **Helen Pokorny,** University of Westminster; **Jan Sellers,** University of Kent; **Dave Griffiths** and **Digby Warren,** London Metropolitan University; **Debbie Holley,** Anglia Ruskin University
Researching the use of labyrinths in learning and teaching in higher education

Keith Burn, Croydon College and **Dr M D Pollard,** Kingston University
Resources and constraints for adults in their first year at university

Andrea Gorra and **Ollie Jones,** Leeds Metropolitan University
Feedback on demand - enabling effective marking

Marita Grimwood FSEDA, Newcastle University
Changing staff perceptions of parity of esteem for teaching and research at Newcastle University

Timothy Hall, University of Gloucestershire
Maximising the Impacts of the Teaching - Research Nexus: the role of staff development professionals

David Jaques SFSEDA and **Ranald Macdonald SFSEDA**
Supporting academic staff development in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)

Lynnette Matthews FSEDA, University of Leicester and Rachael Carkett, University of Bath
Am I qualified yet? An exploration of institutions' accredited prior learning provision for HE teaching

Pamela Parker and **Susannah Quinsee,** City University London
How to get academic peers to develop their scholarly activity

Jane Roberts FSEDA, Open University
Practitioners as University Teachers: building communities of practice through accreditation

Rebecca Turner and **Priska Schoenborn**, University of Plymouth
Evaluation of a university teaching fellowship scheme as a tool to promote pedagogic research and development

SEDA-PDF

We are very pleased to report that our PDF scheme continues to expand, with two new institutions, King Saud University in Saudi Arabia and Southampton Solent University, having recently been recognised as providers of SEDA-PDF programmes.

A new PDF pricing structure has been introduced, which is simpler and more predictable for institutions. Details of the new fees are at the SEDA website (http://www.seda.ac.uk/professional-development.html).

SEDA Fellowships

Many congratulations to **Ursula Lucas** of the University of the West of England and **Clare Power** of Bath Spa University who have recently been awarded Fellowship of SEDA.

Earlier this year we wrote to all existing SEDA members inviting them to take up the new Associate Fellowship, and, to date, we are delighted to welcome the following to Associate Fellowship of SEDA:

Joelle Adams, Bath Spa University
Nick Baker, University of Windsor
Dr Pierre J Boulos, University of Windsor
Sue Burkinshaw, University of Bolton
Dr Keith Burn, Croydon College
Karen Clarke, University of Wolverhampton
Dr Mary Deane, Coventry University
Yaz El Hakim, University of Winchester
Dr Stephen Fox
Wendy Garner, University of Chester
Darren Gash, BPP College of Professional Studies
Sam Godden, ifs School of Finance
Sonia Greenyer, University of Central Lancashire
Brian Jennings, Ghana Christian University College
Erika Kustra, University of Windsor
Dr Alison Le Cornu
Valerie Mannix, Waterford Institute of Technology
Marion Palmer, Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology
Doug Parkin, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
Prof Michael K Potter, University of Windsor
George Roberts, Oxford Brookes University
Lorie Stolarchuk, University of Windsor

Forthcoming Events

SEDA Summer School - Supporting Educational Change

Tuesday 19 - Thursday 21 July 2011, Cumberland Lodge, Windsor

SEDA Annual Conference 2011 - Using Technology to Enhance Learning
Thursday 17 - 18 November 2011, Birmingham
See the SEDA website (www.seda.ac.uk) for further information and booking.

New publication

SEDA Special 28: *Cultural Diversity in Higher Education,* edited by Monika Foster is available to purchase on the SEDA website.

Forthcoming publication

SEDA Special 29: *Learner Engagement: A Guide to Negotiated Work-Based Learning,* edited by Mike Laycock will be available to purchase on the SEDA website soon.