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Terms of engagement: Reflections from the SEDA Spring Teaching, Learning and Assessment Conference 2014

Claire Taylor, St Mary's University

Held this year on the banks of the river Tyne in the heart of Newcastle, SEDA's Spring Teaching, Learning and Assessment Conference was titled 'Engaging Students: Engaging Staff'. The conference explored the theme of engagement from multiple perspectives and we were particularly pleased to welcome student contributors at conference keynote and plenary sessions. Each keynote address provoked a range of reactions and questions from conference delegates and it is upon the keynote addresses that I wish to focus, reflecting upon 'terms of engagement' for the educational developer in particular.

Dan Derricott, Student Engagement Officer at the University of Lincoln, opened the conference on day one by presenting a case study of how student engagement has begun to be embedded at Lincoln. Dan defined student engagement as 'working in partnership with students to improve the quality of what we do'. A suitably broad definition; perhaps, some may say, a 'catch all'. We were taken through a phased approach to the development of a more engaged environment, starting with institutional leadership and moving through local engagement through engagement champions, the development of a default position in terms of engagement and then followers becoming leaders themselves. Full details of the work at the University of Lincoln can be found on their website. Dan posed some interesting ideas and challenges – students on staff recruitment panels; executive staff members shadowing students in order to understand the 'lived' student experience; re-inventing subject committees and advisory groups, to name but a few. His account was at times inspiring and at times overwhelming; even Dan himself acknowledged the danger of 'initiative overload' in developing the engagement agenda.

On day two, we were joined by Liam Jarnecki, Director of the Student Engagement Partnership. The Student Engagement Partnership is a collaboration between the National Union of Students and the higher education sector in England which aims to help students and their associated representative bodies become partners in the student experience. Liam began with the premise that 'The SU is now formally involved in the academic process', although some conference delegates questioned whether this was actually the case for all Students' Unions. Liam described the work of the Student Engagement Partnership as founded upon being 'listeners; conversationalists; content creators' and emphasised that Students' Unions would be key delivery partners. Conference delegates welcomed the assertion that the

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Partnership wished to see 'behavioural change, not a paper chase', but there was some lively debate around the role of educational developers within the Partnership's scheme, with concern expressed that perhaps academic endeavour was being marginalised. We now know that the Higher Education Academy is leading on the pedagogic framework in relation to the work of the Partnership. We look forward to seeing the scheme unfold and to understanding more fully the role of educational development within it. Finally, there was much discussion around how to measure impact and the shortcomings of instruments such as the National Student Survey in this respect. Regardless of how the engagement agenda is conceived and defined, there was clearly a vocal group at the Conference who contended that metrics and measures will do little to enable us to understand impact and effectiveness and even that campaigns such as 'You said, we did' did little to promote partnership-working but actually undermined the principles of collegiality, community and dialogue.

Colin Bryson, Director of the Combined Honours Centre at Newcastle University, and chair of RAISE (Researching, Advancing and Inspiring Student Engagement), delivered the closing conference keynote, ably assisted by students who shared powerful and convincing accounts of their part in engagement activity. Colin's starting point was one that extolled the virtues of staff and students working in partnership as being fundamental to a profound and authentic higher education experience; indeed Colin was quite clear that education should be exemplary, dynamic, progressive, public, ethical and democratic. This was the framework within which true student-staff engagement should and could occur. In exploring the Combined Honours Department at Newcastle, we learned that it was a department with an identity and it was upon this that true engagement was founded and flourished. Fundamentally, Colin contended that the engagement agenda must be exciting and it must embody and exemplify transformative learning.

The three keynote speakers brought different interpretations of the student engagement agenda to the conference and it was quite clear from early on in the proceedings that a key issue on the engagement agenda was of definitions. Just what do we mean when we talk about staff and student engagement? Can we actually agree on meanings and definitions? And, actually…does it matter? For example, Dan Derricott was fairly relaxed around the whole issue of definitions and types of activities that may constitute engagement. He suggested that language and understanding were bound to vary across departments and that was okay as long as key underlying and unifying principles were understood. One conference delegate identified that such variety was a positive thing, commenting in their evaluation that this would be the key aspect they would take away from the conference: 'There's no clear model for student engagement; it's a many faceted topic open to many interpretations – this could or should be celebrated more!' Another delegate noted that they would leave the conference and 'Think about what we mean by student engagement…' Liam Jarnecki was clear that openness around engagement definitions was acceptable, although conference delegates were keen to suggest that perhaps more focused definitions would bring more benefits to the engagement endeavour. Colin brought a further dimension to the issue of terms and definitions, firmly espousing the view that engagement was no mere transactional activity, but rather was integral to a truly authentic, vibrant and transformative higher education experience.

So, where next for Educational Developers and the engagement agenda? Where do we fit in and what is our contribution to the engagement debate? Just what are our 'terms of engagement' both with students and with staff? Well, there is no doubt that there was an appetite amongst conference delegates to explore the engagement agenda more deeply and with the SEDA mission and values more to the fore in order to shape discussion. I had conversations with delegates who were disappointed that the platform we provided at the conference did not take the opportunity to explore, critically analyse and constructively challenge the viewpoints being presented and I take that on board as something to reflect upon going forwards. However, others felt there was too much challenge, response

and reaction to issues raised and too little encouragement of dialogue and collaboration. Clearly, it is hard to get the balance right, but both perspectives indicate a healthy interest from conference delegates in seeing SEDA have a voice with regard to key higher education debates and the engagement agenda in particular on this occasion.

So perhaps it is timely to remind ourselves of SEDA's core mission, which is to enable members:

- To enhance their capabilities in leading and supporting educational change, development and provision
- To assist the professional development of new and experienced academic staff; staff in learning and teaching support roles; and those involved in special initiatives to enhance and develop learning and teaching across the higher education sector
- To lead and support improvements in the quality of students' educational experiences
- To assist the strategic development of institutions in relation to educational change and development
- To encourage and support the development and application of greater understanding of the teaching process and the nature of students' learning.

I see nothing in SEDA's mission that flies in the face of engagement initiatives with both students and staff; rather, our mission represents our 'terms of engagement'. SEDA has a good track record of providing resources and networks that really do enhance the capability to lead and support change and its members both act as, and work with, change agents within Universities and Colleges. Such change agents come in a variety of guises – academic colleagues, professional support services, colleagues external to higher education and, of course, students. In assisting the professional development of those involved in initiatives to enhance and develop learning and teaching, educational developers need to develop and employ approaches that engage staff and students. Perhaps this could even extend to supporting and engaging students as educational developers? There were many good examples at the conference of students involved in, and often leading, worthwhile learning and teaching initiatives and maybe SEDA is now ready to explore more formal acknowledgement and recognition of students as educational developers.

Clearly we (the SEDA community) are on a journey with regard to engagement, but if we believe that deeper engagement is good for student and staff learning (as many of the conference sessions asserted) then we have a proactive role to play in contributing to the development of the engagement agenda. In 2012 McVitty asserted that 'students' unions and educational developers are natural allies in the project of educational development and change' and suggested that Educational Developers are best placed to engage with students around direct conversations related to pedagogical issues, or to broker and facilitate such conversations between academic staff and students. Let us lead and continue such conversations within and beyond the SEDA community, engaging with staff and students alike.

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What I know now…reflections on involvement in a partners in learning scheme

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Canterbury Christ Church University

Introduction

Like many other universities and colleges, Canterbury Christ Church University has been experimenting with ideas related to students as partners in learning. Looking around the University it is easy to see how students can get involved in a wide range of activities, all under the heading of student engagement. Nonetheless, a question remains about how close these notions of engagement are to the formal curriculum. For example, whilst it is clear that students can benefit enormously from a range of volunteering activities, wouldn't it be even better if students could enhance their research skills while engaging in those activities, and, where appropriate, earn University credit as a result of that engagement? And whilst campaigns like `you said, we did' may have their place, the nature of that dialogue seems far removed from the sorts of dialogue we all try to encourage in undergraduate seminars.

One year on, this article reports on the establishment of a Student Ambassadors for Learning and Teaching (SALT) scheme which attempts to widen and enrich notions of student engagement along these lines. The first part contextualises the scheme, and the second part contains reflections from some of the SALTs themselves.

The SALT scheme: Conceptual underpinning

Our SALT scheme was conceived on a train journey back from a Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) seminar in London, where I had heard from Sabine Little on how she had been able to employ a number of students – known as SALTs – at Sheffield University to work on projects across the University, and a follow-up session from Ben Little about how he had – of necessity, due to losing a number of colleagues – transformed the learning experience on his Middlesex University course by having the students direct more of the learning. Both struck chords with me. Firstly, although we had active student reps at the University, by definition they were there to represent the interests of their peer group on their course and not therefore required to get involved in wider matters relating to learning and teaching. Secondly, armed with only a smattering of pedagogical knowledge, surely students would be able to be not just directors of their own learning but also co-creators of their own curricula? Indeed, it struck me further that all the pedagogical ideas I discuss with new staff on our PGCert course could easily be discussed with students. Indeed, why not open up the existing taught sessions to students as well as staff – or, at least in the first instance, open them up to the SALTs?

The wider conceptual framework for the scheme also included an attempt to use it as a counter to the consumerist turn in UK HE which was couching fee-paying students as consumers of educational products, and preventing them from seeing the University as a space in which they might develop their own forms of scholarship. On this front I was hugely indebted to Mike Neary and his work at the University of Lincoln, neatly summarised in conceiving the student as *producer* of knowledge rather than as mere consumer of knowledge (Neary, 2014). But it also struck me that, although radical sounding, it is the notion of student as consumer which is the truly radical position – it being radically different from a long line of consistent thinking on what universities are for.

From this position it was then a small step to produce a vision statement, including ideas to work collaboratively with students on *research* projects related to learning and teaching; on *change* projects related to learning and teaching; and to include students as partners in the peer review process at the University. Clearly, we are still in the early stages of developing and embedding all these notions and by their very nature they remain fraught with difficulties. For example, do we agree that all forms of consumerism are bad – should academics publish books that students can't afford; should student accommodation be run like a workers co-operative; should companies like Starbucks be banned from university campuses? Do we agree that students *must* engage in scholarly ways and can students *really* be considered as peers? What do we do when academic colleagues argue that collaborating with students on pedagogic research will ruin their REFable status? And perhaps most troubling, particularly while we wait for a national student engagement survey in the UK, will all this extra effort – on behalf of students and staff – pay off in terms of enhanced satisfaction?

On the whole, I have enjoyed rising to these challenges, and I have been hugely encouraged by the conversations (or, perhaps better, professional dialogues) I have had with the SALTs on these subjects. That said, and particularly when emotionally drained by the challenges, I have also taken refuge in some supportive quotations:

> *`The relationship between teacher and learner is… completely different in higher education from what it is in schools. At the higher level, the teacher is not there for the sake of the student, both have their justification in the service of scholarship.'* (von Humboldt, W. 1810)

> *`…learning is maximised when judgements by the learner (in the form of self-assessment) are emphasised and judgements by the teacher are minimised.'* (Gibbs, quoting Carl Rogers, in Bryan and Clegg, 2006, p. 27)

> *`Research and inquiry is not just for those who choose to pursue an academic career. It is central to professional life in the twenty-first century.'* (Brew, 2007, p. 7)

> *`[We should] encourage and enable students to learn in ways that parallel or reflect the ways academic staff themselves approach research and learn in their disciplines or professional area.'* (Healey and Jenkins, 2009, p. 28)

Sometimes, I have clashed with colleagues who tell me that I am taking things too far, at that point taking some comfort here:

> *`The concept of "listening to the student voice" – implicitly if not deliberately – supports the perspective of student as "consumer", whereas "students as change agents" explicitly supports a view of the student as "active collaborator" and "co-producer", with the potential for transformation.'* (Dunne and Zandstra, 2011, p. 4)

And sometimes I have clashed with the SALTs on just how much they need to know about HE pedagogy to be effective partners, taking some comfort here:

> *`It is possible to imagine a scenario in which academics conduct serious conversations with students in which pedagogical decisions are challenged or defended with reference to the evidence rather than to feelings or unsubstantiated beliefs.'* (McVitty, 2012, p. 16)

Our scheme was conceptually conceived in the collective spirit of these quotations, along with that initial desire to ensure that the other laudable notions of student engagement did not crowd out those more closely related to the formal curriculum and the classroom, that is, where students are most clearly partners in their *learning*.

The SALT scheme: In practice

The rest of this article contains details of some of the projects the SALTs have been involved in and their personal reflections of being involved in the scheme overall. To date, the University has employed 14 SALTs recruited from across the student population and across the University faculties, and includes a student engagement officer, who has co-ordinated their projects, monitored their progress, and organised their pay (£8 per hour).

Dani

My interest has been in communication, not in addressing the traditional question of how academics might better communicate information to students, but how it might aid dialogue between them. To this end I have worked on developing an online community for all staff and students within the faculty of education, to communicate, share news and thoughts, as well as useful information. Secondly, a club or society, called *Learned,* has been set up, assigning times, dates and locations to get together and discuss current issues in a relaxed environment. Lastly, I have worked with the sustainability team to improve the aesthetics of the campus, to help create a relaxed working environment.

Throughout the three branches of my project I have realised the importance of time management, but also the importance of compromise, prioritisation, and persistence, and thereby the importance of communication itself in the successful completion of a project on communication, and that with a little imagination it is perfectly possible for even large faculties like mine to help students and staff better learn and teach together.

Kate

Being part of the SALT team increased my sense of belonging to the University and enabled me to have much more mature conversations with academics, which I think inevitably resulted in me learning more, and importantly, learning more about me. It would have been very easy to conceive of my SALT role as demanding my right to be heard and be entertained because student engagement is the fashion. Actually, the relationships that have grown from the networking that being a SALT requires, have enabled me to work in true partnership with academics and professional staff. I'm now also much clearer about the importance of listening more than speaking, and realising what exactly academics and professional staff actually do know! For example, for the project I am involved in now, on peer observation and review, I did go in initially waving my placard, demanding that students should be involved in the observations of teaching: 'But what does the student get from it?' said an academic. What a question! I had never thought of it. Consequently, that conversation has now taken this project wandering off in new and interesting directions.

Last year I also worked with a couple of SALTs looking at student transition issues. We designed and produced a simple bookmark with Ten Hot Tips for new students, and I also worked with my department to devise and launch a peer-mentoring programme. In that last project my ignorance about sustainability was embarrassing; I honestly thought it was just to do with trees. I now understood the need for sustainability in all we do, and the need to embed the projects that we undertake within existing University frameworks to help enable sustainability. To illustrate this, my mentoring scheme, whilst successful as an idea, was very much driven by the programme director and myself. What would happen if and when one of us left? After talking (key word that) we were then able to integrate it into the existing pattern of personal tutoring. Sometimes being a SALT simply means learning about how the university already works.

Ben

Studying American Studies at the University was hugely rewarding in a multitude of ways, but the main difficulty it presented was trying to work out just how I could transfer into the world of work the skills and knowledge I had picked up. It was this problem that my SALT project aimed to fix; aiming to show students – both current and prospective – just what options they really did have available to them. To this end I have worked closely with the careers team, and recently the web editor for the faculty, to attempt to tackle this issue by providing clear and concise information on exactly what skills Arts and Humanities students pick up and how alumni from the same courses had used them in their own working lives. In the context of increased student fees, it is more important than ever that students understand where their studies could lead them.

Once this project is completed, I hope it will make a considerable difference and spread to other subject areas whose students suffer with the same problems. Even though the project could still be described as being in its infancy, I have already been made to feel that it is highly valued and that the University as a whole appreciates my efforts. Being a SALT has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my time as a student, and I'm sure that this itself will enhance my own employability.

Dave

The project I was involved in saw me collaborating with the Equality and Diversity Manager to investigate students' experiences and perceptions of inclusive practice at the University. The Higher Education Academy's (HEA) principles on inclusive curriculum design were used as a baseline to formulate a questionnaire to gather data from students about their perception of the curriculum and teaching and learning strategies employed at the University and their impact in enabling/preventing a positive student experience. Participants for the survey were recruited from across all three campuses by working in partnership with the academics to promote the project.

The data was collected and analysed, based on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, to understand the students' lived experience and the findings were used to inform the University's ongoing work in designing strategies to promote and maintain inclusive practice within the institution. Naturally, this project also enhanced my own understanding of research processes.

Subsequently, and on completion of my undergraduate degree, I have transferred the skills and experience gained in my role as a SALT to become a new full-time student engagement officer. A key thing I learnt whilst being a SALT is that if students are empowered as partners in learning, their input in designing strategies and policies to promote and develop an inclusive curriculum across the University can be key to its implementation and success. After all, students are experts on being students.

Andrew

I feel honoured to be one of the first pioneer SALTs at the University, and very pleased to have been able to work with one of the University's learning technologists on a project about e-feedback. My role in the project was to collate views from students on how effective their assignment feedback was for them and what they would like to see improved, with the aim of producing an evidence base on feedback methods most likely to enhance learning. Being a SALT gave me more confidence mainly because of the great reception that my ideas have had from my fellow SALTs and staff. The constructive criticism and support from my project sponsor have also helped me develop an effective method to build a project, communicate ideas, and develop my organisational and presentational skills.

On graduating I became a programme administrator at the University where I have been able to use my SALT knowledge to good effect. I am currently assisting academics in the Faculty of Education with a potential research publication on student views on assessment feedback. Furthermore, members of the Education Studies programme I administer are requesting I use my experience as a SALT to give advice on assessment feedback methods and possible improvements with staff-student liaison representatives.

I feel my training as a SALT has been epitomised by my recent nomination for a University Golden Apple Award, nominated by the students on the programme I administer. I am very humbled by this nomination and also glad that students appreciated my ability to understand their concerns as well as relate to them. Overall, my experience as a SALT has taught me a great deal regarding not just what my University has given me, but importantly what I can give back to my University.

Conclusion

Given some of the risks we had to take to get our SALT scheme moving, and the inevitable problems of maintaining momentum, it is extremely gratifying to hear of the positive impact that the various projects have had on departments and faculties at the University. But what has struck me most about the scheme to date are its much more intangible and intrinsic aspects; how it has been able to prompt and promote aspects of personal growth. And these dimensions appear to reach back to notions of Maslow-like 'self-actualisation' and Rogerian 'significant learning' indicating that there is actually nothing new here, just a confirmation of sound underpinning pedagogic (or andragogic) practice in higher education.

What the scheme also seems to confirm is that working in partnership with students is not about turning up the volume control on student voice, or allowing students to rule the roost; but is, at heart, about listening to each other and learning from each other. In addition, it is also clear to me that these SALTs, and the others like them around the sector, are highly employable, not because they have studied on work-related degrees but because they have been actively engaged in the life of their University. And yes, these SALTs were highly engaged students in the first place, but what they know now is in large part as a result of actually being a SALT, and, as ambassadors, it was always envisaged that their work would in some way be infectious amongst all students.

Next steps? One: to demonstrate to the University that paying a bigger cohort of SALTs for their work is a very small price to pay for a potential huge return; two: to try to ensure, where appropriate, that more students can earn University credit for the kinds of projects and campaigns that they get involved with; three: to promote the use of a wide range of research methods and encourage creative experimentation amongst all students when working on learning and teaching-related projects and campaigns.

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The Student Fellows Scheme: A partnership between the University of Winchester and Winchester Student Union

Stuart Sims, Tom Lowe, Gabrielle Barnes and **Laura Hutber,** University of Winchester and Winchester Student Union

As part of the joint ambition between the University of Winchester and Winchester Student Union to embed an inclusive culture of opportunities for engagement and partnership, we have developed the Student Fellows Scheme (SFS). The purpose of the SFS is to recruit, train and empower students who can work alongside academics and professional staff on educational development projects. These projects address a diverse range of topics varying in scope and size but all must enhance the student learning experience. We will discuss the development of the SFS including a discussion of the challenges we have faced and an outline of how our cross-institution partnership initiative will progress in the future. Because the SFS is predicated upon valuing the contribution of students, this article includes outlines of two example projects written by Student Fellows themselves.

What is the Student Fellows Scheme?

The SFS is an attempt to increase the level of student engagement at the University of Winchester and to empower students to address varied issues, problems or barriers to a satisfying teaching, learning and social experience. The role of the Student Fellow predominantly consists of engaging in social scientific research with their student peers, implementing new initiatives or developing interventions for enhancement. These projects are carried out in partnership with a staff mentor whom Fellows are paired with based on their overlapping areas of interest. These staff mentors facilitate the project (e.g. drawing upon their existing networks to disseminate findings) but the projects are ultimately student led.

Building the initiative

The SFS is the result of meetings between the Executive Committee of the Student Union (SU) and the Learning and Teaching Development Unit (LTDU) to expand active student engagement at Winchester. Student activity around feedback and educational enhancement currently sat in only two forms at Winchester (Student Academic Representatives and SU Executive Committee), with no activity in between. Therefore there was a demand for empowered students to commit time to improving the student experience across programmes and departments of the University, for maximum student-led cross-campus change.

Partnership was the priority from the outset. The Scheme was co-funded by the Student Academic Council and the University Senior Management Team, giving both parties an equal stake in decision-making and accountability. While creating successful partnerships and improving student engagement and employability were key goals of the scheme, the research undertaken by these partnerships was designed to effect real change at programme and institutional level. Prioritising impact in this way encouraged staff and students to work closely on issues that are important to them, and engendered a stronger relationship between the SU and the institution to improve the student learning experience.

The current incarnation of the SFS developed from the pioneering work done in its 'proof of concept' stage the previous year. This involved a much smaller SFS as part of a JISC-funded FASTECH project at Winchester and Bath Spa University (Hyland *et al.* 2013). Inspired by this, Tom Lowe, SU VP Education, and Camille Shepherd, LTDU Research Officer, planned the logistics of the SFS in July 2013. The SU brought the communication networks of the student body to the Scheme, whilst the LTDU brought experience and expertise in teaching and learning. A successful partnership has emerged through negotiations between the SU, LTDU and Senior Managers reflecting our differing priorities for student (and staff) engagement. At times there have been inherent tensions such as how 'student led' the partnerships were, to what extent they served institutional needs, and how staff perceive their roles. These issues were overcome through the participation and commitment of all parties and their mutual priority to enhance student engagement.

The majority of funding for the SFS is used for a £600 bursary provided to each Student Fellow to support their research activities and time commitment to the scheme. While we recognise that there are many issues raised by paying

Vicki Wright and Jasmine Wyatt (Student Fellows) discussing their projects with Dr Stewart Cotterill (LTDU)

students to work on projects related to student engagement, our experience has shown that the amount of effort required of the Student Fellows coupled with students' 'time-poor' university experience has more than justified the use of a bursary in this way. One Fellow encapsulated the issue well by saying 'I don't do it because of the bursary, but I couldn't do it without it'. We also support students with any additional costs that they incur through conducting their research or implementing their initiatives.

Because the Student Fellows receive financial support from the LTDU and SU for participating in the scheme, we have a rigorous application, interview and induction process to ensure that students are properly equipped to carry out this work and that they are participating for 'the right reasons'. The SFS is advertised extensively across the institution, in particular through our intranet and social media. The experience and expertise of the SU in engaging with students is invaluable in the initial recruitment communication phase. Prospective Student Fellows are asked to submit a CV and a supporting statement outlining both their suitability and their areas of research interest. The applications are reviewed by the co-managers of the scheme and those of a suitable standard are then invited to a panel interview. The panels are always a mixture of staff from the SU and LTDU to reflect the partnership which supports and maintains the SFS. The interviews cover various topics but are specifically focused towards ensuring a high level of commitment to the issues students would like to address and what skills they have and will need to develop to address them. From the interviews, we were impressed to find the applicants had an incredibly high awareness of the current Higher Education environment and the University's workings, which led to the recruitment of 60 Student Fellows in 2013-14.

Following successful recruitment, the 60 Student Fellows were trained to conduct social science and educational research by Prof Graham Gibbs and Dr. Tansy Jessop. These sessions aimed to inspire and empower the students as agents of change who will have a great impact on the enhancement of the student experience at Winchester. Following this a call for staff expressions of interest to work with Student Fellows led to pairing of partners. Projects were created collaboratively around mutual areas of interest to conduct research in the following semester in 2014.

Example projects

To engage and provide motivations for students and staff as partners in the SFS, few restrictions are placed on the scope of the research and enhancement areas. This created a wide range of projects exploring areas such as assessment and feedback, combined pathways student experience, student engagement, curriculum design and technology-enhanced learning. Two example projects from students are given below in detail.

Gabrielle Barnes – Redrafting modular feedback forms for the Performing Arts department

I was extremely privileged to be a part of the Winchester Student Fellows Scheme; it has been one of the highlights of my first year here and has inspired me to immerse myself in academic opportunities and pursuits available to me alongside my degree. I began my work for the SFS by submitting an application after seeing the advertisement on the intranet. I attended an interview for the role and expressed my enthusiasm and interest in making a positive impact as well as providing examples of my own ideas. After receiving a place on the scheme I attended a training session which was useful and engaging, giving me inspiration on how to tackle my task as well as introducing me to the methods of pursuit available to me.

I was paired with my course leader to improve the Modular Feedback Forms for my BA Vocal and Choral Studies course – this later mushroomed into improving feedback forms for the entire Performing Arts department. We discussed the language and content of the current forms, how these could be improved upon and how the project had now grown to encompass a change of form for the entire department. The second meeting was my first Programme Committee Meeting for my course in the first semester. This gave me an opportunity to talk to the second and third year students who had already completed modular feedback. I also spoke to our course administrator who agreed to send me a copy of the current feedback form.

I faced mild resistance for change, being informed that the feedback forms are standardised within the department and are already updated by others. They were not interested in meeting with me or the project. Instead of letting this development dissuade me from proceeding, I decided to seek feedback and interest from students within the department. I conducted informal discussions with both individual Student Reps and my class as a whole; I contrasted their responses with comments and observations made by students from other departments with differing feedback form designs.

My focus for the redraft was the design of the questions, as they were ambiguous and vague. Other departments had differing designs breaking these more generalised questions down into sub-sections. This added clarity to the questions allowing students to respond more accurately. The second element I focused on was the language and phrasing used. Within my own lectures I had students feeding back to me that they did not understand what the questions were asking them. By simplifying the language or by restructuring questions, students can tackle feedback with confidence. The additional positive factor that this has on student feedback is the increased likelihood of qualitative information – if students understand what is being asked of them, they are less likely to avoid giving additional feedback. I also phrased the qualitative questions in a fashion that would stimulate students to see them as part of the feedback form, as opposed to an optional space that can be overlooked.

With the new layout completed, I informed the programme leader that I would be sending her the hard copy over the summer, as it was now the semester of dissertations and extreme pressure. She will then use this form to run a focus group in her own time, as well as feeding back to myself with ideas for further improvement. In turn I have also sent out

a copy of the feedback form to the students of Vocal and Choral via Facebook. I am currently awaiting responses.

Laura Hutber – Providing a physical approach to learning and teaching the law

My project's main aim has been to provide a more interactive means of facilitating legal education at the University through the creation of resources. My role was to co-manage the project with my supervising lecturer by carrying out the vast majority of ground work and general administration.

Our first steps were to recruit ten Student Consultants (SCs) from the second and third years to assist us with researching and creating these resources. This was done by speaking to students in lectures and via email, inviting them to apply for the position. Once the positions had been filled, I brought several of the SCs into a first year law lecture with me to gather qualitative data on which concepts or subject areas on the law course could be focused upon during our research. This was done by asking students to decide in small groups to list four topics which they considered the most challenging to learn or be taught.

The results from the survey were then analysed by the whole cohort of SCs at a focus group meeting. In addition to the widely utilised concept of Equity and also so-called 'Problem Questions' which form a large portion of assessment formats in all years, the second year modules of Criminal and Employment Law were selected as our key areas of focus. Each topic was then allocated to a group of 2-3 SCs who agreed to complete some individual research into their area.

The following weeks were spent devising initial plans for how each group could create an interactive resource for their topic in ways which would appeal to different learning styles and preferences. Their ideas were then presented at a second focus group meeting where I facilitated a practical, peer review-style session to provide critique and allow their ideas to be developed further. Final reports were then submitted by the SCs on their resources to allow the legal accuracy of their content to be checked. Plans were also made as to how their resource could be successfully implemented onto the course and reviewed by fellow students.

Summary of each resource:

- Employment Law: A digital video depicting various scenarios taking place within a 'solicitor's office', through which a 'solicitor' explains the law in an exaggerated, comical manner to a 'client' who enquires about their legal predicament
- Criminal Law: A strategic card game incorporating key offences and defences within Criminal Law to test knowledge and understanding
- Equity: A digital video using a simple analogy of boats on a river via the use of props to physically and visually explain the key concept of Equity and its origins
- Problem Question: An easily accessible booklet or 'how-to' guide to answering problem questions successfully through the use of example answers and breakdowns of grade distinctions.

Throughout our work on the project, we have aimed to produce resources which have practical value and will actively be utilised by both students and lecturers to facilitate both learning and teaching Law at the University of Winchester. As a dyslexic student, the opportunity to work towards increasing the 'accessibility' of reading Law at Winchester has been both an honour and an enlightening experience through which I have continuously learnt new skills. The project has become a platform for further change and improvement within the Law department and next year I hope to make even greater efforts to assist in the development of my course.

Impact

Currently coming to the end of the first year of the SFS, both the SU and the LTDU have begun to conduct internal and external dissemination of the projects. An active internal dissemination on the intranet is being created, so that lessons learnt or enhancements made in one department can be shared across the institution. When this process is multiplied by the number of Fellows projects, mass cross-campus student-led enhancement is achieved in a very small amount of time. Other internal dissemination of projects has been through presentations, workshops and posters at the University's Learning and Teaching Day and externally at SEDA Spring Conference in May 2014. Recently the SU and LTDU held a two-day Writers' Retreat for our Student Fellows, to give training in academic writing and guidance in the publication process to help further dissemination. For the Student Fellows themselves, they have gained unique research, negotiation and innovation skills in making change and project management, which has already been reported by Fellows to give them confidence when entering the graduate employability market.

Laura Hutber and Gabrielle Barnes (Student Fellows) presenting at SEDA Conference, Newcastle (2014)

Conclusion and reflection

As with any new initiative at a Higher Education institution, the SFS has not been without its share of challenges, most of which were oriented around communication, both to students and staff involved in the scheme, once the projects had commenced. Keeping contact with 60 different partnership projects to ensure the student and staff experience was at its best was difficult for a management team of two, with no previous years to be reflected upon.

Also many of the projects would be unique to the scheme, so it was important to bring the Fellows back together to provide motivation to continue and to develop a community of practice.

In reflecting on the first year, the structure of the SFS has been refined for its second year. Specifically, we are providing three defined pathways to allow more tailored training, guidance and future development. Rather than restricting the scope of the scheme, these three pathways are designed to broaden the focus and increase the number of projects which explore institution-wide issues:

1) Enhancement Aimed Projects (EAP)
Researching issues identified from key performance indicators, staff and students develop the project together.
2) Evidence Led Projects (ELP)
Researching evidence-based issues developed by students, being matched with suitable staff members.
3) Institutionally Strategic Projects (ISP)
Researching issues of importance to the whole university, developed by staff, students or in collaboration.

Lief Keay-Chaplin (Student Fellow) promoting the SFS to students

This redesign was also undertaken to make the process more transparent and accessible to staff members who were often unclear about the nature of their role. In the first year the staff role was less developed due to the focus on engaging students in the initial roll-out of the scheme and this is being addressed with further communication and resources to staff next year. The projects are also running across the whole academic year rather than one semester, to allow more access to student feedback and enrichment opportunities for our participants such as conferences.

The management and staff-student partnerships have been integral to the success of the scheme and have allowed it to continue to grow. Recruitment has already begun for the second year of the scheme, with more exciting enhancements and research set to be conducted as the presence of the SFS on campus at Winchester increases.

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Enabling creative professional conversations around Academic Leadership through Dialogue

Bridget Hanna, Fiona Campbell and **Elaine Mowat,** Edinburgh Napier University

Professional conversations are essential to the enhancement of practice in any profession (Shaw, 2002; Francis and D'Annunzio-Green, 2005) and can enable employee engagement, ownership and empowerment. But how can we support such professional conversations in academic development? And how best can we encourage them to be creative, democratic, purposeful – and enjoyable?

Three key threads wove together to underpin our approach to academic development and our engagement with professional conversations: SEDA, dialogue through using dialogue sheets and an opportunity to use these around conceptualisations of Academic Leadership.

Thread one: Unpicking the threads

Participants at the SEDA workshop *Placing Student Voices at the Heart of Institutional Dialogue* in Spring 2008 were introduced to Dialogue Sheets (Holtham and Courtney, 2006) by Flint and Oxley who described their use within their own institution (Flint and Oxley, 2008). Describing these as an innovative tool to change institutional dialogue which could be used by academic developers to adopt less traditional facilitation roles, the workshop leaders ably modelled this facilitative approach. In exemplary SEDA interactive style, participants had the opportunity not only to learn about Dialogue Sheets but also to experience them by engaging in active dialogue with fellow participants.

Impressed and inspired by how Dialogue Sheets provided a neutral, structured space for dialogic discussion which can be logged, we immediately introduced them to Edinburgh Napier and, in the intervening years, we have developed, extended and used them to enable strategic discussion which engages, stimulates and challenges participants. These discussions have focused on various areas including academic transitions, technology-enhanced learning and academic leadership, and we have employed them within institutional conferences, management meetings and cross-sector project teams. Significantly, Dialogue Sheets democratise discussion and empower participants enabling the views of all to be respected and valued.

But what is dialogue? Isn't it all just talk? Alexander (2004) distinguishes between *conversation* as relaxed and often directionless and *dialogue* which is characterised by purposeful questioning and the linking of ideas into 'coherent lines of thinking and enquiry' – this is essentially the dialogic principle of *cumulation*. It is this type of dialogue within professional conversations (Francis and D'Annunzio-Green, 2005) we wanted to enable.

We left inspired and began employing Dialogue Sheets in our work and developing them further to engage, stimulate and challenge colleagues in multiple contexts. One of those contexts has been in our approach to developing a programme to support the development of our academic leaders.

Thread two: Academic Leadership and the importance of institutional context

Academic Leadership has been identified as critical for the development of the HE sector as a whole (Leadership Foundation Strategy, 2010-2014) and has been identified as central to our institution's strategic direction in our strategic review.

There is a very real lack of agreement around definitions of academic leadership (Bolden *et al.,* 2012). To inform our thinking we commissioned a student-generated literature review. The results led us to the conclusion that we needed to think predominantly about the context in which Academic Leadership would be enacted. This led us to concluding that our Academic Leadership project could have a wider strategic impact on the culture around and values of our university. We wanted to find a way of generating our programme and for that generation to be transformational, by disrupting normal ways of talking about leadership through thinking about how we want to lead academically. By looking to ourselves rather than at others we could create a space for the emergence of a contextualised programme that answers our institutional needs. These needs included wanting to stimulate more boundary-crossing in our approach, focusing on the key academic roles of Lecturer and Senior Lecturer (rather than on senior roles) and ensuring that in the process we built a community of academic leaders. In effect this process was about Edinburgh Napier re-conceptualising Academic Leadership as a University.

This increasing emphasis on a contextualised approach to academic leadership meant that a dialogic tool was particularly useful. This dialogic approach was used to surface, structure and develop the views and understandings of Academic as well as Professional Services staff around 'Academic Leadership'. The outcome is a set of key principles which will be used to underpin the development of Academic Leadership at Edinburgh Napier.

We asked six key questions on our Dialogue Sheets to elicit a current state, a desired state, some thought about the process and finally some personal reflection. The six questions where:

1. How does Academic Leadership work at Edinburgh Napier University?
2. What does Academic Leadership need to look like to deliver the Academic Strategy?
3. How do you currently demonstrate Academic Leadership in your role?
4. How should we develop Academic Leadership at Edinburgh Napier University?
5. What are the enablers/barriers to effective Academic Leadership at Edinburgh Napier University?
6. How would you like to describe Academic Leadership at Edinburgh Napier University to the Higher Education Sector in Scotland?

Using a dialogue sheet for Academic Leadership

Notably, staff found the most difficult question to answer (as evidenced through their completed dialogue sheets) was Question 3. It seems we are used to asking this question of others but not of ourselves. This is potentially an important institutional blind spot in many institutions:

> *'It's interesting, isn't it, that we were are all asking you for a definition when we should really be thinking about what Academic Leadership means to ourselves first.'* (Participant)

The main focus of the sessions was an opportunity for participants to engage in dialogue with each other, in order to experience 'thinking together', not simply 'reporting out old thoughts' (Isaacs, 1999). Participants were invited to consider Kantor's Four Player Model (Kantor, 2012) and the significance of a good balance of advocacy (moving and opposing) and inquiry (following and bystanding) for effective dialogue. Dialogue sheets were used to democratise and capture the thinking of the groups.

The entire process took several months to roll out across all campuses and faculties. Finally we had the substance of what was important to all our colleagues about how our academic leaders should develop. We surfaced quite a lot of tangential information in the process so it was important to honour this and to provide opportunities for the University to address issues in other relevant ways such as through staff engagement processes. It was also important to close the communication loop and let colleagues know how we would take their thinking forward.

These are the ten key principles identified as important for Academic Leadership at Edinburgh Napier University:

- The outcomes of Academic Leadership are aligned with student outcomes, in terms of both student learning and employability.
- The development of Academic Leadership is valued and seen as central to the organisation.
- Academic Leadership is emerging and dynamic. We therefore remain open to all views and contributions, however challenging, diverse and controversial, and are supportive of a continuing dialogue around its scope and nature.
- Academic Leadership cannot be neatly defined; it is complex, multi-faceted, and includes both formal and informal leadership roles which cross boundaries. Therefore, in developing Academic Leadership we acknowledge and embrace this ambiguity and complexity.
- The development of Academic Leadership should happen within an environment which supports quality, learning, innovation and promotes effective and collaborative working. It covers both the development of Academic Leadership at both individual and organisational levels.
- In recognition of the diversity of Academic Leadership and academic areas across the University, approaches to the development of Academic Leadership are tailored, blended and balanced between meeting individual, role and organisational development need. Leadership development occurs across professional practice as well as in formal programmes.
- All staff have a personal responsibility for being committed to their own development and for taking the development of Academic Leadership (both their own and, as appropriately, that of colleagues) seriously.
- Academic Leadership is, at heart, collegiate. We all have a responsibility for our own actions and how we work with colleagues across the university to produce a culture which values Academic Leadership. There are clear expectations of each of us in fulfilling our self- and personal leadership and staying open to continuing personal development through engaging in reflective practice, dialogue and feedback.
- The principle of academic freedom and autonomy is valued as being fundamental to the exercise of thought leadership and the advancement of innovation in teaching, learning, and applied research.
- In recognition of the creative tension between business and Academic Leadership, the development of Academic Leadership takes place within this context and is broadly aligned with organisational aims and values. We fulfil our academic aims through all areas of the University and have a responsibility to work across professional and discipline boundaries with respect and understanding. We are all working to the same purpose.

To leverage strategic support for the principles we involved key sponsors within both academic departments and Human Resources. Building on this work we have taken the principles to both our University Leadership Team and to our Academic Strategy and Enhancement Committee (ASEC). These important strategic bodies supported our approach and the outputs. It also stimulated some wider conversations about our approach.

Reflecting on where we are now and how we need to move forward we are aware that Dialogue Sheets themselves are only one way of approaching the need to disrupt normal patterns of interactions. There is a chance we could over-use this one approach. The key to its usefulness is its disruptive nature through which it equalises and therefore democratises contributions. Because of our boundary-spanning approach (our core premise is that all of our colleagues have something to contribute to the definition and development of Academic Leadership), this tool was useful in taking away some of the power issues that could have emerged within the sessions. One of the defining moments so far in the project has been reading the sorts of comments participants have

made. We have already changed their conceptions of Academic Leadership and perhaps we underestimated the usefulness of early interventions as part of the development itself.

The Academic Professional Development approach has therefore been to define Academic Leadership in a way that is contextualised and supports how those of us involved in the academic endeavour want it to develop. This is perhaps something quite different to other development programmes:

> *'I found the session really different from anything I'd been to before. I felt valued and listened to. Wonderful.'* (Participant)

Thread three: Returning to SEDA

We returned to SEDA in 2013 with our innovative use of professional conversations and Dialogue Sheets. By enabling fellow developers to experience the potential of this facilitative tool, we hope to empower them in order to develop effective professional conversations in their own contexts.

In running this SEDA session we wanted our professional conversations to be around an appreciation of just how dialogue sheets might be used to facilitate discussion around important issues like Academic Leadership. We also wanted our SEDA colleagues to experience how this could happen and to be able to take this back to their own institutional practice:

> *'Embodied how to run an interesting workshop with emphasis on experimental learning, thank you.'* (Participant)

Weaving a future

This year sees us moving Academic Leadership into a development stage in tune with the principles developed through dialogue and using dialogue sheets. The fact that these were introduced to us through SEDA and that we have had a chance to come back to SEDA focusing on one of the most important issues facing all our institutions today is testament to their continued salience. That as academic developers we continue to engage with strategic change and with each other seems to be at the core of SEDA's values.

A case study of our use of Dialogue Sheets has been developed for the University's LTA Resource Bank (now available through JORUM), which includes a number of exemplars to encourage the use of Dialogue Sheets in different contexts.

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Dialogue as a developmental tool

Peter Lumsden, University of Central Lancashire, and **Laurence Eagle,** University of Sunderland

This article shows how an ongoing dialogue between staff with shared academic identities (the authors were both trained in the Biosciences) can have unexpected benefits in their common role as educational developers.

Background

Peter and Laurence both studied biology as undergraduates, after which Laurence taught biochemistry for 18 years and Peter, after gaining a PhD and doing a post-doc in Japan, taught a mix of biology subjects for 15 years. Several years ago Peter moved into the field of educational development, and became a module tutor on the PGCert in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education at his home institution. Laurence is the programme leader for the PGCert at his university.

In 2010, Laurence attended a meeting of course leaders and others involved with PGCerts in learning and teaching in higher education in the North. A chance meeting at the coffee machine led them to a chat from which it quickly became apparent that they shared not only a discipline and educational background but also an interest in different forms of feedback. Peter had carried out a study on audio feedback but was not sure what to do with the data he had generated and Laurence suggested that it was publishable on its own and that he would like to perhaps use some of it as a basis for a collaborative project into audio feedback.

Peter then presented a poster on this work at the November 2011 SEDA conference and expressed his intention to

publish it in a journal. Laurence had embarked on his own study into audio feedback based partly on Peter's work and the two of them were then asked by James Wisdom to prepare and submit an article for *Educational Developments*.

Structure of this article

We agreed to maintain a dialogue, sharing our evolving experiences as tutors on our respective PGCert programmes. This article follows the development of this dialogue between colleagues with a shared academic identity/culture over a period of two years. This has enabled us to communicate quickly (an academic shorthand of sorts) and gain a trust that might have been more difficult had we come from different disciplines. The initial focus was around audio feedback, but soon this extended to a wider conversation on issues relating to our roles; here Peter's experience in educational development has also allowed Laurence to reflect upon his new role and allowed him to appreciate his new academic identity.

There follows a mix of a direct account of discussions (recorded by Peter at the time), together with subsequent reflections on these *(italicised),* and an overall view on how this dialogue has informed our developing practice, particularly in the context of our PGCert programmes.

27 January 2012: Face-time discussion

Laurence said that on seeing Peter's SEDA poster he went away with the idea of this being a good thing to do, and to try it. Talking with someone else about the approach was a confidence builder.

He has applied it to a blog which PGCert participants produce. The assignment was initially participants simply writing about their experiences, and was voluntary. Some people did, and then Laurence started to make comments on it. 'Keep a diary' was the old format and was used to illustrate examples of participants' practice. Laurence then put the exercise online, which is why he was able to comment, using the WebCT journaling tool. The current 11/12 cohort blog every week to the brief of: 'some reflection on something that has happened to you'.

Laurence decided to give audio feedback a try, using the audio app on a mobile phone, as this was easier for him than an MP3 recorder. He piloted the approach with a group of 15 with whom he had a positive and social relationship. He found that audio feedback is quicker, and suits his style. When asked 'how are you finding this?' one participant preferred written, and for her, Laurence carried on doing written feedback, though he noticed that it took longer doing written comments. Other participants have said that audio is more authentic. As a further development, one student wanted to give audio feedback to Laurence! This cohort started off hesitantly, but is getting more comfortable. Keeping it going is a challenge. At the moment the blogs are private between individual participants and Laurence.

For Laurence audio is typically a couple of minutes, which is much quicker than written. He attaches the audio file to replies in WebCT.

For the next cohort (12/13), Laurence will relate to UK PSF more overtly.

As a further aside, Laurence is reading up on e-portfolios….

Reflection: *We both agreed that through the ongoing exchange with participants, we will obviate the need for summative feedback. During a reflection assignment there are both our formative comments and their own self-assessment – achieved simply by their doing it. Laurence is taking this further by getting participants to submit extracts of their learning journals as evidence for their achievement of the different dimensions of the UK PSF.*

We then moved on to discuss how to do feedback on a written piece, and our experiences of Turnitin. Laurence uses comment boxes in Word to annotate scripts, which actually led to more insightful comments than did hand-written annotations. The same thing happens for Laurence on Grade-mark. However, although he finds it great as a submission tool, making the process easier, and the plagiarism detection is a bonus, he does not like the fact that you have to remain online whilst marking the scripts. I asked about Grade-mark and highlighting – Laurence told me that if you download the file, you get a pdf showing where you have highlighted.

Actions – Peter to explore how to deal with mass audio feedback, so that participants don't see everyone else's comments.

Reflection (Peter): *We are talking the same language, and ideas seem to bounce back and forth; the idea of developing approaches to and use of audio feedback seems to be widening to cover formative feedback as an essential component of learning; the dialogue activity we are engaging in is of itself interesting – is this actually the main focus of the paper??*

Reflection (Laurence): *My immediate thoughts are that we are starting to enact our conversations, in that our reflections are becoming triggers for our actions concerning the operation of our individual programmes.*

2 October 2012

Laurence proposed that we do a joint presentation at the HEA annual meeting. For Laurence this would be the first collaborative research presentation that he has ever committed to.

21 March 2013: Phone call

Very positive comments from participants on the ongoing use of recording messages on mobile phone for feedback. This year (12/13) Laurence has gone the whole hog with audio feedback on written work. He was using track changes in Word for summative written assessment, and then went fully onto audio for commenting on student reflective diaries.

In a separate development, his PGCert group are indicating in their diary entries which of the dimensions of the PSF apply.

Reflection (Laurence): *This represented a sea change in assessment practice in that an assignment was being used*

in this case not only for measuring progress but also as a method for supporting participants throughout their early years of teaching.

12 June 2013: Skype

We seemed to have moved to talking about social media, and Laurence mentioned Google+. Google Hangouts sounds like something (else!) for me to explore. Could this be used in the PGCert here at UCLan?

Returned to the feedback used on the PGCert, and the reflective account of a teaching session by participants. This led us to talk about how to improve learning outcomes by applying learning theory, and how, from my in-house research, undergraduates certainly say that one-to-one feedback on their work is ideal. Laurence: 'interesting you should say that….', and indicates that our conversation has thrown up another idea. Ah yes, I could do this by Skype! ….or maybe we could offer them the option of face to face *or* Skype. We then explored the fact that some people might *not* like audio so we do need to give them the option. Laurence then noted that he sometimes says something in audio that he might not say face to face…*i.e.* the audio may have a greater richness in terms of content as well as scoring from the angle of the affective domain.

We then discussed the HEA meeting and 'our Talk' – agreed that we would first review briefly what our learning has been so far (which sounds very much like the critical discussion we run as one of the assignments on the first module of the PGCert), and then we would 'wing it', doing a 'live' conversation around a recent experience – e.g. I (PL) am to run an Adobe Connect session next week on the PGCert.

HEA conference 2013

The poster and the live session were both very successful (Eagle and Lumsden, 2013). The poster evolved naturally between us, with Laurence providing an outline with speech bubbles, which I looked at and 'saw' a DNA spiral as the scaffold onto which we could attach the speech bubbles. Using Dropbox allowed us to develop the idea effectively.

Our 'talk' also went well:

> *Helen Barefoot (@HelenBarefoot) 03/07/2013 14:44 Very much enjoying seeing @PLumsden & @legal69 having a great conversation about their PGCert developments at respective HEIs #HEAconf13*

And following that we had this email from one of those who attended our session:

> *15.7.13 Had my first meeting with X by Skype this afternoon – inspired by your and Laurence's presentation. It was really productive and useful. PGC Buddies are taking off!*

25 September 2013: Skype

A further Skype session with Laurence which took us into unexpected but very fruitful territory. It actually began as I asked Laurence about his being at home, to which he replied that he was planning his schedule for the whole year. I had intended to discuss the pedagogy of assessment criteria, but at this point Laurence mentioned his preparation for Descriptor 3 of the UK PSF, which took us off down the path of comparing the schemes at our institutions – UCLan is still at a pilot stage, with the intention of using a dialogue route (as for Descriptor 2); Sunderland uses a submission to a panel. This discussion galvanised Laurence to say that he would have a draft of his Descriptor 3 by the time of the Friends of the North meeting in Durham.

So, on to assessment criteria/marking criteria. The context here is that I am writing a document to become part of the University guide to assessment. I explained that I needed to produce something by way of generic criteria, but I wanted these to be clearly separate from the marking criteria, which are linked to specific assignments. My thinking had progressed to the point of using different language, and referring to learning outcomes *per se,* rather than to use any wording associated with cognitive activity. Laurence suggested that the concept of value-added and the evidence for that might be useful, since this was essentially the conceptual model underlying assessment for learning.

We then talked about the 'journey', which we had already talked about with Descriptor 3. This sparked ideas around assessment practice, and the submission of drafts as part of the actual assignment, and to judge the improvement from draft to final submission. This could be referred to in the feedback, but also the student might comment on this as part of their final submission.

Laurence then really got carried away and suggested that a way to further distinguish assessment criteria from marking criteria would be to remove the numerical categories, and to use non-numerical designators such as A, B, C, D – he also sent me a link to the HEA project which will look at alternatives to degree classification. Am now progressing this and will send Laurence an update shortly.

3 March 2014: Phone call

Happy new year, Laurence, as he is about to start a block of two weeks for the PGCert cohort, and I, having just finished a week of level 6 workshops, now have a group progressing to start one of the level 7 modules. Again, the parallels in our development were quite eerie. Laurence is using PGCert graduates to deliver some of the material in that their experiences are now being fed back to the current cohort, and I also have previous participants lined up to deliver some sessions. We've both started using social media more widely; I have set up a Facebook group for the PGCert cohort and Laurence is intending to make use of Twitter during the coming session. All of this links through to a common issue for us, namely building communities of practice within schools/departments. We both have a frustration that the enthusiasm that is developed during the PGCert is not sustained after participants complete the course. We plan to do a final comparison at the end of the month.

Overall reflections

Peter: *This dialogue has happened at a time of considerable change e.g. I am now course leader of the PGCert. Although not frequent it has always provided stimulation and each time I have come away with at least one idea. I can probably identify three significant developments where the dialogue has directly assisted me:*

a) I have become far more intimately involved in the pedagogy of assessment and feedback, both at a practical level within the PGCert course, but have also actively sought ways of contributing within my University e.g. writing a University guide, and running workshops for schools
b) On the PGCert course, our discussion has stimulated me to try different technologies; one assignment is now a blog, which has evolved to a shared blog using the Blackboard blog tool
c) Dialogue as a tool itself within CPD – since my relationship with Laurence began, I have become an assessor for SD2, and have carried out a number of these, and am now on the point of embarking on my own path to D3.

Laurence: *Over the last three years I have changed the culture of my PGCert to enhance the student experience and this has led to a greater achievement rate on the programme (32% to 100% successful completion of the programme). These steps have included: use of online critical incident diaries to give timely and individual feedback to new staff as they progress through their first year of teaching; the rewriting of course handbooks to be more student centred; regular social meetings to develop group cohesion and identity; individual meetings with staff to discuss problems/issues; and a new approach to classroom teaching in that I became part of the student cohort for sessions I was not teaching, thus allowing me to become an active participant in the delivery of the Programme's learning outcomes.*

All of these developments stem directly or indirectly from the dialogues I have been having with Peter as can be seen from these discussion notes. Our shared academic backgrounds seem to have allowed us to form and sustain a partnership even when our institutional environments might have worked against us (Lee, 2004). Our shared culture has allowed us to reinforce our academic identities even in times of great change (Becher, 1990; Henkel, 2005), and achieve curricular enhancements that we would not have gained without our continuing collaboration (Briggs, 2007; Eagle and Lumsden, 2013).

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International consultancy: Reflections on, and implications for, educational development

Mike Laycock, HE Consultant

For a number of years now I have undertaken consultancy in countries as disparate in culture and educational traditions as Indonesia, India, and the Western Balkans. Although most of these have not involved acting directly as an educational developer, they have challenged my preconceptions and sometimes confirmed many of my own assumptions and beliefs about educational development. I have learnt from people with whom I have worked and have offered observations that I have hoped were culturally relevant, in spite of my own western European norms and values.

The consultancy example I would like to draw on to exemplify my reflections on these issues involved my role in evaluating the effectiveness of a Tempus project in 2012 which, ambitiously, was attempting to introduce service learning into five universities in two countries in the Middle East – Lebanon and Jordan. The project became known by its Arabic name 'Tawasol' (implying continuous, seamless human communication and connection). I have included recorded comments of staff and students in interviews undertaken at the time to illustrate these reflections.

Tawasol

The project was to support the creation of effective cross-curricula service learning and 'civic engagement centres' in Jordan and Lebanon through utilising the specialist expertise and resources of EU universities. This

consortium of nine universities (4 EU, 3 Jordanian and 2 Lebanese) was involved in putting this application together, led by a university in the United Kingdom. To my knowledge, none of the university representatives, including the project coordinators, had a formal background in educational development but each faced what developers face in attempting to introduce new models of learning in their own institutions.

In addition to establishing these centres the Tawasol Project was to engage in the 'training and education of administrative and academic staff' in delivering service learning and civic engagement partnerships and programmes; the preparation and training of students; the establishment of effective community engagements and partnerships with enterprises; and the promotion of cross-cultural learning and understanding.

From its inception, then, a number of assumptions concerning educational development were made – and principally that 'Centres' would further the cause of the service learning project and that staff development was key to successful implementation.

Since my evaluation was conducted in the final year of this 3-year project I was keen to see whether their experience had added anything to these initial assumptions.

Service learning

Service learning involves students in community projects addressing and contributing to the wellbeing of local and national communities. Unlike volunteering it is formally assessed and is credited towards the student's course. The initial Tempus grant application claimed that:

> *'Service-learning, as a pedagogical methodology, began in the US but has, since relatively humble beginnings in the early 1980s, been exported across the globe [and that] Jordan and Lebanon will be seen as an exemplar of the trend to greater university and local community engagement in universities around the world.'*

There have been some rather grand transformational claims about service learning. Butin's (2006) analysis 'reveals some of the fundamental and underlying assumptions of the service-learning field'. He notes that much discussion views:

> *'The notion of service-learning as an overarching and transformative agent of social change and social justice in higher education and society more generally by focusing on three specific claims made by the service-learning movement – that service-learning is a means (a) to transform pedagogy, (b) to usher in a more democratic and socially just politics in higher education, and (c) to redirect post-secondary institutions outward toward public work rather than inward toward academic elitism.'* (Butin, 2006, p. 478)

The cultural portability of service learning

In acknowledging this grand narrative what initially intrigued me about the project was the assumption that service learning, having US origins, was deemed culturally portable to universities in the Middle East despite Tempus officials suggesting that the project proposal 'did not demonstrate why the concept of service learning and civic engagement was particularly important for the partner countries'.

However, it became clear that, in the main, partners were clear about the importance of service learning but with notable differences between them. In the Lebanon, service learning seemed to have a strong political impetus to its development and success. By contrast, service learning in Jordan seemed to be directed towards national pride and helping the advancement of the country. For example, when asked why he had become involved in service learning a computing student said:

> *'It's my country so I have to be involved. There is a need for developing these systems in our country.'* (Student: Jordan)

It was clear from the evaluative research that each institution in Jordan and Lebanon had its own institutional culture and that it was important for each to develop their own understanding of the importance of service learning.

The project certainly demonstrated that service learning can find enthusiastic support across divergent cultural, political and religious boundaries, though different cultural interpretations can and do occur within institutions, between institutions in the same country and between different countries in the Middle East. Extrapolation from this general principle of generating local meaning would mean that most/many educational development projects will find greater support once the project has acknowledged that meaning for particular institutions/faculties/departments/disciplines.

Dealing with traditional academic cultures and institutional resistance

Even with the backing of European funding, project representatives found the introduction of service learning a complicated task in terms of traditional academic cultures. This is acknowledged in the literature. Zlotkowski (1995), for example, has asserted that the institutionalisation of service learning requires institutions to go far beyond implementation issues and will ultimately depend on the complete 'transformation of a set of elitist, self-referential academic assumptions' (Zlotkovski, 1995, p. 130). Staff admitted that:

> *'There are major tensions in importing the idea of service learning to the Middle East. We need to speak frankly and openly about the limitations. In this part of the world which has all the problems you can imagine, still the universities think they are towers for the élite.'* (Staff: Lebanon)

Of special interest to me was how relative novices in both service learning and/or educational development dealt with inevitable feelings of peripheral participation in the dominant socio-cultural life of their universities when the legitimacy of their pedagogical, social and political beliefs in terms of service learning was sometimes in

question. Underwood *et al.* (2000) also noted these difficulties and complexities for developers in:

> *'Confronting institutional resistance and opportunity, of testing the boundaries of their knowledge of the institution in which they work and its resilience or impenetrability.'* (Underwood *et al.,* 2000, p. 11)

The development of 'Civic Engagement Centres'

Would the establishment of Civic Engagement Centres be without controversy? Certainly there seemed to be more institutional persuasion required than just the initial financial outlay:

> *'We said (to the President) we need to have a task force to see if there is enough interest. This engages all the faculty members. The long term goal is to try and initiate a Centre.'* (Staff: Lebanon)

> *'Because of the diversity of the colleges we have at the university, to have our own centre is a good idea but it will have to take into consideration the nature of teaching in each school.'* (Staff: Jordan)

The only private university in the project had other concerns in its recognition for the need for a Centre:

> *'It's difficult to persuade the University. It's important to have a central Centre...but we are academics and they are the owners and they have to see the economic benefits. We could make an economic study and try to justify it...'* (Staff: Jordan)

At one university in Lebanon, the Centre began without EU funding. Community outreach had always been an institutional function. Its approach was 'project driven' reducing the workload for departments:

> *'Establishing projects and community partners is a major part of our work and we have many with whom we work on a weekly basis. So we work with departments on certain projects – like working with the Landscape Department.'* (Staff: Lebanon)

Mission/strategic plans

Many were clear that the long-term success of service learning was, to an extent, dependent on a strategic approach to its development. Some felt that it would be important to refer to the mission of the university but that this did not guarantee progress which in some cases was challenging:

> *'Despite the fact that the first statement of our mission is to serve the community in many ways.'* (Staff: Jordan)

> *'We needed to convince the President and this wasn't easy because there are a few misunderstandings among the senior staff so we struggled. But the idea of community service is in the central mission of this University historically.'* (Staff: Lebanon)

> *'It needs to be in the strategic plan of the School. All Schools here have a strategic plan. If it is in the strategic plan then there should be something measurable...say in 2020 we should have 50% of our courses with service learning.'* (Staff: Jordan)

These views are supported by the literature. Holland (2009), for example, has noted that:

> *'For the service movement to be sustained and institutionalized, each institution must develop its own understanding of the degree to which service is an integral component of the academic mission.'* (Holland, 2009, p. 30)

And that:

> *'Every institution needs to establish a clear and definitive statement of mission that reflects its own goals. Even more important is the need for strong leadership to ensure that the energy and ambition of faculty and staff are engaged in the fulfilment of that mission.'* (Holland, 2009, p. 31)

The assumption of staff development

The original Tempus bid placed emphasis on the supposed importance of staff development in securing the embedding of service learning in the participating universities, creating a core membership with the awareness and skills to drive change from course level upwards and outwards across the universities. Workshops, held in various locations, were a key facet of the project and were well received by staff from all partner institutions. Though staff development was successful they questioned the extent to which such development was a necessary, but not necessarily sufficient, lever for change:

> *'I think the staff development side of it has been very successful but how quantifiable that has been in terms of reform of the curriculum I'm not sure. Now I'm being more prescriptive and we are now gathering documentation and asking what is on that course and how is it embedded.'* (Co-Director, UK)

Within institutions – 'Top down' and 'bottom up' development

Two basic implementation models seemed to be in evidence across the partnership. The first was reliant on individual enthusiasm from individual members of staff, usually encouraged by the co-ordinators:

> *'It's important to start with the right people. When I chose people I spoke to students and asked who is the closest person to them in their faculty. I really wanted people to believe in the idea so I interviewed people to see if they were motivated.'* (Staff: Jordan)

> *'It should start from the department. As long as you keep it optional everyone will support it. If it's mandatory it will be challenged. Service learning needs to be part of each discipline rather than a common course for the University.'* (Staff: Jordan)

Though this tactic was instrumental in allowing more and more individual examples to be developed in a wide range of disciplines, staff recognised that further progress was dependent on persuading senior managers of the value of service learning for their university:

> *'If we convince the President we might have more strategic development but having individual initatives will not work on a larger scale or long term.'* (Staff: Jordan)

> *'The administration needs to encourage people to do it. At the moment it's ''If you're interested you can do it; if not, don't do it''. Awareness is only one condition for integration.'* (Staff: Jordan)

Workload

There were some caveats to the staff development/awareness tactic with an individualistic, voluntary 'goodwill' approach to development. Workload was an issue if the use of the Tempus funding was less than transparent:

> *'My colleagues are not interested because teachers in my university and in Jordan are overloaded. This is like extra work. I had to do it and I had to work at nights, talk to other people, talk to managers to get permission and so on.'* (Co-Director: Jordan)

Recognition and reward

Second, the importance of recognition and reward, particularly promotion for staff, was identified as key to the long-term development and success of service learning in all the partner universities:

> *'Unless it becomes directly part of the credit for promotion – how much you did was service learning – then I don't think it will spread widely and it will remain a personal initiative.'* (Staff: Jordan)

> *'Motivating people is very important and if faculty could be rewarded with a certificate or an award because there is a lot of work involved and people say why should I do extra work – for what?'* (Staff: Jordan)

Research v teaching

Third, many recognised that standard promotion routes were governed by disciplinary research rather than research into service learning:

> *'The promotion process is based on how many papers you have written. We have no promotional basis in terms of service learning so this does not encourage faculty to work with the community even in their research.'* (Staff: Lebanon)

> *'Because I am in the engineering department my research should be in the engineering field. Research into service learning would be "supporting research" (and) all this work I cannot put in my file for promotion in the engineering field. So that's frustrating.'* (Staff: Jordan)

Student support and involvement

Within each institution students were invited to make presentations both to students and staff on the work they have been undertaking and its value to them and to their work on the course. My evaluation further recommended that additional awards for students were considered such as Citizenship/ Service Learning awards. Staff recognised the importance of students as ambassadors for service learning:

> *'We need to do more about spreading the word. We just need students to talk about their work. I could speak for hours but it would be nothing like how students speak from the heart about what they did.'* (Staff: Jordan)

Assessment of service learning

Faculty commented that service learning involved them in reviewing their assessment procedures and, for some, moving outside of the 'comfort zone' of their standard processes and procedures:

> *'We need to change the assessment too. We need to know that students are learning something not just doing service learning.'* (Co-Director: Jordan)

As has been noted, a further assumption of the grant application was that service learning would find take-up in a wide variety of disciplinary settings such as education, environmental sciences, health sciences, human rights, technology and engineering. However, Butin has argued that service learning has found its application only in a small range of specific disciplines:

> *'Campus Compact's (2004) annual membership survey shows the following departments with the highest offering of service-learning courses: education (69%), sociology (56%), English (55%), psychology (55%), business/accounting (46%), communications (46%),and health/health related (45%).'* (Butin, 2006, p. 479)

Assessment raised challenging issues for staff, particularly those for whom assessment of reflection had never been part of the process in their discipline:

> *'For Education, the assessment of reflection is more usual but for us technical people we know one plus one equals two! In the technical disciplines I don't think it will be easy to do the assessment because we don't normally assess on that basis.'* (Staff: Jordan)

Reflections

The evaluation of the Tawasol project confirmed a number of principles about the nature of educational development I have held for many years and that these principles are perhaps universal and have relevance and application in very different educational systems and cultures:

- Progress in educational development is managed more easily if those encouraged to introduce it see its relevance to their own institutional/ disciplinary culture
- Staff who may be novices in the practice of educational development learn through experience how to deal with institutional peripherality through a range of tactics

designed to reduce resistance. These tactics are fundamental to most developments, not just service learning. They include encouraging:

- the inclusion of the development in mission statements/strategic plans
- the engagement and support of senior managers
- increasing staff involvement through rewarding activities in promotion and recognition
- the building of centres/ structures specifically to promote and support the development
- student ambassadors for the development promoting it through presentations/ publications
- revised assessment policies and strategies, if required, to acknowledge the development.

Perhaps more interesting is that these tactics seem to be universal in encouraging the institutionalisation of service learning. Furco's (2002) work, for example, offers a systematic rubric for gauging incremental progress. He operationalises institutionalisation across five distinct dimensions 'which are considered by most service-learning experts to be key factors for higher education service-learning institutionalization' (Furco, 2002, p. 1):

- Philosophy and mission
- Faculty support and involvement
- Student support and involvement
- Community participation and partnerships
- Institutional support.

Finally, the matrix (Table 1), right, has been designed both to reflect how staff in the Middle East saw developmental progress locally and to offer a broad template based on their reflections and my own in terms of how an engaged institution could demonstrate its commitment to any large-scale educational development. Since community participation is specific to service learning it has not been included in this general matrix.

	Full engagement	High engagement	Low engagement
Mission/ strategic plans	Development is central to mission and/or institutional strategic plans	Development is an element of some faculty strategic plans	Development is not mentioned in mission or faculty strategic plans
Managerial support	Clear support for development from senior management in all relevant institutional communications	Some senior management involved in development	Senior management have little knowledge of, nor involvement in, development
Organisation structure	Bespoke centre/ institute which promotes/supports development	Designated and dedicated Faculty administration to support development	Few designated structures/ administration to promote/support development
Staff involvement	Institutional staff awareness of development is high and apparent in curriculum design and interdisciplinary and collaborative work	Staff awareness of development is present in some Faculties and apparent in curriculum design	Staff are unaware of development in the majority of Faculties and Departments
Promotion/ recognition	Research into development is included in criteria for hiring and promotion/rewards	Guidelines exist for documenting and rewarding/ recognising development	Development is not mentioned in promotion/rewards guidelines
Student involvement	Students encouraged to be ambassadors for development by making institutional presentations/ publishing *etc.*	Students encouraged to promote development in Faculty/ Departmental events/meetings	Students not encouraged to promote development within or outside institution
Assessment	Development is acknowledged in revised institutional assessment strategies/policies	Development is acknowledged in changed and agreed departmental/ faculty practices	Development is not acknowledged in assessment

Table 1 Indicators of an Engaged Institution

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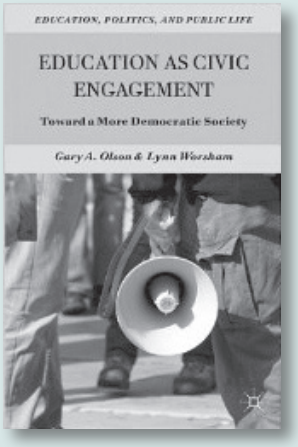
Book Review

Education as Civic Engagement – Toward a more democratic society



Gary A. Olson and
Lynn Worsham (eds.)

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Palgrave Macmillan, 2012
ISBN: 9781137033697

Reference to Satan in the opening of the book immediately grabs the reader's attention; we learn that US presidential candidate Rick Santorum 'long connected higher education to the work of Satan' (p. ix). Furthermore, 'populist rage on the right is aimed at the educated not the wealthy, in spite of inequality, insecurity, and impoverishment' (p. xi). Later there is reference to a widely circulated report, 'Defending civilization: how our universities are failing America and what can be done about it' (p. 97). Such bombardment, together with the aftermath of 9/11, forms the backdrop for the ten essays selected from the *Journal of Advanced Composition* (JAC). These essays construct a powerful and impassioned assault on the values and practices of corporate, market-driven higher education. Collectively, they argue for education as civic engagement, which as Susan Searls Giroux puts it, 'revitalises the relationship between the university and public life...Educators must not only demystify those forms of knowledge that undermine democratic social relations, but also provide opportunities for students to engage in public discourses, deliberations, and social relations that put into place democratic identities, practices, and values' (p. 41).

The authors are well up to making the case for education as civic engagement – equipped as they are with critical pedagogic perspectives and disciplinary backgrounds including English, humanities, philosophy and cultural studies. The book is divided into three parts: 'Historical Perspectives', 'Emerging Trends' and 'Towards a Pedagogy of Hope'. A limitation of the collection, from a non-US perspective, is the focus of each section being almost entirely on the US. The editors might usefully have excised the rationale given by one contributor for focusing solely on the American university, 'because it is acknowledged to be the dominant institution in the world today that governs other countries' expectations of the university ' (p. 54). That aside, readers from all parts of the world can engage with the stimulating theoretical explorations and insights which transcend geography; these include considerations of major international cultural and critical pedagogy theorists, for example, Bourdieu, Gramsci, Dewey and Freire. Educational developers, independent of their geography, might have a warm response to all this; after all, promoting critical inquiry and collaboration are key aspects of what we do. But how to respond to John W. Presley, 'Even now, more scientization...in the guise of assessment is aimed at holding teachers and faculty "empirically" responsible for teaching measurable simplistic outcomes' (p. 305)?

The book would benefit from including more examples of critical pedagogy in practice. An 'Afterword' seems to recognise this, drawing attention to the American Democracy Project. Inevitably a collection of journal articles lacks the overall coherence of a set of commissioned book contributions. Yet it is the passionately argued-for role of critical pedagogy which gives the book consistency and purchase. Here civic engagement is not bolt-on activity for students; rather there is recognition that civic engagement has to be striven for and centred at the core of student learning to build and sustain democracy. This collection merits careful study.

Kristine Mason O'Connor is Emeritus Professor Higher Educational Development at the University of Gloucestershire and **Lindsey McEwen** is Professor of Environmental Management at the University of the West of England.

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What are the student academic representatives of 2014-15 prioritising?

Debbie McVitty, NUS

Over the summer students' union elected officers are likely to attend an NUS residential training event to develop themselves as representatives, build networks with student sabbatical officers in other institutions and grow their understanding of national policy issues and NUS campaign priorities. One of our events is called Education and Representation and it is targeted at students elected into education or academic affairs roles in their unions.

The overriding theme of the course is making change in education and to do that we make participants do all kinds of uncomfortable things like research a policy topic and prepare a paper, blog or video on their findings, all in the course of three hours. We make them pretend to be a Vice-Chancellor or university finance manager and make tough decisions about how to respond to external policy change. We give them a whistle-stop tour of quality, pedagogy, student experience, fair access and the myriad of other topics they will be called upon to be knowledgeable about in their roles.

But the course is not just for them. Each of these attendees comes from a different institution in the UK and each was elected by students with a mandate for lobbying for change in their education. By analysing their manifestos we gain an insight into what is bothering students right now (or at least, their elected representatives). I make no claim to scientific accuracy in the following paragraphs – we simply read their manifestos and logged their identified priorities. Of the 85 delegates to the course we were able to identify at least one priority for 63 of them and the majority of these had three distinct priorities.

The first thing that strikes you is the sheer diversity of things that student representatives care about. If anyone ever makes grand claims about 'what students want', be sure to tell them that in 2014-15 alone students identified 83 different concerns from Academic Societies to Widening Participation by way of Bursaries, Community, E-Books, Fair Pay, Global Learning Partnerships, Mentoring, Postgraduate Facilities, Reading Weeks, Student-led Learning and Virtual Learning Environment. Truly our sector is as diverse as they say.

Encouragingly for the educational development community, a significant number named Teaching and Learning (or Learning and Teaching) as an area of priority work. Study resources also make an appearance, with students manifesting particular concern about study space. Increasingly a concern for equality and diversity is perceived as part of the job of an academic representative, with students citing disability, fair access and inclusive curricula as among their priority concerns. Some concerns, admittedly, caused some scratching of heads – including the officer who, opaquely, identified 'Transparency' as a key priority. Another cited Social Justice, which is heartening in this era of marketisation and offers a pleasing counterweight to the student officer who prioritised Value for Money.

Technology is a growing area of concern, particularly the ever-controversial lecture capture. Representatives are keen to ensure that lectures are available to students who are unable (or perhaps unwilling) to attend in person. There is an opportunity here to harness the disruptive power of technology to more constructive ends than merely giving students another excuse to skip the lecture. Lecture capture is of course valuable for students with specific learning needs and those on shift work but there may be a larger conversation to be had about whether technology could support achieving the intended learning outcomes from a lecture in a more creative way than simply posting a recording. Or even to challenge the idea that the lecture is the primary vehicle for learning in higher education.

Despite all this infinite variety of student concern, three issues stand far above the rest, and these will surprise almost nobody. In reverse order these are: Employability, Assessment and Feedback and Student Voice. It is perhaps, unsurprising that elected students' union officers focus on student voice; this is after all one of the core purposes of a students' union and in the sphere of academic representation normally falls to the education officer to oversee. But it might also indicate the widespread need for a more rigorous consideration of student voice concepts and practices; as higher education delivery and students diversify, the 'student on a committee' model is creaking ominously.

Given the amount of effort invested in assessment and feedback in recent years it might be disappointing to see students continue to identify it as an area for development. But a more positive spin is that students recognise its importance. They want the parts of their learning experience that contribute the most directly to their success to be good – whatever that means. More than that, they want to have a say in what their learning looks like. Finally, they want to be confident that they will be prepared to face the outside world when they have completed their qualification.

Dr Debbie McVitty is the Head of Further and Higher Education at the National Union of Students.

Creating an online portfolio for SEDA Fellowship

Susannah Quinsee, City University, London

Rather longer ago than I care to remember I attended a development session on preparing my SEDA fellowship portfolio. After discussing various techniques for reflection and the kind of evidence that we might use we were invited to view some successful portfolios. Turning around, I was confronted by a table groaning with mighty tomes of paperwork. In black forbidding folders. I summoned the strength to lift one of these and nearly collapsed under the weight. Once opened, though, the portfolios were full of vibrant, engaging material, but also complicated systems of cross-referencing and tables to ensure that all the evidence was cross-matched to the right criteria. Whilst obviously representing a tremendous effort and culmination of work, I wasn't convinced that presenting the evidence in this manner really did justice to the thought and inter-connectedness of the work submitted. There must be a different way, I thought, and vowed to find it.

A year later, and with woefully little completed on my portfolio, I discovered I was pregnant with twins about the same time that I grasped the fact that the fellowship route was changing. Both these circumstances required me to knuckle down and complete my portfolio with a rather hard and non-negotiable set of deadlines. Furthermore, the dreaded black plastic portfolio folder had arrived, sitting glowering at me from under my desk, chiding me for my lack of progress. Something had to be done.

The idea of creating an e-portfolio appealed to me, not just because I wanted to do something different, but also because all my work is so located in the digital environment. Having a background in e-learning too, I seemed to owe it to my work and profession to present my portfolio in digital form. It'll be a piece of cake, I thought to myself.

My requirements for a digital portfolio were as follows:

- Be quick and easy to use
- Ability to upload a range of files – pdf, Office suite, images
- Link to external web pages
- Create narrative pieces around each file
- Link files in multiple ways
- Tag files to enable cross-referencing
- Enable a limited set of users to view the content but not edit it
- Ensure the content is available for a considerable period of time
- Ideally not incur any additional cost or licences
- Have internal navigation to signpost my examiners through my content
- 'Home' or 'landing' page that introduced the portfolio.

I should also add at this point that I had decided, with help from my mentor (thanks Shân Wareing), to write my narrative as a 'year in the life of'. This was a great format as it enabled me to cover all the criteria but in a more natural way. It also avoided repetition and made it easier to ensure that I covered all the requirements with a variety of examples. This was particularly useful for ensuring that the SEDA values were covered. It is a useful way to structure the work as the narrative flow I found more fluid and I would recommend it. It does mean, however, that you need considerable cross-referencing and the ability to link files in multiple ways.

My initial plan was to use a dedicated portfolio tool. I was drawn to Mahara. As the company's website proudly proclaims:

> *'Mahara is a fully featured web application to build your electronic portfolio. You can create journals, upload files, embed social media resources from the web and collaborate with other users in groups.'* (Mahara.org)

This seemed to fit exactly what I wanted. I could upload files. I could embed external resources. There seemed to be the ability to add in external users. It is open source, there are lots of free sites. Great.

No, not great. Two hours later, and nearly in tears, I would have been quite happy if I never heard of Mahara again (apologies if you are a lover of it, we just didn't have the chemistry). I have to add the caveat at this point that Mahara may have developed since, as it was three years ago that I was attempting to shoehorn my portfolio into it. My first problem was that I found it very hard to work out how to link files together. I could upload things easily enough but couldn't find them again. Secondly, my structure for describing and analysing my year just wouldn't work as I couldn't link files into multiple places with a narrative. However, my biggest problem was that I couldn't tag files to create a tag cloud which would enable the reviewers to just click on the particular value or descriptor and easily see all the evidence. I found it really hard to work out whether my files were public or not and who had access. I think Mahara would be great if you are just uploading files without needing to create a framework around them in terms of a narrative or presenting that framework to others.

The other big problem I encountered with Mahara was that although there are indeed many free sites, they are often limited in functionality. In order to get the file storage I required – a SEDA portfolio can be rather large, particularly if you are including presentations and images – I needed to

subscribe to a service. If you use marhara.org any content you create expires within twenty four hours, so you have to go elsewhere. I found it hard to know on some sites whether the content I was creating was public or not and how to control the access. Although other subscription services gave me additional functionality, and greater ability to control access to my content, they come with a cost attached. Some of the issues I experienced may have been linked to the control of various functions on the subscription sites I was using. Then there are issues about what access you get and what tools are available through different services. One particular issue is that you are often very limited on the style and templates you can use which limits your ability to personalise your portfolio. I think I must have created about four or five different portfolios with different sites before I resigned myself to the fact that this wasn't going to work. Sorry Mahara – it's not you…it's me…

Still determined to use a portfolio tool (that black folder was looking decidedly smug under my desk) I then thought I would use Pebblepad. We had an institutional licence for Pebblepad at City and have a couple of fantastic Pebblepad superusers in my team. Pebblepad describes itself as a 'personal learning system' (pebblepad.co.uk) and is very popular in a number of UK Universities. I have to admit that whilst I have dabbled with Pebblepad in the past I have never been a great fan as I have found it rather counter-intuitive to the way I wanted to work. However, I have heard very good things about it and I thought that perhaps I had just been trying to use it for the wrong thing. Writing a portfolio for SEDA must surely be a good application of the software, right?

Wrong. Again I found myself increasingly frustrated by the inability to link files and create a narrative around them. Admittedly I was able to do more on Pebblepad than I had been able to achieve with Mahara but it just didn't fit my style in terms of the year-in-the-life-of narrative with links to other applications. On the positive side, you can tag files, which is a big plus in terms of portfolio creation. I also got in quite a mess about access and presentation. It took a long time to upload files and then I would lose track of where I was. I should of course add the caveat that Pebblepad may have moved on over the past three years, but at that point it just didn't give me the flexibility.

One issue that I found myself exploring in my use of both these tools, but particularly something that has bothered me with institutionally managed portfolios, is the issue of ownership. When we first introduced Pebblepad into City, one of the drivers was the ability for students to create content that they could then take with them when they graduated. And I think that Pebblepad has been great in terms of a very user-driven system in the way that the user owns and manages their content. However, this has often been at odds with the University's desire to assess and oversee that content when it is used as part of an assessment, which was often the main driver behind students needing to create accessible portfolios. There seems to be an inherent contradiction or tension in many e-portfolio systems that are provided by institutions – the institution provides the system which seems to imply some kind of ownership but the very nature of an e-portfolio is that it is user-driven and determined. Although not coming up against this in a strong way as part of this work, I was aware of that tension in trying to create something that was ostensibly my own portfolio but required viewing, accessing and assessment by an external agency. There are also additional complexities around limiting the entire portfolio, in some e-portfolio systems, to small groups of users or complex processes in which you can limit access to various files but not all.

After discounting both these e-portfolio systems, I was rather at a loss as to how to proceed. A simple website? A big Word document? My colleague, who was completing her fellowship application at the same time, was proudly filling her black binder and printing out reams of evidence with aplomb, which berated my lack of progress. I seemed incapable of proceeding at all with my fellowship application until I had found the right tool. In the meantime, the twin bump was growing larger, a physical manifestation of the clock ticking towards the deadline.

It was at this point that my partner suggested I look at Wordpress. An IT geek, at his own admission, he had used Wordpress for a while and indeed I had played around with it at various points, as well as having a rather neglected blog (www.sqhq.co.uk). I wasn't convinced. I thought that Wordpress was a rather flat structure for blogging and wouldn't enable the file management or content management that the e-portfolio systems offered me. I had an account at wordpress.com as I had created a blog for an extended trip to America a couple of years before so that I could update the team back home as to what I was up to.

Wordpress is probably the best known, free and open-source blogging tool, however, it has developed into a relatively sophisticated content management system. It also has an inherent bias towards social media integration, due to it being a blogging platform, and this means that it has a number of neat integration features in terms of social media as well as the ability to plug in additional tools. For example, you can create tag clouds easily in Wordpress and link between items on your blog with relative ease. This was a big plus for me as I really wanted to create a tag cloud so that my examiners could easily find out which evidence pieces related to the descriptors.

The other thing I immediately liked about Wordpress was that I could name the URL for my blog – so I was able to create a whole site dedicated to my SEDA portfolio. This meant that I wasn't confused as to the content and knew that I had everything I needed in one place.

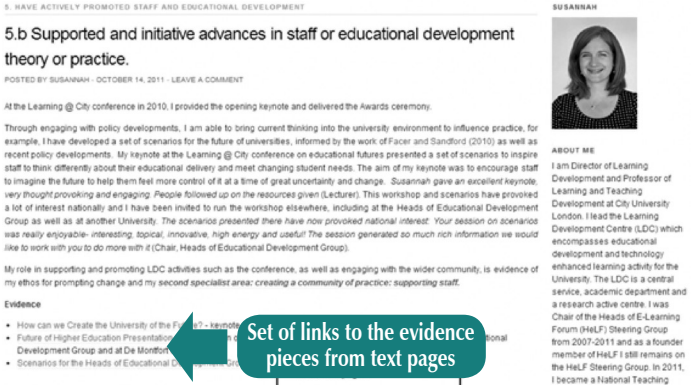
Playing with Wordpress enabled me to more coherently articulate my design requirements, as demonstrated by the screen shots below.

It did not take long for me to set up the Wordpress page as I wanted. Uploading content did take a little longer but I was able to organise my thoughts as I went along and work out which key evidence pieces I required, then link them into

different files. I was very happy with the internal navigation which did involve a little bit of HTML work but nothing overly geeky! I also liked the fact I could create a customised and coherent home page or landing page where I was able to introduce myself and my portfolio (demonstrated in screen shot 1). This has been a challenge in some of the e-portfolio tools I used.

Screen shot 1 Home page

Tagging content enabled the range of items that covered a particular value to be easily found. Furthermore I could categorise material too so if the examiner selected a particular outcome they could easily see all the pages relating to that particular outcome, as demonstrated in screen shot 2.

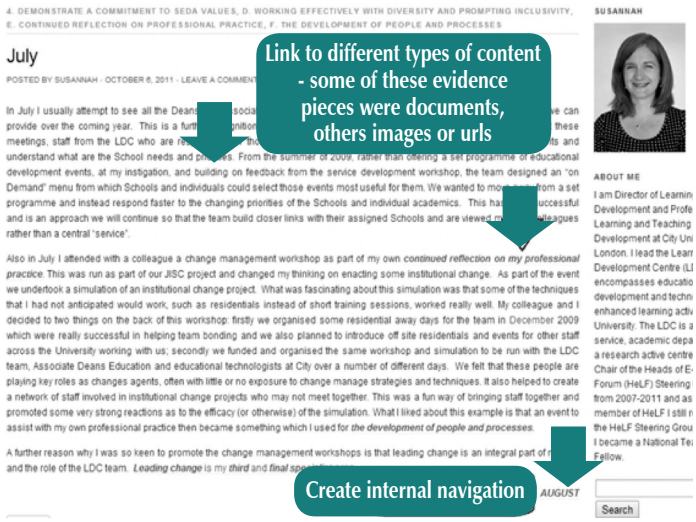


Screen shot 2 Evidence linking to outcomes

This mixed mode use of evidence should have been enabled by a portfolio tool but the sheer amount of evidence and complexity of multiple mapping made it much more difficult. Wishing to determine the internal navigation also complicated the use of a standard e-portfolio tool, as demonstrated in screen shot 3.

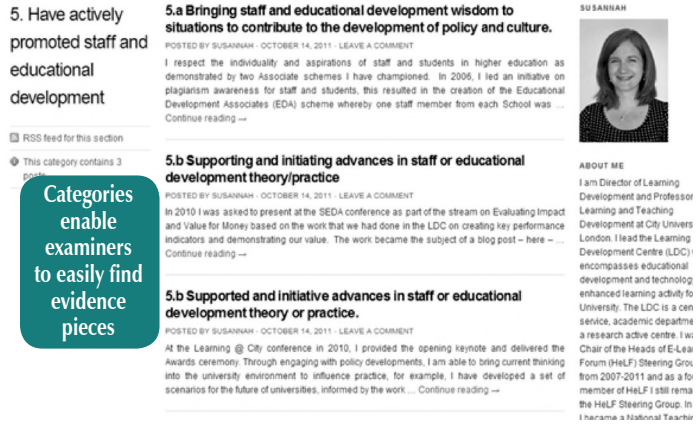
I should also add at this point that I had done a lot of planning in relation to the structure and where I wanted the evidence to be, how evidence related to different outcomes or values, and what examples I was going to use to ensure I demonstrated breadth.

I did try to do a mapping on a grid at various points, but in the end the navigation in Wordpress by using categories and tags enabled me to represent how I met each outcome and value in a way I found more intuitive – as a list! You could add a grid document into Wordpress if you wanted to as it would be just a series of links to relevant content – whether text pages or files.



Screen shot 3 Internal navigation and content linking

Tagging text pages and relevant pieces with the outcomes or values they related to enabled finding of all evidence in one place, but items could also be used in multiple places by just repeatedly linking in. Creating categories also enabled easier navigation and ordering, as demonstrated in screen shot 4.



Screen shot 4 Category view

I was also easily able to limit access to my examiners, although they did have to validate their accounts – this was relatively straightforward.

I had thought a lot about how I wanted to structure my content and although I had to alter this a little to compensate for the features of Wordpress, this tool did give me the most flexibility in terms of structure and ease of use.

In conclusion, then, I would recommend Wordpress as a tool if you are considering a digital portfolio. I would also suggest that you spend a lot of time thinking about the structure of your work and what story or narrative you are creating. The 'day in the life of' worked really well for me as it enabled me to create my story of my role in an easy to structure fashion. So I would urge you to take the plunge and go digital for your portfolio!

Top tips for creating a (digital) portfolio

- Think carefully about your requirements.
- Have a look at other portfolios – paper-based and online – to determine your requirements.
- Explore different tools and try them out early on – do not commit until you are sure all your requirements can be met, in case you find that you need to change things later.
- Map out your structure and where your evidence will go in graphical form – I spent a lot of time with large sheets of paper and post-its!
- Don't be worried that you have to be an IT expert (or a geek!) to engage in an e-portfolio; it does not have to be technically hard if you have done your planning.
- Think carefully about the story you want to tell and how your portfolio will support this.

Professor Susannah Quinsee is Director of the Learning Development Centre at City University, London.

Information for Contributors

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Educational development in Canada and the UK

Celia Popovic, York University, Toronto

Taken from blog in April 2012 –

> *'I'm in two minds about recommending a transfer to university in Canada – obviously the big pull for Rad and I would be to have B on the same continent as us, then there is the matter of fees. In the past North America was horribly expensive compared with the UK – but with the recent hike in fees in the UK (up to £9,000 per year for students starting this year) the average fee for home students in Canada of around $5,000 per year (£3,000) for domestic students and $15,000 for international students (£10,000) looks quite attractive. You do have to factor in an additional year though, as while most degrees take 3 years in the UK, in Ontario they are 4 years in length as students leave school a year earlier than in Britain. The attraction is even greater if she goes to my own university – as a faculty member fees are waived for my dependents. So that looks like a no brainer. However, B has already started a course at a British university, has settled in well and made plenty of friends.*
>
> *We've looked at the content of the courses in the two places – and again the choice isn't simple – in Britain she is taking French and Spanish – she is in a cohort of students taking the same subjects, there is an element of choice – out of 6 modules per year she has four compulsory modules (two in each language) then she can choose a further two from a wide range of choices including topics not directly connected to her main subjects – for instance European Film. She will end up after 4 years (the third year will be spent in French and Spanish speaking countries) with a degree in French and Spanish and should be fluent in both languages.*
>
> *If she transfers here she will take a similar course but with much more choice over modules. As she will join the second year of the program she will end at the same time. There is no year abroad though, so it seems likely her level of fluency will be less at the end of a Canadian degree than a British one.'*

While it is fairly easy to research fees and course content it is less easy to find out about the culture in the university and the attitude to teaching and learning. In the four months I've been here I've started to notice significant differences between Canada and the UK. It seems to me that Canadian universities illustrate what might have happened in the UK had we not seen the end of tenure, the creation of post-92 universities and the smashing of unions.

All three of these changes were brought about by the Conservative Government led by Margaret Thatcher who in 1979 became the first (and so far only) female prime minister of Britain. In the 80s, Thatcher's Conservative Government changed the face of British society by smashing union power, all in the name of improving the 'flexibility' of the labour pool. Universities were included in this change of approach as laws were passed that reduced the power of the unions. Bizarrely these changes were apparently supported by those most affected by them, given that Thatcher was elected as Prime Minister three times.

Also thanks to Thatcher and her government, in the UK we have had the benefit of a tranche of former polytechnics becoming universities. These post-92 (the year of the mass expansion) universities compete with the older institutions to win research grants and some have been very successful, but most will still call themselves teaching-focused. This expansion of teaching-focused universities resulted in the growth of my area – educational development. While there are some highly effective teaching support centres in research-intensive universities, most development in the 90s, at least, occurred in teaching-focused institutions. In the 2000s the Labour Government invested in teaching, formed the Higher Education Academy (with mixed results) and started to change the focus from research-only to teaching and research – and the pre-92s started to pay attention. It is now the norm for a new academic in any UK university to attend some sort of teacher training course. This marks a huge change; when I was a student at Nottingham in the early 80s, for instance, none of my lecturers would have received any sort of teacher training.

When the Conservatives granted university status to the polytechnics, they also reviewed the employment contracts for academics. Until 1992 universities followed a similar tenure process to what is still in place in Canada and the US. Here, over a period of say 6 or 7 years, an academic proves him or herself in the key areas of teaching, research and service. They produce evidence of their work, in the form of a dossier, this is considered by their peers, and if approved the academic is awarded tenure. Tenure means they are now a full member of faculty, and have a job for life. This gives security so that the academic is free to research whatever seems appropriate to them (academic freedom) free from the fear of being sacked by those who fund the university, if they for instance discover uncomfortable truths. This is a good thing for the academics and, many would argue, for academia – particularly knowledge creation – in general. However, it makes it difficult for those trying to bring about change to have much impact. Academics with tenure can do precisely as they please. Academics in the UK no longer have tenure – some may have permanent posts, but many are on renewable contracts. Most research is funded by external grants or supported by teaching funds – so it is possible that 'academic freedom' has been curtailed to an extent in the UK, but I'm not convinced this is the result of the loss of tenure, rather a focusing on where and how limited funds are spent.

As in all universities across the world there are inspirational teachers at my university. However, there is also a pervasive culture of valuing research far more than teaching. For anyone who has worked in a research-intensive university in the UK this won't come as a surprise. Typically, in the UK and in Canada, teaching fees subsidise research activity, but when academics are rated or rewarded research trumps teaching almost every time. In Canada this is particularly true. The argument goes that in order to attract the best academics (for which read researchers) it is important not to overload them with rather dreary undergraduate teaching. However, those making this argument will also claim that active researchers produce wonderful teachers. This can be true, but it is not guaranteed. In fact it is likely to be the opposite, particularly if those active researchers don't enjoy or have a talent for, or heaven forbid have any training in, teaching.

The end result (and forgive me but I've glossed over quite a few of the nuances) is that in Canada we have an educational system that is highly reliant on doctoral students supporting undergraduate courses. So these are students who themselves may have completed the course they are now teaching only a year or two earlier. This is not what was intended when the system was created – these TAs (Teaching Assistants) were usually supposed to support the professors by helping to facilitate discussions and lend a hand with grading papers and exams. In return the TAs received a modest income to help offset the costs of their doctoral studies. Through successive negotiations with strongly supported unions, we now have TAs who are paid generously ($40 per hour), and used extensively – in several universities more than half of all undergraduate teaching is performed by TAs and teachers on short-term contracts. While this frees up the tenured academics to research, it does not necessarily lead to the best undergraduate experience.

One of the many surprises for me is the disconnect between the perception of Britain by Canadians and the respective cultures – several people have referred to Britain as being highly socialist. I think the basis of this is probably the NHS (moment's silence here as we all mourn the passing of that great institution if the news I've heard recently about the Cameron Government's changes are true). My experience so far is that Canada is far more socialist than Britain, certainly in the field of labour relations. In recent weeks the news has been full of various threatened and actual strikes. At the start of the year local government workers threatened to strike; last week librarians pulled out of work (the group of well-dressed rather polite-seeming people milling round the library in Toronto was rather incongruous, but I tooted my support as we drove by); Air Canada pilots pulled a sickie this week (150 phoned in sick in protest at something or other, rather than actually strike as their union did not support strike action); a couple of weeks ago ground staff at Pearson Airport (Toronto) called a wildcat strike for one day; in Montreal the students are striking (I find this one hard to understand, as I can't work out who apart from the students is affected by that action) and my own institution has just avoided a strike by TAs in the latest round of negotiations.

So where does that leave us? Like so much in life there are good and bad aspects to the two systems. I do find the lack of accountability for academics shocking. I've not elaborated on it here, but along with academic freedom Canadian academics are much less likely to have their research output measured – no RAE in Canada. On the other hand the lack of measurements, audit and a general air of not having to look over one's shoulder is refreshing. My job is to try to move the culture of my new institution to one that values teaching more than at present and to support my colleagues in this journey.

Celia Popovic is Director Teaching Commons at York University, Toronto.

SEDA News

New SEDA Fellowship Holders

We congratulate the following individuals who have successfully completed our Supporting and Leading Educational Change course and been awarded Fellowship of SEDA:

Roisin Donnolly FSEDA, Dublin Institute of Technology
Darren Gash FSEDA, University of Surrey
Karen Hamilton FSEDA, Open University
Lisa Hayes FSEDA, University of Bedfordshire
Juliet Hinrichsen FSEDA, University of Greenwich
Deena Ingham FSEDA, Loughborough University
Kathryn James FSEDA, University of Wales, Trinity St David
Tamsin Lister FSEDA, Open University
Giles Martin FSEDA, University of Bath
Fiona McHardy FSEDA, University of Roehampton
Julian Priddle FSEDA, Anglia Ruskin University
Jen Smith FSEDA, Keele University
Penny Sweasey FSEDA, Manchester Metropolitan University

Courses in Supporting and Leading Educational Change 2014-15

SEDA is now taking registrations for its courses in educational change:

- Supporting and Leading Educational Change (Professional Qualification Course), 27 October 2014-13 February 2015
- Online Introduction to Educational Change: a four-week online workshop, 3-28 November 2014 and again from 23 February-20 March 2015

Further details and bookings forms are available on the SEDA website.

19th Annual SEDA Conference

Opportunities and challenges for academic development in a post-digital age

National College Learning and Conference Centre, Nottingham. 13-14 November 2014

Book online at www.seda.ac.uk

The latest SEDA Special

Supporting Higher Education in College Settings

Edited by **John Lea**

£12, from the SEDA website

Contributors: Angus Carpenter (educational consultant); Kay Dutton (University of Chester), Claire Gray (Plymouth University), Eve Rapley (University of Bedfordshire), Jonathan Simmons (University of the West of England), Ellen Thinnesen (Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education) and Rebecca Turner (Plymouth University).

This SEDA Special supports teachers, managers and staff developers who are working in colleges providing higher education either directly or through partnerships with universities. It is also valuable for university staff engaged in these partnerships. It recognises the varied provision of this growing sector and will help college staff who are beginning to provide some higher education courses, as well as those who are seeking to enhance their more established courses.

Each chapter deals with the common questions and themes which arise from considering higher education provided through colleges. These include: capturing HE-ness and nurturing an HE ethos; developing appropriate forms of research and scholarship; enhancing peer observation and reviewing HE practice; conceptualising the nature of knowledge in vocational curricula; and accessing and developing relevant continuing professional development opportunities.

Each chapter considers the context of its theme, critically discusses the relevant issues and gives practical advice on ways to enhance provision. The authors have a depth of knowledge and experience from working in this important sector of higher education, both in the UK and around the world.

SEDA's free online publication

53 Powerful Ideas Every Teacher Should Know About

Professor Graham Gibbs

Based on the rationale that 'thinking about teaching' is at least as important as teaching methods, Professor Graham Gibbs is publishing one 'powerful idea' a week through the Publications pages of the SEDA website (http://www.seda.ac.uk/publications.html?p=5_6).

These thought-provoking texts deserve consideration amongst the higher education community. They are also essential reading for educational developers and participants on PG Certificate courses.

Go to http://thesedablog.wordpress.com/ to comment on the ideas, or follow the discussion on Twitter #53ideas.