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SEDA's response to the Teaching Excellence Framework Technical Consultation

Yaz El Hakim and **Jo Peat,** SEDA Co-Chairs, and **Pam Parker,** SEDA Vice-Chair

SEDA's executive committee agreed that the Association should make a response to the Technical Consultation on the second and subsequent rounds of the proposed Teaching Excellence Framework. The Executive had a presentation from and discussion with Graeme Rosenberg, HEFCE's REF manager, who is involved in implementing the TEF. The full response to the consultation can be found on the SEDA website (see 'About us' then 'Consultation Responses'); what follows is a version edited to suit Educational Developments. *Since this submission was made, Higher Education has been transferred from BIS to the Department for Education.*

SEDA would wish to support a framework which genuinely positions student learning at the centre of HE. Students are at the heart of all that SEDA does and, as a body, SEDA aims to improve student learning and to defend it from any perceived or potential dangers, utilising evidence from our scholarship of, and research into, learning and teaching.

SEDA's central point in its response to the technical consultation is that, in its current form, this is not a teaching excellence framework; rather it is a framework that reflects the provider and the reputation of the institution. It is about provision, not teaching.

SEDA understands that, in order to establish the TEF, it makes practical sense to use existing national metrics; however, SEDA is concerned about the metrics identified and expresses a hope that some of the currently flawed measures will be replaced by potentially much richer, more focused metrics, for example, around learning gain. SEDA would like to commend HEFCE's work on this, which could result in more focused, informative data for measuring the quality of learning and teaching. If the TEF is to be at all meaningful, it must be a developing and developmental process. Currently, the proposed process points strongly to the potential for risk aversion from institutions.

SEDA would be willing to work with BIS and relevant bodies to:

1) Position 'Learning' as a central tenet of such a framework *i.e.* evolving into a 'Learning and Teaching Excellence Framework'

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2) Support the creation of 'appropriate and contemporary evidence' (*i.e.* Figure 4 and Figure 6) (BIS, 2016, pp. 13 and 29) in partnership with other professional bodies/groups (if willing) such as the Heads of Educational Development Group, the Association for Learning Technology and the Principal Fellows of the HEA
3) Create a template for written submissions to guide and focus the responses within the 15-page institutional reports, allowing some autonomy within boundaries, informed by pedagogic literature and evidence
4) Support the development and evaluation of any future metrics aligned to Teaching and Learning Excellence, both in evidence and scholarship e.g. Learning Gain and Analytics.

Broadly speaking, SEDA agrees with the three 'Aspects of Quality', but not with the 'Criteria' suggested for each aspect (Figure 4). These need substantial revision. They appear to be very static and do not position the students centrally and actively, instead relegating them to a position of passivity as recipients of an education that is 'done to them'. SEDA believes fundamentally in a learning community and partnership model, where students are empowered and engaged throughout their time in higher education and in all aspects of the process of higher education. SEDA would like the criteria to move away from a consumer model, where learning is 'provided' by the HEI and 'consumed' by the student. The criteria as they stand could have this focus, but they would need to be rewritten to position centrally the concepts of creativity, the active partnership of student and institution and the developmental process of change. A Teaching Excellence Framework needs greater emphasis on the quality of learning and the engagement required to achieve it.

SEDA suggests that there is a disconnect between the suggested evidence and the criteria proposed. The criteria need to be evidence informed, drawing on the scholarship of teaching and learning, thus grounding them in research findings. The criteria must foreground innovation, as this is key to the global reputation of UK HE.

SEDA also questions the proposed data. Currently this seems to be biased towards quantitative data, based on a positivist epistemology, whereas the triangulation of qualitative data with quantitative is certainly of more benefit in this developmental process. An example is TESTA (Transforming the Experience of Students Through Assessment), used extensively across the HE sector, nationally and internationally, which is premised on the triangulation of data from audits, questionnaires and focus groups to identify and inform development and enhancement. SEDA would like to underline that the HEIs' contextual document is of crucial importance: proper contextualisation is key, as the quantitative metrics are developmentally meaningless in isolation from this.

SEDA would like to reiterate forcefully that the aim of teaching in higher education is learning, not satisfaction. To link satisfaction with quality and associated fees is deeply problematic and will inevitably stymie creativity and innovation. This will result in academics teaching 'safely' and students avoiding risks in their learning and assessments. This is anathema to the true aims of higher education. There should, therefore, be a move away from measures of student satisfaction (which is not a proxy for quality) to measures of engagement (e.g. UKES or NSSE).

A key focus which SEDA feels is missing is that of developmental practice. The current proposals focus on measuring performance at certain points, but development and change are not priorities. SEDA would like to see a focus on how institutions are using the data to take steps to improve rather than merely commenting on data sets. This process should not be about taking snapshots; the 3-year period ought to show improvement annually, in addition to the 3-year averages.

In the same vein, institutional investment in and encouragement for continuing development both of staff and policies should be included to underline institutional commitment to improvements and enhancements. One example of this is the CPD schemes in place for academics and those in academic-related positions, including those leading to qualifications recognised by HESA. Such a dataset would be highly relevant to the TEF metrics and is much more closely related to teaching excellence than, say, employment.

SEDA was fully involved in the development of the UKPSF, which has been in place since 2004 as a benchmark against which to measure teaching performance. It has had a significant impact on teaching and learning across higher education and should therefore play a central role as a source of evidence.

In addition to actual teaching qualifications, a focus on identifying developmental schemes of peer observation of teaching rather than an OFSTED-type approach of grading and judging, is of paramount importance. TEF Assessors must be trained fully to look beyond the actual teaching sessions to the students' total experience of learning, and therefore to include a focus on the ethos and culture around opportunities for staff to engage in development.

The first criterion in the Learning Environment section which centres on the effectiveness of learning resources is reductive, positioning HEIs and academics as being the creators of the learning experience and ignoring the active role of the students. Students must be seen as part of this developmental process. This is an area in which SEDA could contribute significantly. SEDA's strengths are in working with institutions, other national association/bodies and students towards the enhancement of learning in all contexts.

The proposed use of individualised feedback and opportunities for students to reflect and enhance their performances autonomously and independently is admirable. However, evidence from scholarship on effective learning environments and cultures is absent from the criteria and proposed evidence. SEDA would like to see, for instance, a focus on student partnership and peer-assisted student learning and support. Schemes in place to facilitate such approaches contribute significant richness to the student learning environment.

Considering Aspect 3: Student Outcomes and Learning Gain. The employment metric is particularly concerning: if used, a six-month post-graduation data point is too short; this should be at least 12 months and preferably 3 years. Contextualisation is key, and needs to consider, for example, regional factors, disciplinary and professional issues, though we are anxious about how this will be achieved. If the focus were to be on employability outcomes, e.g. graduate attributes, rather than employment per se, this would be more fitting and equitable.

SEDA recommends that a highly skilled employment metric is not part of the TEF. Ultimately this metric is the most problematic of the three, as there is no relationship within the evidence that teaching excellence (however perceived) results in highly skilled employment. HEPI showed that highly paid employment was more related to parental income, and when accounting for institution and subject, still created a 10% premium.

The definition of what is considered 'highly-skilled' is also problematic and dependent to some extent on personal interpretation. Some graduates may actively decide not to enter the established 'highly skilled' sectors and this is certainly no failure. What is classed as a highly skilled graduate job is biased against certain types of work, especially public service, charities, the arts and the caring professions and this will undermine the significant achievements of many institutions. It would be important to see more of a focus on metrics that reflect the graduates' autonomy and career choices.

TEF does not include lifelong and life-wide learning. This is a major omission and should certainly be included. Many students go to university for the joy of learning, not because it has a certain, specific outcome. This must be taken into account and post-graduation engagement with learning, through courses and CPD would also create an interesting reflection on the benefit of the learning experienced previously.

SEDA does not agree with the proposal to use the Standard Occupational Classification of groups 1 to 3 as a measure of graduates entering highly skilled jobs. Nor with the proposal to include all graduates in the calculation of employment/destination metrics.

SEDA agrees with the proposed approach to setting benchmarks, with reservations – for example, benchmarks need to remain fluid. If they become too rigid, they become meaningless, as they do not reflect changes in context and circumstance. SEDA suggests that POLAR quintiles may be effective here and that benchmarking should be used more broadly.

HE has been benchmarking for years but this has not been used effectively to change HE. For example, the NSS may have had some impact on enhancement activity, but it does not seem to have had any discernible impact on the league table rankings. SEDA questions whether a benchmarked TEF will create sufficient disruption to lead to real engagement in activities that will improve learning experiences.

SEDA has reservations over the proposal that TEF metrics should be averaged over the most recent three years of available data. SEDA's proposal is that this should be an annual process to allow for changes to be seen in a more timely manner. This will, however, necessitate a quick and efficient update of data.

SEDA agrees with the proposal of using certain key characteristics of benchmarks; however, there are omissions in the categories that could skew results and/or not provide a sufficiently detailed picture of which factors have the most impact on outcomes. We propose the inclusion of on-campus and off-campus students, as this split has a significant and well-recognised impact on performance and outcome, which may not be picked up through the other categories. There needs to be flexibility and granularity for instances when these characteristics do not apply and it is important to recognise and record intersectionalities. A further suggestion is to include *all* protected characteristics rather than to prioritise a selection. If the decision is to use a selection rather than the whole range, a clear rationale should be provided.

SEDA agrees with the proposed approach to provider submissions. It is vital to recognise the importance of properly evaluated, continually improving provision, supported and evidenced by good educational development units in HEIs. A dynamic teaching, learning and assessment strategy is a good piece of evidence and SEDA would like to see this included in submissions. A strong suggestion would be that each TEF panel should include an educational development expert, as these colleagues have expertise and experience in making judgements about the quality of teaching, both in their own institutions and more widely in others, for example as expert assessors for PG Certificates in HE and UKPSF CPD schemes.

SEDA suggests that a submission template would be helpful for both institutions and panels to suppress the likelihood of a 'hidden template' evolving over time, which would disadvantage a number of institutions and make the consistency of judgements through this process very difficult. SEDA suggests the use of an indicative list of evidence but this must be carefully drafted so that it does not become a list of requirements. Again, this is an area in which SEDA already has significant experience and expertise and would be keen to work with BIS and HEFCE in drafting such a template. A key criterion of 'institutional culture recognises excellent teaching' should be included. SEDA is perfectly placed to work with universities to support them in a proper contextualisation of the metrics.

SEDA thinks 15 pages is reasonable. It is imperative that the 'journey' of the HEI is foregrounded in this document: a developing HEI is preferable to a complacent institution that is unaware of its strengths and areas for improvement and development and, therefore, does not make changes. SEDA suggests the inclusion of evidence such as a strategy for development and enhancement; evaluative evidence of success against it; the development of courses; a dynamic learning, teaching and assessment strategy and implementation plan; and an active continuing professional development policy and culture.

SEDA agrees with the broad areas proposed for the additional evidence, but not with the terminology. The list offered in Figure 6 has a retrospective focus. The emphasis is on 'looking back' rather than on innovation, creativity and future planned development. In order to minimise this, SEDA suggests a focus on the following as evidence of success with associated evaluation:

- Inclusion of the institutional learning, teaching and assessment strategy and implementation/action plan
- The engagement of an institutional Educational Development Unit: its role, reach and position in the institution
- Evidence of successful investment in educational development and the student learning experience
- Institutional approaches to teaching, including the engagement of students in curriculum design; genuine and embedded partnership with students; authentic and active learning and assessment; the proportion of time spent in collaborative learning versus a delivery approach
- Institutional assessment and feedback policies, including instances of self, peer and formative assessment and feedback
- Institutional CPD for academics and those in academic-related roles. Examples of how the institution actively promotes, supports and encourages individuals who excel in educational leadership as well as teaching excellence should be included
- Evidence of institutional support for and encouragement of professional recognition, such as Fellowship of SEDA, engagement with the SEDA-PDF and engagement with the HEA Fellowship scheme.

SEDA would like to highlight the potential pitfall of including 'teaching intensity'. This must not be seen merely as an increase in contact hours. A main aim of HE is to develop autonomous learners, not learners dependent on the academics and traditional transmissive teaching. Additional elements such as peer-assisted learning, peer review, and peer assessment must be included to avoid spoon-feeding students to demonstrate teaching intensity for the purposes of the TEF.

Care must be taken to ensure that this does not become an exercise in generating activities to count as evidence. The focus must remain on the enhancement of learning, not gaming the system. Unfortunately, in practice, the proposed TEF is more likely to encourage institutions to retrench with tried and tested (often mediocre) methods likely to be preferred over innovation and creativity, which often require more substantial changes to the educational culture of an institution and involve some risk.

If there were just two level ratings in the TEF: 'Meets Expectations' and 'Exceeds Expectations', then SEDA would support the award of one commendation. The proposed OFSTED-style three level ratings are poorly worded and structured. Justifying the differences between three different ratings with the proposed words will be difficult. With just two ratings one commendation would allow recognition of a specific strength. If three levels are maintained, there is no justification for any commendations.

SEDA partially agrees with the commendable areas. The impact or influence of these must be evidenced in the narrative of the submission and they must not be anticipatory. Research alone would not be evidence for a commendation; claims that research enhances the student learning must instead be evidenced in the form of research-led teaching that involves the students actively.

SEDA agrees with the proposed assessment process, but is concerned about representation on the TEF panel. We recommend a SEDA presence, or, at the very least, an educational developer on each panel. The specialists who are suggested in this consultation document are not necessarily people with a deep knowledge of teaching and learning. They have expertise in other areas, in particular their discipline and research, but the educational development community is concerned with the quality and enhancement of teaching and learning on a daily basis. Educational developers need to be present on each panel to ensure the focus remains fully on the quality of teaching and learning.

It is of vital importance to reassure the sector that assessors will be able to come to robust, considered decisions. For this to happen the sector needs to see and be consulted on the standards for the criteria, as these apply to assessors' judgements on the additional institutional evidence. One major concern is that the tight timescale will put pressure on assessors to make quick decisions rather than considered ones.

SEDA does not agree with the descriptions of the different TEF award ratings proposed in Figure 9 (BIS, 2016) or the different ratings themselves. The difference between excellent and outstanding as applied to teaching has not been explained with any clarity. In addition, in a 'Teaching Excellence Framework' it is unclear how the highest category can be more than 'excellent'. To re-iterate, SEDA would support just two level ratings in the TEF: 'Meets Expectations' and 'Exceeds Expectations', if the expectations are more clearly defined than they are now and are publicly transparent.

SEDA cautions that it will be challenging to ensure that HEIs do not begin to 'game' the system, for example, eschewing pedagogic approaches that challenge the students or entail risk-taking which may result in lower student satisfaction. Students often want 'guaranteed' results, which has never been an aim of higher education and is anathema to a dynamic and stimulating learning environment. It is incumbent on those who design the assessment that this is taken into account and that the focus must remain on learning and teaching and the driving up of the quality of learning and teaching. An associated concern is that the very largest HEIs may find it harder to get the 'outstanding' and 'excellent' grades than smaller, specialist institutions as a result of disciplinary bias.

It is imperative that equal consideration is given to metrics and the contextual document and the sector will need to be assured that this is the case. SEDA questions the impact that institutional and/or disciplinary bias may have on the decision-making process. Unconscious bias is a well-researched phenomenon and certainly applicable to the TEF decision-making process. Perhaps anonymised submissions should be considered.

Finally, we ask what will contribute most to an award – the quantitative data or the submission and panel? What percentage impact does BIS anticipate each element will have on the final award?

References

BIS (2016) *Teaching Excellence Framework: technical consultation for Year 2.*

SEDA Co-Chairs
12 June 2016

Seven years and still no itch: Why TESTA keeps going

Professor Tansy Jessop, Southampton Solent University

Tansy has had the privilege of leading the TESTA project since 2009, with SEDA Co-Chair and former Director of Learning and Teaching at the University of Winchester, Yaz El Hakim, and learning from the wise counsel of Graham Gibbs, consultant to TESTA in its first three years, and pioneer of the TESTA approach.

Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment (TESTA) began its life as a National Teaching Fellowship Project, funded by the Higher Education Academy for three years to undertake programme-wide research on assessment and feedback. £200,000 and seven years later, TESTA is still alive and kicking. Like a low-budget film which defies expectations, TESTA has taken the sector by storm. More than 50 UK universities have used TESTA, and its methods and principles have been used in Australia, India, and South Africa.

The odds of educational development projects petering out after funding dries up are high. Project staff have real jobs to go back to; sustaining partnerships across different universities is time-consuming and can be frustrating; people retire, have babies, find new jobs, get tired of the project; and besides someone has to pay the bills for the website and maintain it. In the twilight hours of many projects, there is a moment of relief when it is all nearly over, as teams take a last draw on the wistful pipe of dreams. The final evaluation reports are written and data stashed away in locked filing cabinets. When the key turns in the lock for the last time, the project team scatter to the winds with all their inventive ideas. After sunset, project effects pop out in random ways, as unpredictable as electric shocks, but generally more vivifying. Years later, eager googlers meet Error 404 in their hunt to revive lost and often ingenious ideas. This is the stuff of the funded project.

So why has TESTA defied the odds? Why, four years after the expiry of its original funding, is it still growing? In this short piece, I'll wager nine reasons why TESTA is the Leicester Football Club of the Educational Development League table, or less heroically, the longlife milk in the educational developer's store cupboard. Here are my nine best bets.

1) TESTA's focus meets a real need in the sector

Assessment and feedback is the hardest nut to crack in the enhancement agenda. Managerial approaches to fixing the problem usually arise from the National Student Survey (NSS), and generally take a sledgehammer to the nut. The broken discourse of assessment and feedback is contained in that bludgeoned nut. Across universities, NSS scores on assessment and feedback are at least 10% lower than scores about the quality of teaching on courses (Williams and Kane, 2009). Students are disgruntled; academics are angry and confused. Year on year, institutions and academics react to NSS data, using a variety of strategies. These range from mandates to mark in quick time, to devising new feedback sheets, to using inventive technology, and even to disingenuous attempts to drip the language of feedback into every conversation with students. Most often, these strategies eschew engagement with complex systemic challenges which form part of the fabric of higher education.

The reason why TESTA is in demand is that it takes a systemic approach to understanding why academics' best efforts in assessment and feedback often falter. A programme perspective enables teams to stand back and understand what assessment and feedback feels like from the perspective of a student. The catalyst for making strategic changes is often hard evidence about summative assessment loads, patchy formative tasks for keen students, and bewildering varieties of assessment, for example.

2) TESTA is driven by the community

Partnership is at the heart of the TESTA process. Doing the research involves partnerships between educational developers, programme leaders, academic teams, students and quality assurance teams. The original project was a partnership between four universities; the TESTA beachhead into India was a partnership between Winchester, Lady Irwin College, Delhi University and Saurashtra University in Gujarat. The aptly named TESTA offshoot 'Leading Enhancements in Assessment and Feedback' (LEAF) instigated a partnership between the Universities of Nottingham, Birmingham, Edinburgh and Glasgow. The HEA Change Academy (2011-12) on Assessment and Feedback coupled seven universities together working on parallel TESTA projects. In September 2013, about forty members of the TESTA community gathered at Woburn House in London to share stories, insights and data from different universities in the UK and Australia.

Partnership is the word of the day in UK higher education, so you may feel it is a bit old hat to suggest that it oils the wheels of TESTA. But in the world of marketisation, competition and league table rankings, a partnership of the TESTA kind is extraordinary. TESTA tells the inside story of programmes from the perspective of students, warts and all. It combines an official view of the planned curriculum with student voice and perceptual data from the Assessment Experience Questionnaire. The student data is a hard-hitting mix of personal, funny, poignant, critical and quite revealing tales of their journeys through the minefield of assessment. This is all quite sensitive data in a competitive higher education environment. But while each data set tells a particular and revealing story about a single programme, it is also a shared story about systemic hindrances to effective assessment processes. TESTA data shows how academics have been blindsided by modular silos, and overwhelmed by marking loads that have grown like fungus in a dark and airless cupboard.

The community has kept TESTA going, funding resources within their own institutions, paying for consultancy to strengthen capacity, with SEDA and the HEA plugging vital gaps, after formal funding ceased. The University of Winchester, as the lead partner, has invested time and money in flying the TESTA flag. TESTA belongs to the academic community. An analysis of google analytics from the inception of the website in September 2010 to June 2016, indicates the steady growth in the TESTA community (Figure 1).

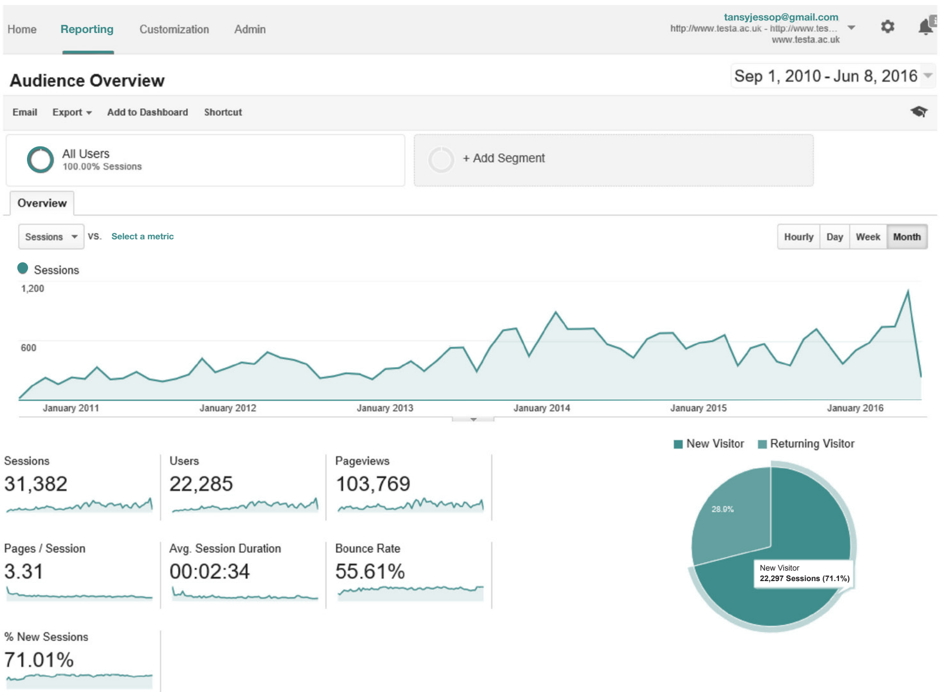

Figure 1 TESTA website hits from September 2010 to June 2016

3) TESTA has a robust research method

There is no doubt that TESTA's strong triangulated methodology has been a significant part of its survival. The blend of qualitative and quantitative methods, with deep roots in Graham Gibbs's powerful grasp of assessment and feedback, has given TESTA special purchase with academics. But great research methods alone are not enough to guarantee longevity. Research must be robust, but it also needs to be compelling. TESTA research has resonated because it takes teams to 'the centre of the experiences being described' through textured student voice data (Geertz, 1973). The externality of researchers, usually educational developers from outside the programme team, lends objectivity to the process. Discussion of a TESTA case study is a live event, conducted in the public forum of a programme team, so that it cannot simply be filed away in a dusty pending tray. Team accountability gives impetus to academics to use the evidence in making strategic decisions to enhance the design and pedagogy of assessment and feedback.

The TESTA community keeps developing the methods so that they are current, creative and leading edge. For example, at the University of Dundee, Lynne Boyle has developed a visual method of displaying the audit using bricks as metaphors. In writing a paper with a statistician (not my strength), I was encouraged to pull together a team to redesign the Assessment Experience Questionnaire. For fifteen months, Yaz El Hakim and I have been taken through our paces by Phil Birch and John Batten. AEQ Version 4.0 is about to be released. It incorporates constructs about formative and authentic assessment, and has ironed out some crinkles in AEQ version 3.3.

4) TESTA tells hard truths about systemic flaws

Speaking truth to power can bring individuals one step closer to the P45, even in university settings. TESTA research has relentlessly challenged the *status quo,* with data and assessment principles in one hand, and a galvanising repertoire of tactics from the TESTA community in the other. Technical myths about word count equivalence and the impossibility of implementing high risk summative assessments have been challenged; conventional wisdom about the sheer pointlessness of attempting formative assessment has been questioned; and the tick-box culture of approving programmes confronted. TESTA has exposed the flaws of disconnected curriculum design in the modular system, and provided conceptual glue to stick together disparate assessment and feedback practices.

Assessment and feedback design is a central theme in the literature, and TESTA adds much needed evidence to cracking the challenge of design (Boud, 2000; Bloxham and Boyd, 2007; Boud and Molloy, 2012). More than that, TESTA takes a logical turn to curriculum design, understood here as a complex process of dialogue, and theorised in the literature as social practice (Knight, 2001; Blackmore and Kandiko, 2012). It wrests curriculum design from its worst manifestations in the programme approval process: as an isolated, individualistic, cut and paste affair where filling in templates matters more than teaching students.

TESTA's approach has resulted in several universities going the whole hog and incorporating TESTA into programme approval processes. The Universities of Winchester and Dundee have seen the value of TESTA as a systematic enhancement process and are using it in cyclical periodic review on all undergraduate programmes. At Winchester, TESTA instigated a new module on Curriculum Design in Higher Education on the MA L&T, which has successfully equipped new lecturers with theoretical, educationally principled, and practical approaches to design.

5) TESTA lifts the curtains on the lived assessment experience of students

The 'Aha' moment in the TESTA debriefing comes when academics suddenly peer outside the zip-locked tight walls of their module to the whole canvas of the programme. Seeing assessment and feedback from the perspective of the programme brings academics much closer to the student experience. It awakens a fresh sense of how it feels to be juggling three or four concurrent modules which may or may not talk to each other. In interviews with programme leaders, one commented that she realised she was 'teaching in a vacuum': 'I was quite shocked when I discovered that people just did things in a random way, but to me it all makes sense. I was teaching in a vacuum' (Programme Leader, Psychology). Light dawned for another: 'I realised what we were saying was "That's only two per module". And I was like "Ah, but that's the point. This is a programmatic thing and you're used to thinking about a module"' (American Studies). The shift in perspective from modular to programmatic is a catalyst for a shared approach to assessment design. This can be challenging for those for whom modular assessment is a masterpiece of ingenuity, operating as a satellite in a universe of its own. TESTA challenges academics to surrender some modular autonomy for the greater good of the programme.

6) TESTA is a participatory change process

Educational change is notoriously difficult to effect. The Wabash Study was a longitudinal research study designed to enhance liberal education in 49 American Colleges, involving 17,000 students over six years. Writing about the Wabash Study, Blaich and Wise (2011) describe the project's three misguided assumptions. These were that: a) the problem was a lack of high quality data; b) analysis and findings would be a key mechanism for change; and c) academics' intellectual approach would facilitate change. Their conclusions that 'proving' is different from 'improving' make for sobering reading, as they lament that 'it's far less risky and complicated to analyze data than it is to act' (Blaich and Wise, 2011). The act of collecting and analysing good data, and presenting it to teams is not enough to effect educational change. So why has TESTA data been a catalyst for change on many programmes?

Programme leaders and lecturers give some insight into why the TESTA process has given impetus to change. Said one 'it's not just the tools, it's the way the team work…it's a collaborative thing' (American Studies Programme Leader). Said another 'this was by far the most significant meeting I have attended in ten years of sitting through many meetings at this university. For the first time, I felt as though I was a player on the pitch, rather than someone watching from the side-lines. We were discussing real issues' (Senior Lecturer, Education). TESTA's change approach is participatory; its modus operandi helps teams identify issues, provides options, and creates space for academics to exercise wisdom in deciding what strategic lines to follow.

7) TESTA provides a repertoire of tactics for tricky problems

Anyone who has read Graham's '53 Powerful Ideas All Teachers Should Know About' on the SEDA blog know what a tremendous repertoire of ideas and practical tactics he has in his educational knapsack. Winningly, they are not disembodied tricks, as he judiciously connects them to educational principles and theory. The TESTA community have learnt from Graham's ways and gathered more tactics for tricky assessment and feedback problems as we have worked with a succession of programme teams, and listened to students in focus groups. This wealth of information provides options for teams when they face tricky problems. A limitation of the work on TESTA by the community is that we have failed to gather up these tactics in one place, but for those on the forage, there is a new '53 interesting ways to assess your students', which has no direct relation to TESTA (Burns, 2015).

8) TESTA is an open educational resource

Having a website is an essential attribute of the modern educational development project. But having a website brings with it no guarantees that it will be the lifeblood of that project. For a website to flourish, the project has to be in demand and the resources have to serve the community. TESTA has had two websites during its lifetime. The first one was colourful and relatively crude, but it served its purpose. The website provided research tools, 'how to' guides, videos, best practice guides, case studies, publications, news and blogs. For the aspirant TESTA researcher it was just about enough to take TESTA off the shelf and apply it in context. Most universities have paid the TESTA team to conduct workshops to unpack the tacit dimensions of TESTA, about which the website is relatively quiet. In 2015, TESTA launched a second generation website, which keeps it looking fresh and outside the range of hackers and spammers. The website is one aspect of OER. The second side of OER is the level of dissemination that Graham, Yaz and I have done over the years to keep TESTA going. You might think that it gets boring talking about TESTA, but it is endlessly fascinating, as new insights keep refining the methodology and challenging the theories underpinning it. I keep doing talks about TESTA because it is just too good a project to neglect.

9) TESTA is generative

The best research changes things for the better. Most educational research aims off in that utopian direction. TESTA is no different. But for a relatively cheap research project, TESTA has been remarkably generative. It has spawned a conceptual shift, and triggered a change in the discourse about assessment and feedback: from the modular to the programmatic; from teacher-centred to student-focused; from technical to relational first principles. The reasons why TESTA is such a generative project are complex, and weave through many of my wagers. One reason is that it is a learning project. The theory and methods of TESTA are continually influenced by the theory and practice of colleagues and experts in the field. This is one reason for the revision of the AEQ.

TESTA is also generative because it has hitched its wagon to other funded projects. It was the basis for the JISC-funded 'Feedback and Assessment for Students with Technology' (FASTECH) project which explored using new technologies programmatically. This idea ran into a concrete wall, but generated new partnerships with students through the FASTECH Student Fellows, who worked alongside academics in advancing technological approaches to assessment and feedback. The University of Winchester embraced the idea of Student Fellows, and with the Student Union has co-funded 36 student fellows annually to work on enhancement projects.

The Student Fellows Scheme formed the basis of the HEFCE Catalyst Fund 'Realising Engagement through Active Culture Transformation' (REACT) project which Winchester leads in partnership with Exeter and London Metropolitan University. In similar vein, TESTA@Greenwich employs undergraduate students to conduct TESTA research, forging joins between assessment and student change agent work. Loughborough, Birmingham and others have employed PhD and Master's students to advance TESTA research. Internationally, TESTA was the heart of a British Council-funded Knowledge Economy Partnership project with two Indian universities. All of this activity has fed the generative aspects of TESTA, and continually refreshed its approach, methods and underpinning theory.

Conclusion

In the last article on TESTA in *Educational Developments,* the team wrote: 'The future is hard to predict, but it would be thrilling to be writing a "TESTA five years" article for *Educational Developments* in 2019' (Jessop *et al.*, 2014). I love the idea of TESTA still being around in 2019, but with one caveat, that it may signal the persistence of troubling issues in assessment and feedback. TESTA as we know it will only remain (a) if assessment and feedback continue to inflict wounding blows on institutions and academics in the NSS and, dare I say it, its new guise, the TEF; (b) if the approaches, theory and tools underpinning TESTA are continually revived and refreshed by the

TESTA community; and (c) if TESTA continues to be a respecter of context, disciplines, academics and students. So, odds on that TESTA will still be around in 2019?

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TESTA – Developing one aspect of feedback review at the University of Dundee

Lynn Boyle and **Neil Taylor,** University of Dundee

Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment (TESTA)

The methodology behind the Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment (TESTA) programme was developed initially through the work of Gibbs and Dunbar-Goddet (2009) and then as a methodology by Jessop *et al.* (2014b) via a National Teaching Fellowship Project funded by the Higher Education Academy. The methodology includes a triangulation of data gathered on assessment and feedback across a whole programme of study. The three aspects of the methodology are: a programme level audit which gathers data on the assessment and feedback practices of the whole programme; a student assessment experience (AEQ) 28 question survey; and a focus group of students in their final year. The data is gathered and is then presented in a Case Study which is discussed with the staff team during a case study meeting. Once the case study has been discussed the power of the methodology is that it can then be shared and strategic planning or effecting change can be developed through evidence-based outcomes – 'at root TESTA is a research and enhancement process' (Jessop *et al.,* 2014b).

The holistic view

When students enrol at university it is with a view of undertaking a specific programme of study within a discipline. Sometimes students know which career choice this will enable once they have gained a proficiency in their chosen subject and graduated from the course. The students will know that their Higher Education institution may have opportunities for a more general first and second year, perhaps even have opportunities to develop an interest or vocation during those first years that they had previously not envisaged. However, by the time they have reached the final years of their chosen programme, the vocation, profession or subject will be viewed holistically by the student and be named with a recognition of achievement through a graduation process within a discipline. The students do not enrol module by module, and for most of the student population, they will have little understanding of the cumulative structure of their learning (despite having programme and module handbooks which give chapter and verse on structure and progression). Students will experience university as a programme, course or discipline as a whole and as a predominantly linear process.

There has been a long decline of the 'Subject' and a rise of the Module or Unit to complete a 'programme' of study. This is an accumulative, credit-patched, piece by piece approach to learning as evident in UK Higher Education institutions. Every module has a credit award and those credits are accumulated into a Degree classification based upon a grading system. Academics have become experts in an ever-narrowing scope within a discipline and lecturing staff often focus on the learning and assessment of each module to a microscopic analysis, within a level. The leaders of these courses gather and organise the modules to ensure professional or industry standards are met and there is a periodic review process to ensure the programme of study meets the list of education excellence, quality standards, quality assurance, academic development, diversity, inclusion, graduate attributes and academic standards. Often the leaders and directors of these programmes of study have a disparate team working module by module across the programme including PhD student/staff members, probationary staff, research contract staff, retirees and middle career experts. Within the programme of study based upon a modular approach academic staff may not have an overview of the programme as a whole in juxtaposition with the students who *only* have the view of the programme as a whole.

Students view the programme as a whole and not as a chain of modules. The students also have long memories and talk to one another at length about the comparative elements of their programmes which commonly include discussions of assessment and feedback practices and the perceptions of those practices. Students tend to comment on feedback which impacted on them personally, e.g. remembering the second module of the first year where the feedback on their work took three months to be returned or how they got a low grade from a marking hawk and then got a 'well deserved' A1 from a marking dove. Students discuss which lecturers can see them in person to willingly go over feedback and where feedback has been given to them as an individual. Students remember who was approachable and who was never available; who was around and which lecturers gave the impression of being too busy to give feedback due to time management of their own research. Students believe they know who the good teachers are and where the baddies are hiding in plain sight. Students fill in module evaluations which ask them to rate the learning materials and their own learning, not knowing what happens to that evaluation and never really seeing a change in the next module because the academic staff have not made that connection. Students have long memories and remember everything that they have said, done and experienced and as a result, often in the National Student Survey (NSS), the scoring for 'assessment and feedback' is typically low compared with other sections of the survey.

The pedagogical approach to the programme of study may fluctuate over time with differing views, academic staff contribution, changes through periodic programme review, professional cultures and approaches, thus leaving the academic staff welded to the lens of the individual module. 'Taking a programme approach clarifies the interconnectedness of units of study', according to Jessop *et al.* (2014a), but despite the plethora of research evidence to support this view it would seem that in many Higher Education institutions the bigger picture is not within sight.

TESTA and the University of Dundee

Viewing the assessment and feedback practices of programmes of study using the TESTA methodology began at the University of Dundee with a pilot project involving two programmes: the BA Childhood Practice which is a part-time distance learning programme; and the four-year full-time BA Textiles programme. Following the 10-step programme set out by the original TESTA team (Jessop, 2010), two case studies were produced and discussed by the participating programme team members and a dedicated university-wide TESTA team. It was realised that discussing the case study in a welcoming and non-threatening environment with a range of colleagues from the programme and from across the wider University community was the most advantageous aspect of the process. The evidence-driven narrative which was produced facilitated the opportunity for the initial discussion encouraging questioning, inquiry and thought-provoking reflection. The 'fresh eyes' of the TESTA team could mine the data and reveal practices and student perceptions which had not been afforded to the programme team in previous evaluation, moderation or programme review processes.

Focus on feedback

Through a developmental progression of four years following the initial pilot and the impact of staff changes it emerged that for the TESTA process to continue, there needed to be streamlining and replicability of the process without the loss of any element or integrity of the methodology. With this focus the TESTA team was expanded to include the Associate Deans for Quality Assurance for each of the nine schools of the University. This increase in resource also ensured that the TESTA process was easily disseminated across schools and the workload was shared.

There also needed to be a buy-in for staff who initially did not view the process as a development tool but in some cases as another way of being audited by the central university. The process needed to be transparent but also confidential when it came to the very specific outcomes of the audit process. This trust was gained by reassuring programmes that the case study belonged to the programme team and only the outcomes and evidence of change planning would be gathered as part of the Quality Enhancement process.

The focus on feedback as a quality enhancement process became evident very early on in the University-wide project through the student focus group discussions and the results of the Assessment Experience Questionnaire (AEQ). In the original TESTA team audit of the programme, the methodology was developed for characterising programme-level assessment environments which included the number of words of written feedback students experienced (Gibbs and Dunbar-Goddet, 2009). This step was useful in illuminating the volume of feedback when used in comparison to the data set which had been produced by the original TESTA team from audits carried out across participating programmes in a number of universities. Programme teams could use this comparison data set to consider the volume of feedback in relation to workload and to parity between the feedback which is returned to students. It is also a useful discussion point regarding written feedback practices and where students are taking cognisance of the feedback given. In addition to the discussion around the volume of feedback and the related effort by the tutors based upon the nature of the assessments, evidence already exists which highlights that there is often more written feedback in humanities, arts and professional courses (Jessop *et al.,* 2014a) than in courses such as many sciences where the programme is largely assessed through examination.

Effective feedback has been widely discussed in Higher Education and the purpose of the collation of the cumulative volume of feedback for comparison was an effective additional component of the feedback discussion. This process involved a member of the TESTA team reviewing the sample of feedback which had been sent and counting the words to get a nominal measure of volume. However, in the process of completing this exercise it was difficult not to notice some of the common traits of lecturers who were returning the written feedback, again looking at feedback with a 'fresh pair of eyes' and with an outsider's perspective. Through the programme moderation processes the quality of the context of the feedback had been reviewed at modular level; however, seeing the sample holistically afforded the reader to make observations around the common marking traits for the whole programme which would ultimately be received by the students throughout their programme of study.

The perception of the feedback which is given to the students on assessed work will impact on the value those students place upon the feedback. If students do not see value in the feedback they have been given in previous assignments, it will very likely contribute towards the lack of motivation to collect, read, review or act upon feedback, never mind actually contacting a lecturer to discuss the feedback given. Unsurprisingly, staff feel more positive about the feedback they give than the students receiving the feedback and despite anecdotal evidence to the contrary the majority of students do not simply look at their grade but actually do read the feedback given (Mulliner and Tucker, 2015). Quality of feedback focuses on effective praise versus effective critique, specificity in identifying the failings of the work and feedback which is effective in informing future work (Young, 2000). The nature of giving feedback is therefore well documented but the hidden aspects of feedback involve issues which are less well documented such as: lecturers having too little time to spend on feedback, ineffectual typing skills, poor handwriting, spelling, punctuation and grammar issues; and mismatching grade-related wording. These aspects of communication and academic standards can also vary significantly between staff and disciplines and may not be discussed or evaluated as part of an ongoing moderation process.

Through the task of word counting and the vantage point of seeing samples of feedback from an entire programme, the initial blunt tool for extracting the volume of data was developed by the Dundee TESTA team. An additional section was added to the case study which underpinned the volume of feedback with a section on written feedback called 'Points for Consideration', where the traits of marking from the entire programme team both effective and ineffective are noted. During the feedback to programme teams the TESTA team will discuss the mean-word count, the median value of the word count and the range of word count for a specific assessment feedback. This indicates to the programme team whether the team are working within agreed broad feedback parameters of programmes or whether someone is giving excessive written feedback or being overly succinct. This is to avoid students perceiving that certain markers are overly strict or weak or that some markers are more helpful than others. It is an attempt to promote parity of student experience through feedback.

This additional section focuses the discussion on the perceptions of the students on the feedback they receive and where the value placed on that feedback by the students may be diminished due to common negative traits and also where value is added through effective practices. Common negative traits are emerging across many programmes from a variety of disciples, often including:

- Lack of legibility due to handwriting (although this is in decline thanks to word processed feedback)
- Errors in communication including grammatical, punctuation and spelling, (despite the same piece of feedback asking for improvements in this area from the tutor)
- The language of feedback, including the use of emotive and unconstructive phrasing where assumptions on effort are given
- That the feedback is not too generic and that there is specific feed-forward advice. Evidence from student focus groups and the AEQ indicates that students, including high-achieving students, want specific guidance of how to improve
- The wording of feedback not being consistent with the grade awarded.

These negative common traits may decrease the credibility of the person giving the feedback and in turn devalue the effectiveness of the feedback given as perceived by students, even if the feedback content meets all of the known measures of what is considered effective high quality feedback. As a result of adding this element to the case study the focus for the discussion on feedback is enriched and a very practical approach to improvement can be developed with immediate effect.

Impact at Dundee

One of the unexpected outcomes from the TESTA programme at the University of Dundee has been that participating programmes have benefited from the TESTA team cross-pollinating discussions with examples of good practice which have emerged during the process. Lessons can be learned, good practice can be shared and the wider perspective of the assessment and feedback philosophy of an institution can be discussed at programme team level. The opportunity for discussion has been enabled through the process and embraced by those participating.

Having a broad institutional team which consists of the Associate Deans and a range of Lecturing and Quality Enhancement staff has enabled cross-disciplinary working and has utilised existing knowledge and experience to enhance the project. The team now includes a lecturer with a broad experience of statistics who has been able to contribute significant insight into the analysis of the data gathered. With a number of programmes successfully completing the process sufficient data has been gathered to create a University of Dundee specific set of comparable data for the outcomes of the audit and the AEQ. Programmes can now compare their results directly to the broader picture of assessment and feedback within the institution. This local comparison has strengthened the validity of the programme not only within a Scottish context but within the context of the institution. Each subsequent programme which completes the TESTA review will contribute to the comparable data set.

As an institutional-wide project, TESTA has subsequently been written into the process for periodic programme review at the University of Dundee. Most significantly, it has been a vehicle for a focus on assessment and feedback practices which has permeated beyond the participating programmes and has underpinned the vision within the University for excellence in teaching which involves every member of staff. The emphasis on assessment and feedback which is emerging through the TESTA process contributes to the institutional vision and core values on excellence in teaching which has interdisciplinary working and transformation based upon scholarly research at the heart of its approach. It contributes to the University of Dundee's focus on meeting the UK Quality Code for Higher Education indicators for Learning and Teaching:

> *'Learning and teaching practices are informed by reflection, evaluation of professional practice, and subject specific and educational scholarship.'*
> (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2014)

In conclusion, the TESTA project which was developed by Jessop *et al.* (2014a) is now embedded in the quality assurance process at the University of Dundee and will enable programme teams to view assessment and feedback holistically and to develop practice to meet the expectations of students to enable and enhance learning.

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'You can't write a load of rubbish': Why blogging works as formative assessment

Amy Barlow, University of Winchester, and **Tansy Jessop,** Southampton Solent University

This article is based on a workshop on Curriculum Design led by Amy Barlow and Tansy Jessop at the SEDA Spring Conference 2016.

Colleagues developing teaching capacity in Higher Education all sympathise with common complaints from exasperated academics; 'my students don't read'; 'my seminars are silent'; 'you want me to do formative feedback?' (cue puzzled frown and raised eyebrow)…'really…but if it doesn't have a grade attached – they won't do it'; 'I spend ages on detailed summative feedback – are they even reading it?'. This article outlines how, at Winchester, the term 'blog' has risen to new pedagogical heights and been christened 'The Holy Grail of Formative Feedback'. To support this mighty claim, this article outlines two practical approaches to blogging as formative assessment, with an undergraduate and a postgraduate cohort. The approach we have used is easily applicable to different teaching contexts and assessment patterns. It pitches an evidence-based model of structured blogging that has proved transformational for student confidence, writing ability and engagement with feedback. Blogging is a risky, playful, formative assessment pedagogy that turns out to have staying power – here's why.

The main assessment challenges that this intervention aimed to address are wide-reaching; students experience a lack of authentic formative feedback, are not engaged in cyclical reflective cycles and tend to focus on summative tasks as drivers of attention (Jessop *et al.,* 2014). Internalising academic writing standards and criteria is an attainment barrier for students. Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment (TESTA), an approach to programmatic assessment developed at the University of Winchester (www.testa.ac.uk), has long been waving the flag for switching out the formative/summative balance of assessment. But, formative feedback has a definitional fuzziness (Yorke, 2003) and as a term, proves troubling for both academics and students. TESTA's definition of formative feedback used here is that it is required, does not count and elicits feedback. Any intervention that includes strengthening the practice of formative assessment produces 'significant and often substantial learning gains' (Black and Wiliam, 1998, p. 40). Despite this, implementing formative feedback effectively presents many barriers; often, a bolt-on approach is taken which can lead to over-assessment and low engagement. The answer perhaps lies in the humble blog task.

So what is a blog?

'Blogs are essentially online journals where an author publishes a series of chronological, updateable entries or posts on various topics, typically of personal interest to the author and often expressed in a strongly, subjective voice' (Farmer *et al.,* 2008).

Blogs are free, unlimited and easy to set up. These interventions used both Google Blogger and Wordpress. Unfortunately, there isn't scope in this article to provide detail on the specific set-up, but we drew on the support of student fellows and learning technology colleagues to help set the blogs up in class.

The privacy settings are perhaps the most important consideration. Blogging sites make it easy to monitor privacy settings; users can be ring-fenced in groups and content can be password protected. Or, if you're feeling bold they can be viewable publicly using search engines. Our cohort of postgraduate research students gained from open publishing as a way to model good professional practice in the online environment and fostered an effective knowledge exchange activity. Personal preference is prominent here; academics naturally adopt the tool they are most comfortable with. It's acceptable to learn new technology in partnership with students, but findings show that teacher attitudes towards new technology impact engagement and confidence levels in students (Hyland *et al.,* 2013).

What does this tell us? Academics introducing new technology for teaching need to invest time in understanding the tools themselves: time to familiarise themselves, time to gain confidence, time to understand what works with their choice of blogging site. As with all implementation of new technology, the pedagogical rationale should lead the decision-making process. The subsequent section outlines two curriculum design models, which build on the 'pedagogy first, technology second' ethos to introduce blogging as a required formative assessment.

Case study 1

The Cohort: Final Year BA Primary Education Students

The Pedagogical Challenges:

- Low engagement with literature
- Silent seminars
- Poorly distributed assessment load, low time on task
- Low academic writing skills and criticality.

The Tool: Google Blogger – password protected blogs, five students per blogging site in a (tutor selected) group.

The Task:

- Each student writes one 300-word blog post per week. The post was an interpretation and reflection on a set piece of reading with a requirement to post by Sunday evening
- Each student contributes three comments (on peer blogs) by Wednesday
- Weekly seminar groups discuss each week's blog content.

Blogging transformed the assessment design of this module. Previously, students had focused effort towards main summative assessments. This pattern of weekly reading and written reflection developed cyclical feedback narratives between tutor and peer groups. The synchronisation of regular intervals of formative feedback to develop lines of thought and ask questions via asynchronous comments from peers and tutors was a revelation. Figure 1 shows the transformation visually.

It was important in monitoring the impact of blogging on learning that we

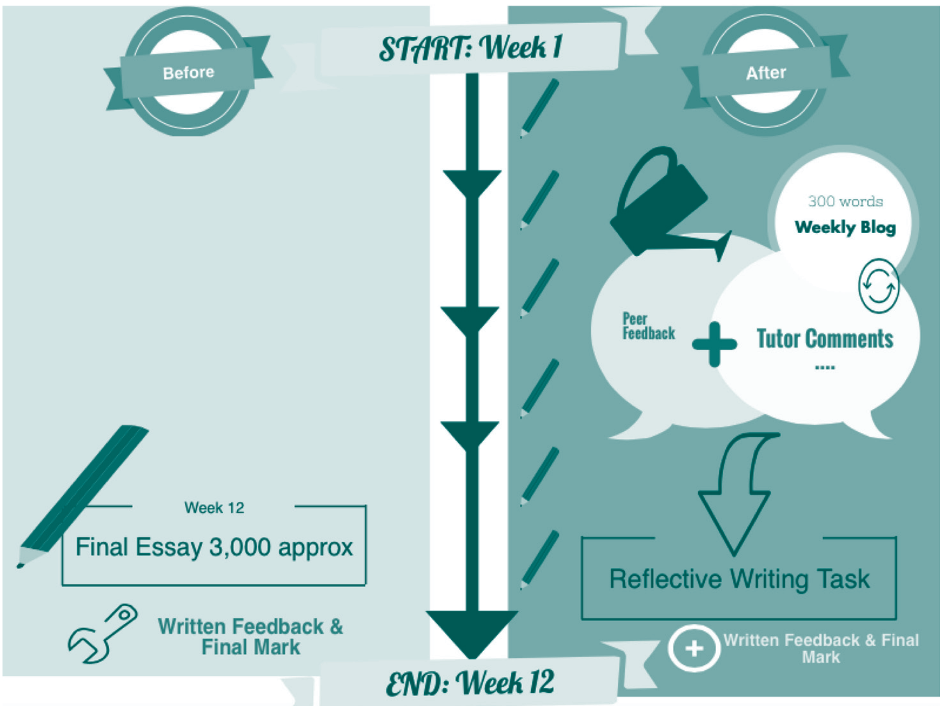

Figure 1 Assessment before and after intervention

employed a relevant method of data collection, to map progression with the assessment task and test our hypothesis that this assessment intervention would be impactful. The following section outlines our methodology in capturing engagement with a digital artefact.

Data collection – A think aloud methodology

Think Aloud Methodology stems from psychological research (developed by Newell and Simon, 1972). It evokes a talked stream of consciousness while verbalising the thought process in an uninterrupted way. The rationale behind this method is that a greater depth of cognition is revealed as information located in the working memory is shared (Lundgrén-Laine and Salanterä, 2010). In this study, we adapted 'think aloud' methodology with the addition of screen capture tools to record the screen activity on a laptop or computer alongside an audio track. We used retrospective Think Aloud, so conversations looked back over the blogging activity. The result was a playable film of the interview, which added a visual, discursive element to the participant's narrative. We tracked blogging progress, for six individuals, through the semester, at intervals (wk1, wk4, wk10) using this method to record semi-structured interviews. This method creates three-dimensional data: participants talk, whilst navigating the digital artefact to guide their reflections and revisit their thought processes.

Think Aloud data collection is a powerful way to capture engagement with a digital task. The participant commentary is tightly wedded to their actions over time (*i.e.* 'this is my blog post', 'here is where I commented', 'here are my tutor's comments'). Recording data with Camtasia was quick and easy. Data was then transcribed and thematically analysed using Atlas Ti to pull out key themes the most useful of which are detailed below.

The blogging headlines

Blogging increases confidence in academic writing

Publicly sharing regular reflections on their reading gave these students a voice. They transitioned from being uncomfortable and private about their writing to proud about their blog posts. 'I know how to write now' became a standout phrase, for example:

> *'I've seen how other people write compared to mine and actually mine isn't as bad as I thought, (…) I always had a lot of difficulty with my sentence lengths and looking through other people's I thought "Actually, I know how to do it now".'*

There was a period of transition to this model of working; it took a month for students to get comfortable with the medium of blogging; the data showed a transition and shift in self-efficacy in Week 4 of data collection. At this point, students started to articulate what criticality looked like in posts, highlighting key phrases and sentence components. They gained confidence in their own writing ability because they were exposed to a variety of writing styles from their peers.

A pedagogy of discomfort

The genesis of the term 'pedagogies of discomfort' is from emancipatory pedagogies aimed to unsettle students from oppressive world views. We are using the term here to capture the unsettling process of blogging, which forced students out of a position of being passive and privatised learners, into being active producers of public knowledge. Students experienced high anxiety in writing publicly, for the first time, in their third year. The think aloud data demonstrated their reluctance to put their thoughts out into the public domain, albeit public only to their peers. The weekly seminar discussions were key to support and encourage them to persevere with writing the blogs. Bringing their writing into the public domain was uncomfortable initially, but this approach increased accountability and effort:

> *'You know you're writing what someone else can see, you have to make sure that your point isn't "Oh, this is my opinion". People can comment on this and write "Actually this is a load of rubbish". I'm kind of scared of being rejected on a blog, which sounds really bad, but that's probably the most difficult bit.'*

> *'A lot of these people I've never seen or heard or spoken to before, so it's kind of really daunting (...) you basically have to add in some kind of comment that could be positive or could be negative (...) you don't know how they're going to take what you say.'*

Staff input matters

Staff comments on posts were highly motivating for students. Initially, there were low levels of confidence; students resisted posting an opinion or critique of each other's writing. Tutor impact was key to model good practice in this and encourage a dialogue within the group during the early weeks of the intervention. Inconsistency in the frequency and length of staff comments across the group was demotivating. Students took the sign of no comment from their tutor as an indication that they hadn't read the post or didn't think it was worth commenting on, when actually time and workload were main factors here. Although this model does increase workload during semester, remission is found by staff having a lower summative assessment load later. Engagement with comments changed over time; peer comments gained traction and meaning as the blogging progressed and became self-sustaining:

> *'It's nice that the feedback is instant. It's really helpful to have that personal touch. It's instant so you don't have to wait for three weeks when you've forgotten it.'*

> *'It's pushed my thinking – It's kind of bringing everyone's knowledge together which is incredibly useful.'*

Increased student and staff engagement

The intervention met the pedagogical challenges of increasing engagement into reading and improving academic writing skills. Many of the reflections in the data demonstrate metacognition about learning. Learning how to learn and identifying behavioural patterns in their personal learning behaviours, alongside the impact they had on others, were key advantages of this assessment model:

> *'Over the whole three years this is the most I've been engaged in my readings. I really liked doing this I wish we had done it more. Maybe start it in the first year.'*
>
> *'It's also a bit chatty and informal. Even though I'm putting in readings, it's different. It's a nicer, relaxed way of talking about reading.'*
>
> *'You change your ideas and maybe something will influence your next post. It opens your mind up to new ideas it gets you thinking.'*
>
> *'I was typing and thinking at the same time. It flowed quite well, but then I wasn't worried about it being marked.'*

But, it wasn't perfect...

The following section outlines some key lessons learned from this intervention and subsequent, new and improved blogging assessment with a postgraduate group. Crucially, the workload involved in posting weekly with a quick turnaround on comments was too high; in an effort to offset the large summative task, the design was pitched overly ambitiously. Tutors on the module shared responsibility for moderating different blogging groups, but struggled to maintain the reading and posting on multiple short posts. If a student didn't receive a tutor comment every few posts, engagement lessened. However, peer processes took over and slowly replaced tutor dependency. In addition to this, the word allocation of 300 words was too little; students commented that it was difficult to include the depth of enquiry under this constraint. The pattern of enforced sequence of blogging was too little, too often and this impacted on the overall success of the intervention.

In a world of social media and instant messaging, tutors underestimated the lack of confidence that students had in commenting on each other's posts. Students didn't feel competent or entitled to comment on the writing of their peers; this was partly due to the late introduction of blogging in the third year. Students felt they lacked the ability to know what to write, how to phrase it and the appropriate tone. Modelling good practice for comments, and outlining clear guidelines could overcome this.

The summative task for this module was slightly more evolutionary than students would have liked. Its final stage was short and involved a reflection on one of the blog posts. Student's perceived a lack of synthesis between the formative tasks and final summative assessment. The relationship to the summative and formative was disjointed; it caused confusion.

Blogging case study 2

The Cohort: PgCert Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (Curriculum Design: Theory and Practice Module)

The Tool: Wordpress

The Task:

- Each student owns an individual blogging site (unlisted in search engine but accessible via the URL link)
- Scheduled in-class writing time was designed to develop a community of writers
- Fortnightly posts
- Alternate week – requirement to comment on three posts
- Students were required to complete four formative blog posts
- Students had explicit teaching on how to comment on blog posts
- Summative assessment – mini-conference presentation linked to lines of thinking from blogs about Curriculum Design.

The PgCert model extended the blogging sequence into manageable fortnightly cycles of writing, reflection and formative feedback. It created clear joins with the final summative task. This led to increased engagement and a defined assessment output in the form of a mini conference event. In line with the previous definition of formative assessment as a required task, there was a set expectation to publish a minimum of four posts. Privacy settings were co-created to be open with this cohort of early career academics. The blogs became professional artefacts which disseminated practice on the PgCert and also provided scope for being continued afterwards. A further change was the addition of formal writing time in the session. This happened in a PC suite and gave dedicated writing time, which fostered the group as a community of writers. Students on the PgCert described blogging as giving them a strong sense of self-authorship, and expressed relief and delight at being able to use the first person and a more conversational tone in their writing (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Responses to the blog task

Overcoming challenges to formative feedback

The opening of this article highlighted common barriers to introducing formative feedback. Blogging is a powerful intervention which, we have found, can overcome many of these challenges. The suggestions below have stemmed from research on formative assessment but also from ideas generated in a group discussion during the SEDA Spring Conference 2016 on Assessment and Feedback.

Challenge: How to get students to value work that doesn't count?

- Ensure that any formative task feeds into and is relevant to the summative assessment
- Make formative feedback activities enjoyable, bold and public
- Bring in a personal element and relate it to individual experience
- Create space for students to develop their own voice
- Ensure that it is research-rich, stimulating curiosity and inquiry.

Challenge: How to build community and lessen workload?

- Do the written activity in class
- Create well-structured blogging groups
- Embed the task and outputs regularly into class discussions
- Encourage sharing and dissemination of the writing.

Challenge: How to link formative blogging to summative assessment?

- Choose one of the contentious or interesting student blogs and integrate it into the taught session
- Link blog posts to a mini-conference as final assessment
- Reflective Final Assessment: Choose your favourite post/a good post from somebody else or your worst post and develop the lines of thought through a written critical reflection.

The TESTA website is at www.testa.ac.uk

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Students setting their own assessments – Feasible engagement or utter folly? The considered response from colleagues from RAISE and SEDA as well as HE graduates

Dr Deena Ingham, Loughborough University

Assessment and feedback are fundamentals of education at all levels for both students and staff. The demand for places at the SEDA Spring conference in Edinburgh, focused on *Innovations in Assessment and Feedback Practice,* was testament to the significant impact and interest in enhancing this essential area of mutual practice.

In higher education, my own approach to assessment particularly has been an indicator of my own development of practice as both an academic and academic developer, as it has been for many colleagues with whom I have worked over the years. We move from content-focused approaches (assessment of learning) to the liberation of beginning to explore how our assessment practice can develop skills, competences and professional attributes (assessment for learning) for and within our students.

The 21st century has seen clear emphasis of active and interactive rather than passive learning in technological use, pedagogy and teaching practice (Mazur, 1997; Higgs and McCarthy, 2005). This applies too within the realms of assessment. Five years ago, I was involving students in setting their own exam questions but today, based on my doctoral research into graduate perceptions of value and legacy in their undergraduate degrees, I am motivated to go much further.

The informed approach of student-led, student-defined assessment is not only about giving students choices as to how they approach academic-determined assessment methods. Instead I am asking us to consider empowering students to decide how – given the intended learning outcomes – they should best be assessed. This may end up being negotiated assessment if they determine that group work or team work is required, or it may end up individual. Potentially students will also create the criteria against which the work should be evaluated. It might sound risky, reactionary, an abdication of academic control, but it appears that there are sound, informed reasons for demonstrating that this is an approach which has currency.

We know assessment matters whatever our role – as academic developers, academics or students. Boud (1995) said: 'Students can escape bad teaching but they cannot escape bad assessment.' This is true for us all – for academic developers pick up the pieces of individuals and programmes blighted by poor assessment. Academics struggle with poor or bad assessment which leads to difficult marking, avoidable disagreements and outcomes for students which can range from confusion to, at the worst, disengagement and drop out. As financial outlays increase and there appears more at stake for some students, we see complaints and litigation always focused on assessment. We know we must have assessment in some form so it is important for us all to get it right.

Assessment impact on engagement

The RAISE [Researching, Advancing and Inspiring Student Engagement] network has a series of Special Interest Groups, one of which, 'Engaging Assessment', I co-ordinate. Members (academics, academic developers, and students) at a gathering at Loughborough University identified six key issues which they perceived as holding us all back in assessment engagement:

- Assessment boredom/repetition
- Lack of clarity over relevance/authenticity
- Disjointed assessment over a programme
- Insufficient challenge (said students)
- No space to think, reflect
- Rarely give marks for creativity.

These were elements I had noticed in my practice as a student, as an academic and as an academic developer over the past decade or so, and they are still apparent today. They also emerged strongly in my doctoral research as negatives to strong perceptions of the lasting legacy of a degree.

This research involved 382 graduates with whom I explored perceptions of value. For the purposes of this article, I am looking at analysis of responses from 202 graduates of English universities – graduates who were between one and 42 years from graduation, who had experienced fees ranging from zero to £3300.

What emerged was that those who had taken control of and considered they had responsibility for their learning during their degree were those who recorded the highest perceptions of value, whatever their distance from their graduation. This was, however, the smallest group of graduates, which might suggest implications for the future of HE.

It was very positive to hear that 99.1% of graduates involved in the study saw value somewhere in their degree experience. As one might expect there were those for whom this value lay in living away from home, a good social life, sports facilities, friendships, developing independence…but those who rated their university undergraduate degree most highly identified that value lay in self-authorship, developing autonomy and increased self-identity:

> *'I learned how to take control of the things that I could learn to change and to change them to make me stronger.'* (High value rating graduate – survey response)

> *'It was great when we had the chance to really understand what we were doing, why we were doing it and develop our own ways of thinking.'* (High value rating graduate – interview response)

These comments provide clear signposting for us as we seek to support and develop learning which has lasting value. When exploring the factors influencing perception of value I found a statistically significant relationship emerged between the entry motivation of students and their lasting perception of value which in itself indicated a potential issue for the future of our sector in terms of legacy, as Figure 1 shows.

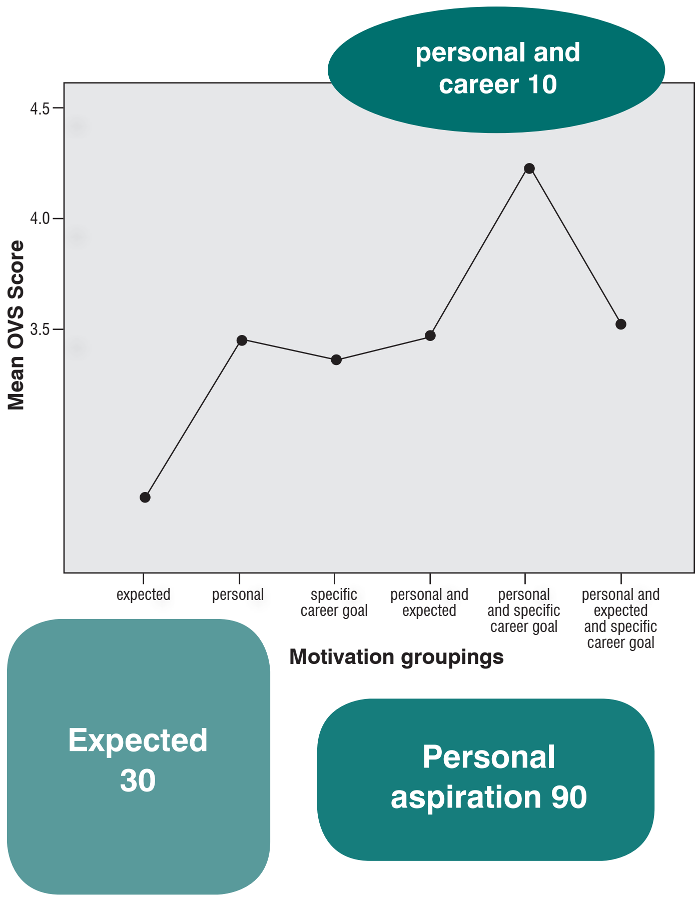

Figure 1 Students' perception of value

The highest value was indicated by the minority of students (n=10), those with personal, and specific career goals. The lowest value was recorded by a large group of students (n=30) who felt they had been expected to go to university. We have all met those students who feel they are at university to meet the expectations of others – parents, teachers, peers (Brooks, 2004, 2007) and/or potential employers.

The very largest group (n=90) were those who considered they had personal aspirations to read for a degree. This group recorded value which was not the highest nor the lowest but fragile. It was apparent from their responses that many of them were articulating personal aspirations formed as the result of expectations of others, which may lead us to consider that, together, the expected and personal aspiration motivated students form our largest groups coming into HE.

The comments from the personal aspiration group on the other hand indicated that they perceived little lasting value from the academic side of their degree experience:

> *'Academically I think I didn't learn very much because of the way the exams were...I've forgotten most of it because it was pretty much regurgitation.'*
>
> *'In academic terms I can't remember any of the theory we were taught. I passed well but I feel I don't use any of my degree. I never have.'*
>
> *'I just went to university…I didn't make the most of it and now I regret that. The one advantage was I didn't have to get into debt to do it.'*
>
> *'I don't think I gained much from the academic study apart from the piece of paper. The value was in the development which came from being involved outside my course.'*

Implications for HE of outcomes from research with graduates

These results create both potential for concern and opportunity for the future of higher education in light of increased competition. There is challenge to the value of a degree in the future if graduates are looking at a cost-benefit approach. This research was among students before fees of £9000, so their financial investment in their degree had been from nothing to £3300. Even so, many saw this as not investment, but debt incurred in the hope of achieving a good job. The already reducing graduate premium articulated in the hegemonic discourse is being nibbled away, as we have seen.

The fundamental academic focus of a degree appears overshadowed in terms of the student experience outside the academic which led some graduates to opine that £3300 a year (and thus £9000 a year or more) for a good social life and excellent facilities might seem overly high. Many of these graduates were now employers and indicated that if they had a choice they would not automatically consider employing a graduate over someone without a degree because they couldn't see the value of their degree to themselves.

But there was a clear difference between the small number of high value recording graduates (who interestingly would always employ graduates) and their lower recorded peers, which perhaps indicates a way in which we can add value to academic degrees whatever the motivation of the student.

What made the difference was self-authorship, whilst students, taking control of and responsibility for their own success and pathway (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2004, 2009, 2014). This indicated the harnessing and development of intrinsic motivation which was much more powerful than extrinsic motivation (Deci *et al.,* 1996). This has relevance for that large group who felt by going to university they were meeting the expectations of others. By empowering them to take control of their own lives they have potential to make their own pathway and move from being spoon-fed to becoming the hunter-gatherers of their success.

There was recognition that this empowerment involved personal effort and in some cases suffering – just as Festinger talks of us coming to like and value those things for which we work hard or suffer (1981). Things that cost us in effort, engagement and involvement, not just in monetary expenditure, are things we value. Kaye *et al.* (2006) and Kandiko and Mawer (2013) warned of students' unrealistic expectations connecting fee-paying and high grade but my research showed that graduates appreciated being more involved – to experience ownership and challenge – to feel they really had 'earned' rather than merely paid for their degrees.

The challenge – to make assessment engaging

So as we all have to assess, can we make it engaging, uplifting and exciting, a positive experience which adds value? How might we harness self-authorship in assessment?

A colleague at Loughborough University, Dr Rebecca Higginson, who has trialled this approach with postgraduate engineers, has reported significant changes – higher quality work, high levels of engagement and a strong level of interest not only in the disciplinary elements but in the pedagogic approaches they are developing to enhance learning too. Giving students in this instance autonomy to self-author their assessment within the framework of the intended learning outcomes led to self-determined, student-negotiated assessment.

What might happen if we were to adopt this level of self authorship with the largest group of students in HE, our undergraduates? Would they engage with the idea or disengage?

Hattie (2015) identifies that students develop deep attributes through becoming their own teachers. In discussions with current undergraduates discussing assessment practice at two different universities I was struck by their repeated recognition and indeed frustration as well as a critical evaluation that they needed to take ownership of their learning to really make the most of their degree experience. There was in some cases articulation that they felt a need to educate their academics or perhaps their institutions to enable their academics to develop change:

> *'Undergrads in their assessments need to come up with their own ideas, their own thoughts and show new ways of doing things. Yes, reference the thoughts of others but aren't graduates supposed to be new thinkers?'*

> *'We're here to develop ourselves as individuals and yet you get the most marks for just doing what the academic wants.'*

At this stage students articulated the need to take ownership but what they were actually identifying was what Baxter Magolda terms 'self authorship', where they have control and indeed responsibility, albeit guided responsibility, for their outcomes. Given that this appears radical in terms of higher education and indeed potentially fraught with risk, it might be imagined that the academic registry teams responsible, as they are for overseeing and reporting the rigour, quality and equality of teaching and its ultimate learning, might be a stumbling block, but that need not be the case for all institutions, as indicated by this enlightened response:

> *'Just make sure the assessment meets the ILOs and one student isn't unfairly advantaged over another.'*

So the initial questions to consider if we are to give students control of assessment emerge as:

- In which years or transition stages could this work best?
- What would be the advantages/disadvantages?
- What would we need to change to make this happen?

These were put to workshop attendees at the SEDA Spring conference, and drawing on their expertise, enabled further development.

When could it work?

To maximise value in such an approach colleagues considered it would be ideal to begin with the expectations and challenge at the start of a degree, building experiences and knowledge in self-authorship gradually. By bringing in perhaps formative or low-stakes student-authored assessment at year one, skills would be developed, students would understand what it was about and why they were doing this, with a higher-stakes approach in the second year and full authorship in the final year. This, it was felt, would change the dynamic of assessment from the start rather than having student-set assessment as a culminating experience produced at a time when students felt there was too much at stake and to begin something new could add unnecessary pressure. SEDA colleagues saw real value in expecting and maintaining motivation from the start, with what seemed a pertinent and perhaps also liberating reminder in these times of nervousness around yet more evaluative metrics: 'We mustn't underestimate what first year students can do.' There was recognition that the development of self-authorship can be a slow burn, and whenever it is introduced students need support to understand the approach and their role in its success.

What might be the advantages and disadvantages?

Advantages

<table>
<tr><td>Students:</td><td>Academics:</td><td>Registry:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Potential for more interesting, involved and engaging assessment</td><td>More opportunities to work with interesting, engaging programmes</td></tr>
<tr><td>Real education?</td><td>Keeps constantly refreshed</td><td>Could result in registry being seen as a valuable part of the academic development rather than a hurdle</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Force reflection on assessment practices</td></tr>
<tr><td>Enables massive growth through the process</td><td colspan="2">Opportunity to link to graduate attributes</td></tr>
<tr><td>Character building</td><td colspan="2">One way of developing attitudes and competences which employers seek in terms of individual responsibilities, leadership, self-directed behaviours and creativity</td></tr>
<tr><td>Holistic experience</td><td>Dispelling the myths</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Disadvantages

Students:	*Academics:*	*Registry:*
Too challenging	Give up power/learning new relationship with students	Deep seated fear of being perceived as a 'mickey mouse' situation
Won't have faith in quality or in standard of what they do	Challenge to academic identity	Lack of confidence
Dissonance of expectations	What to do with different routes through programmes	
	Loss of coordination	
	Timing	
	Balance	
	Finding new identity of facilitating student learning	
	Resource intensive	
	Dispelling the myths	

Conclusion

Introducing self-authorship (and potentially thus increasing legacy value within a degree) was seen by SEDA colleagues as having potential, if only in the belief that re-thinking and questioning conventional wisdom is always a good thing. There was recognition that current structures can be too restrictive and sometimes professional bodies reaffirm this, thus creating dissonance with educational practitioners and academics. In order for it to be effective it should start small (perhaps on one module in a programme at first) and grow, and there would be a need, as in any institutional change, to get staff and students on board.

Thus one further question remained for the SEDA brains – nomenclature for the approach. Here the jury remained out with student-led, student-defined, student-agency, student-centred and student-involved all emerging. Perhaps, echoing the underlying philosophy, we should challenge our students to name this assessment approach.

Whatever we call it, the research clearly signposted that in order for graduates to perceive highest value in their degree experience, enabling self-authorship at undergraduate level is fundamental. The collective SEDA workshop view was that whilst not without difficulties, enabling self-authorship through the essential of assessment has the potential to add legacy value to every student and every degree programme. For the future of HE I hope we shall before long read case studies from colleagues doing just that, and on a personal note, I hope this type of assessment will herald the next stage of my academic development.

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Dissertations for Good: Research for the real world that plugs the gaps

Kim Croasdale, National Union of Students

A little less conversation, a little more (social) action

Students want to do good. This motivation is clear from two recent reports on student volunteering (Brewis *et al.,* 2010; Hunnam, 2016). Both report that of the students who volunteer in social action, very high percentages (95% and 78%) are motivated by a desire to improve things and help people. Looking back at my own experiences, I can attest to this. One of my housemates was a whirlwind of different activities, be they organising trips to Nepal to volunteer in an orphanage, fundraising for different charities, encouraging others to get involved in opportunities, and occasionally acing her coursework.

I'll admit that I was hopelessly naïve when I first attended university. As for most, it was my first time away from home, experiencing the thrill of independence, the excitement of responsibility and the innocently short-sighted acceptance of 'free money'. All too quickly the realities of self-motivation, self-control and debt crept in. By the time I was in my final year, I had started actively engaging in my course instead of passively assimilating the material the tutors gave us and I was enthusiastically searching for opportunities to branch out. Part of that was motivated by a sparse CV, but there was also a sense that I needed to do something worthwhile.

This feeling was amplified when I took a module on Conservation Biology. I had never been much of an environmentalist before. I recycled because I knew I should but I closed my eyes to information about the wider ramifications of my other actions. This module showed me that it is exactly this type of head-in-the-sand lack of knowledge that has led our planet into a state of emergency. This is not the place for discussion of the sobering details or the mis-informed, well-intentioned actions often causing more problems than they solve, suffice it to say that I felt part of the problem was a wide gulf between the people in academia doing research about these issues and the people on the ground taking action.

With this newfound sense of accountability and commitment, I'm sure I wasn't the only one to hand in my dissertation and feel, alongside an overwhelming sense of relief, a bit of an anti-climax. I knew that I had dedicated myself, but after all my hard work, who would ever read my amazingly long and detailed report other than the various markers? Who would really benefit from the hours that I had spent in the library? At that point I wasn't aware that I was able to use my dissertation project to work with a non-academic organisation. I didn't think I had the skills required and I certainly didn't think I would be able to produce anything of value to people in the world outside of academia. But the truth is that students at university who want to do something meaningful have exactly the qualities that are needed for this kind of work: dedication, enthusiasm, time, insight and knowledge (if not of the actual subject then at least knowledge of where to find the information and expertise!).

This is what is so exciting about the fact that students want to improve things and help people. It is actually possible for students to do that while at university, and not only through activities in their spare time.

So much to do, so little time

In fact, there is another, more concerning figure reported in both these reports, which suggests that students are becoming less able to commit to activities in their spare time. In 2010 almost half of all students gave their time to formal volunteering activities benefiting the wider community. In 2015 it seems that this number has decreased to just under a third. Why?

One of the major barriers to volunteering that is identified in both reports is time. These time-related barriers vary but include studies and lecture timetabling, paid work, family commitments and involvement with other clubs, sports and societies (Hunnam, 2016). None of these are activities that either can or should be reduced, but nevertheless the decline in volunteering is worrying.

Volunteering is fantastic in so many different ways: making a graduate's CV stand out, developing essential transferable skills, meeting new people and making a difference, to mention but a few. And, importantly, it allows students to fulfil that desire to improve things and help people. But these reports show that students, for whatever reason, are often not taking part in the opportunities that are available to them.

So the question is: how do we continue to tap into this student desire and provide opportunities for them to gain the benefits of volunteering and social action, while avoiding burnout?

Plugging the gaps

We have two separate but interlinking issues here:

1) Students can do and are doing important research for their dissertations that often is not being used or publicised
2) Students want to improve things and help others but they do not have the time available to do it.

The good news is that there is a simple solution that tackles both of these issues. Give students the opportunity to improve things and help others as a part of their studies. Both reports agree with this idea, suggesting that opportunities could be incorporated into the curriculum to encourage students to take part.

One really exciting thing about this solution is that it also plugs the gap between the people in academia doing research about sustainability issues and the people on the ground taking action on them.

The other really exciting thing is that it is now available for students!

A fantastic charity called Change Agents UK first gave me the opportunity to focus on this idea and develop the Dissertations for Good programme. It is now delivered as part of my role with the Department for Sustainability at NUS. Both of these organisations had had similar ideas and thought the time was right for something to be done. We have learned about several successful similar schemes happening in educational establishments across the country and the world and have been able to work alongside some of these to our programme.

Dissertations for Good consists of an online platform at www.nus.org.uk/dfg, which functions much like a dating website: students and non-academic organisations can register and create a profile outlining their area of interest. They search through others' profiles and can then request to create a partnership with good matches. Once partnered, they complete research together that benefits social, economic or environmental sustainability (hence 'for Good'). It is a national scheme, open to students from any discipline who want to use their work to contribute something and make a difference to the real world.

During the pilot, six partnerships were set up between students at universities and organisations. The topics ranged widely and just two of them are detailed in these case studies.

Case study 1: Investigating building performance with CIBSE

Dr Anastasia Mylona, Research Manager at the Chartered Institute of Building Services Engineers (CIBSE) first heard about Dissertations for Good through a colleague. She immediately saw the benefits, saying, 'it felt like a good opportunity… students work on industry-related topics and the industry advances its knowledge of the same topic'.

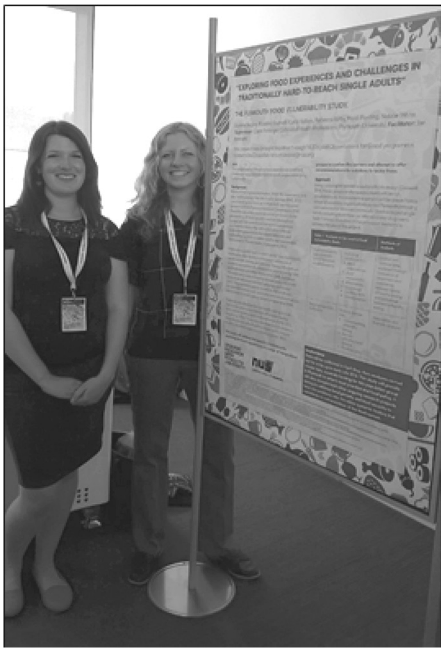
Anastasia was partnered with students from the department of Civil Engineering in the University of West London (UWL), supervised by Dr Ali Bahadori-Jahromi. They proposed projects to Ali's students that would use the knowledge and learnings of students to update CIBSE's resources, including evaluating climate change information for building adaptation and testing the new CIBSE weather files in building performance simulation.

These projects proved successful. As well as the new knowledge resulting from the partnership, 'the process revealed further areas of study and collaboration opportunities…the opportunities have developed into current new projects'.

Anastasia feels that the process has 'confirmed the many benefits, especially for an institution such as CIBSE, in getting involved in the education of young engineers'.

Case study 2: Finding out about food experiences of hard-to-reach populations in Plymouth

'Harder-to-reach' populations in Plymouth are very under-studied. With food poverty alarmingly prevalent – UK foodbanks are now thought to provide emergency food parcels to half a million people – getting involved in this DfG project allowed the students to gain an insight into important and prevalent issues surrounding food in their own city.



Dr Clare Pettinger, Lecturer in Public Health Dietetics at Plymouth University, felt that taking part in DfG would enhance her students' experience. Her students worked with Metro Fresh Enterprises, a micro-sized local organisation. Natalie White (on the right, in photo), one of the students on the project, says that it allowed them to tap into significant current issues and gave her a sense that there was 'acknowledgement of the importance of projects aiming to make a difference'.

The added dimension of access to external partners to share the project has helped develop the students' communication skills and increase others' understanding of the importance of the research. It also 'enhanced their research skills first and foremost', not least by giving them the opportunity to present their findings in a poster presentation at the British Conference for Undergraduate Research 2015.

Overall, Clare believes that the project increased the students' knowledge and understanding of the importance of sustainability for dieticians and healthcare professionals. Similarly, Natalie has learned that food experiences vary widely and that 'everyone has an individual story to tell'. She is now questioning the role of food aid, as, while she is more likely to donate to food bank collections, she is also aware that there are concerns about the sustainability of growing food aid. Is facilitating this growth 'masking the larger problems', such as benefit delays and disruptions, which mean that 'food aid does not necessarily equate to food security'?

Final words

Both of these partnerships, along with the various others already formed, demonstrate that students possess the drive, the knowledge and the skill to research and write important dissertations in partnership with non-academic organisations. Not only that, but Dissertations for Good and other similar schemes also tick many other boxes as well.

Students want to learn about sustainability and embed it into their courses (Drayson, 2015) regardless of what they're studying or where they are, and this gives them the opportunity. It also helps them to develop many skills to prepare them for graduation and their careers. Importantly, the supervisors involved reported that it was a key lesson for the students in the challenges of working in the real world. All of this while also using their work as a force for social good!

Member universities so far include Bournemouth University, the University of Bristol, Keele University, Manchester Metropolitan University, the University of Sussex, Plymouth University and the University of the West of England. With organisations ranging from small initiatives such as the Bristol Palestine Film Festival (www.bristolpff.org.uk) and the British Association for Sustainable Sport (BASIS – www.basis.org.uk) right up to the Fairtrade Foundation (www.fairtrade.org.uk), students are now able to truly make a difference with their dissertation project.

This is just one of the myriad of ways that students can use their time at university to contribute to society. For other examples of opportunities we offer that can be made available, I'd encourage you to visit www.nus.org.uk/sustainability and look at our other programmes, including Responsible Futures, Green Impact, Student Switch Off and Student Eats. After 10 years of delivering these schemes, we can confirm that if these opportunities are there, students will take them up and profit from their experiences.

Today, we are in a unique position. We can see which behaviours of the past have led to the problems of the present and future. We can change the path that we are on, but we have to take responsibility. Our students want to face up to that responsibility, if we let them.

Dissertations for Good

As much as we would like to make Dissertations for Good free for all, we are non-profit and must cover our costs. However, fees have been kept minimal with one year's membership for a whole university (meaning all of its students can register and create a partnership) costing just £500+VAT. Memberships for organisations depend on the size and type; please get in touch on dfg@nus.org.uk or kim.croasdale@nus.org.uk for more information.

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SEDA and the Lebanese Professional Standards Framework

Mike Laycock, HE consultant, **Georges Yahchouchi,** Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, **Liz Shrives,** HE consultant, and **Jo Peat,** University of Roehampton

SEDA is playing an important part in an ERASMUS+ project with a consortium of universities in Lebanon and Europe to create a framework for professional standards in teaching in Lebanon. SEDA was specifically invited to take part, given its long history of involvement in promoting innovation and good practice in higher education.

In February 2013 SEDA was approached by the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, Lebanon (USEK) to be a partner in a Tempus IV project 'Framework for Professional Standards in Teaching and Learning Practices in Lebanon' (FPSTLP). SEDA submitted documentation expressing its willingness to contribute and what our expertise and role could be. The bid was initially unsuccessful.

However, in February 2015, a new bid highlighting the high profile sector-wide ambitions of the project team was successful in gaining funding under the ERASMUS+ scheme, re-named E-TALEB project. The project began in January 2016 and will run for a period of three years with partners from the UK, Germany and France, in addition to the Lebanese universities. The Erasmus programme has, for over 25 years, enabled higher education institutions to work together to learn from each other, to develop new curricula, and to agree on new ways of approaching programme design. It has introduced important innovations such as the European Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (ECTS), which have revolutionised the way in which learning is organised and recognised across European borders.

E-TALEB: Professional Standards Framework for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Lebanese Universities

E-TALEB (http://www.etaleb.org/home), co-funded by the ERASMUS+ Programme of the European Union, is aimed at developing a framework of professional standards in teaching in Lebanese higher education and to enable innovation and the exchange of good practice and experiences relevant to similar frameworks established in Europe. Its main objective is to support the initial and continuing professional development of staff engaged in teaching and to foster dynamic approaches to teaching and learning through creativity, innovation and continuous development in diverse academic disciplines and/or professional settings. The project is intended to have high national impact, providing many outcomes including:

- Establishing a Professional Standards Framework in Teaching and Learning (the LBPSF)
- Developing and establishing a Post-Graduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education for faculty members
- Enabling inter-university activities centered on training and educational programmes
- Creating 'Centres for Teaching Excellence' inside each of the participating universities
- Supporting Lebanese universities in accreditation programmes
- Developing human capital and talented experts in teaching and learning in the participating countries
- Sustaining the competitiveness of Higher Education in the Lebanon, the Middle East and participating EU countries
- Establishing published Journals on Teaching and Learning in the Lebanon.

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

Participants at the workshop held at Churchill College, Cambridge, July 2016

The work of SEDA in relation to E-TALEB

The project is designed into a series of work packages and SEDA will be involved in a number of these, but is primarily responsible for Work Package 2 leading the development of the Lebanese Professional Standards Framework (LBPSF), to be completed by October 2016. This is principally concerned with:

- Providing a forum for the key persons from Lebanese partner institutions to come together to share and reflect upon the nature of the student learning experience in the Lebanon (outputs from the project work package 1) and other initiatives from across Europe
- Assisting with the development of the proposal draft for the Lebanese Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Learning
- Engaging in national level roundtable discussions about the LBPSF proposal
- Participating in the process for the approval of the final Lebanese Framework of Professional Standards by the Lebanese Ministry of Education.

SEDA will also provide examples, share research and offer the lessons learned from creating the original teacher accreditation scheme (which later became the Professional Development Framework, SEDA PDF) and the research and development required to establish, embed and maintain the UK Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning (UKPSF) (SEDA, 2013).

The work of the University of Roehampton University in Work Package 1

The University of Roehampton is the UK institutional partner in the project. In Work Package 1 it has undertaken an analysis of the current Lebanese practices in teaching and learning in HE. Jo Peat, who leads Work Package 1 at Roehampton, has worked closely with the University of Balamand in the Lebanon to develop a needs analysis to allow the research team to gauge the current state of play in terms of teaching practices in the Lebanon and determine where there is a need for development. This had directly informed the development of the teaching standards framework as it will provide a picture of the current practices adopted across the sector and will subsequently inform the development of a Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in HE as a professional qualification across the Lebanon. The analysis will also provide data in terms of the high level priorities for the Lebanese HE sector. Of key interest to SEDA is that the findings of the needs analysis will provide the groundwork for the SEDA workshop for Work Package 2.

The methodology proposed by Roehampton for this analysis was a series of questionnaires using a simplified version of the conventional Delphi study. The Delphi Technique was first devised as a quantitative and qualitative research method by the Rand Corporation (USA) in the 1950s, and is a method for the 'systematic solicitation and collation of judgments on a particular topic through a set of carefully designed sequential questionnaires interspersed with summarised information and feedback of opinions derived from earlier responses' (Delbecq *et al.,* 1975: 10). The technique involves an iterative process which takes place over a number of weeks, whereby ideas and thoughts can be refined and reflected on by individuals as well as the participants, in order to reach a consensual opinion on a complex or challenging topic, or a 'wicked' problem (Tomkinson, 2009). The main areas chosen for inclusion in the E-TALEB Delphi survey were to identify:

- Which teaching approaches are used most frequently?
- Which different teaching approaches would academics like to use?
- What factors prevent them from trying out new pedagogic approaches?
- What are the key learning and teaching issues for academics teaching in Lebanese universities?
- Which learning and teaching topics might be usefully included in future development opportunities for faculty?

The participants in the Lebanese Universities were asked what the main issues were for each question, and then to reflect on other participants' suggestions and comments. This was done via Skype and email over a period of 4-6 weeks, to ensure a good range of views. At the end of this process the data, both quantitative and qualitative, was analysed by the Balamand team and the findings distributed in a report to all partners to inform the next stage of the project. SEDA is also involved in reviewing the report in preparation for Work Package 2.

In July 2016, SEDA hosted a three-day residential workshop at Churchill College at the University of Cambridge, which initially provided the opportunity to explore these findings with Jo Peat and consider other current practices and developments across Europe.

SEDA and Work Package 2

Organised by Mike Laycock and Liz Shrives representing SEDA, the Churchill College workshop was attended by over 30 delegates, including two representatives of Dr Ahmad Jammal, the Director General of Higher Education in Lebanon, and the E-TALEB Project Co-ordinator, Dr Georges Yahchouchi, from The Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, Lebanon.

The key aim of the workshop was to provide space and support for the representatives from many Lebanese universities to develop a Lebanese Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Learning through working with presenters and facilitators drawn from SEDA, the UK Higher Education Academy and project partners from Evalag and Karlsruhe University Germany. Other relevant professional bodies and groups and representatives from UK institutions were involved, including Dr Sally Bradley and Jenny Eland from the Higher Education Academy and Professor Gwen Van der Velden from Warwick University.

Through intensive interactive workshops, an initial draft of the Framework emerged and this will be developed with SEDA support until the Roundtable meeting in October in Lebanon in order to complete the final version.

The importance of the E-TALEB Project to the Lebanon

Teaching and learning in Lebanese higher education has become a national priority for the policy makers and for public and private institutions seeking to demonstrate compliance with international standards. The E-Taleb project recognises the importance, in particular, of the Report to the European Commission by the High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education. The Report recognises that:

> *'Pedagogical models designed for small institutions catering to an elite few are having to adapt, often under pressure, to the much more varied needs of the many, to greater diversification and specialisation within higher education, to new technology-enabled forms of delivery of education programmes, as well as to massive changes in science, technology, medicine, social and political sciences, the world of work, and to the onward march of democracy and human and civil rights discourses… Quality teaching is a sine qua non of a quality learning culture. That teaching mission should appear as a resounding priority throughout every institution involved in the delivery of higher education – a daily lived priority and not just worthy words in a mission statement.'*
> (McAleese *et al.,* 2015, pp. 12-13)

So far as the Lebanon is concerned, there is no national qualification framework for the development of teaching and learning and the majority of staff teaching in public and private institutions have no formal training or engagement with educational development activity. The lead institution, the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (a private Catholic university in Mount Lebanon), has developed through international partnerships special programmes in teaching and learning for its staff, and established its Learning and Teaching Excellence Centre in 2015. Also, the American University of Beirut (AUB) has a Centre for Teaching and Learning, and the Lebanese American University (LAU), one of the partners in this project, has developed a Center for Program and Learning Assessment.

Based on the positive experiences of some Lebanese private institutions and shared experience with European partners, the project aims to support Lebanese HE institutions and the Lebanese Higher Education authorities by responding to the following challenging issues:

1) The need for a comprehensive analysis of the current national informal practices in teaching and learning and providing benchmarks with internationally known good practices by involving different stakeholders such as faculty, students, university leaders and employers
2) The need for more support for Lebanese universities in their process of international institutional and programme accreditation in which quality enhanced teaching and learning requirements are widely recognised by the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA, 2009)
3) The need for a framework for academic human resources management and for the creation of policies relevant to the reward and promotion of teaching staff

4) The need for the creation of centres for teaching development and ensuring their effectiveness in Lebanese universities in the implementation of good practices in teaching and learning and the development of the student learning experience
5) The need for formal training and professional programmes on teaching and learning development (similar to the Post-Graduate Certificate programme in Teaching and Learning adopted by USEK in collaboration with the University of Chester)
6) The need to develop teaching methods to address effective learning (active learning, effective feedback to and assessment of students, instructional technology, teaching resources linked to specific disciplines, *etc.*)
7) The need for a formal and sustainable platform for sharing good experiences and practices related to teaching and learning (professional journal, events, annual forum on teaching and learning, *etc.*)
8) The importance of preparing staff with effective teaching skills to meet the challenges of online teaching that will be strongly developed in the future.

SEDA is uniquely placed to support E-TALEB

SEDA and the University of Roehampton are uniquely placed to assist with this agenda. Almost all of our activities and national networks are able to support and advise on these issues. But key to our involvement are, we believe, the SEDA values, which underpin our work. As all members will know, SEDA is a values-driven organisation that seeks to promote the following in all its activities:

- Developing an understanding of how people learn
- Practising in ways that are scholarly, professional and ethical
- Working with and developing learning communities
- Valuing diversity and promoting inclusivity
- Continually reflecting on practice to develop ourselves, others and processes.

Our work with the E-TALEB project will recognise and endorse the success of SEDA in pioneering teacher accreditation and the early practices and framework that underpinned the UKPSF and the established specialist areas of the SEDA Professional Development Framework (SEDA PDF), along with the ongoing work of the Higher Education Academy in promoting and embedding the UKPSF.

In the true spirit of SEDA we will work with the project team to enable the Lebanese academic community to generate a bespoke framework suited to the academic culture and needs of the country whilst openly sharing and debating what we know and understand about teaching and learning approaches. Through decades of sharing experiences and researching within UK higher education and internationally, the SEDA community is aware of the practices in higher education that appear to meet the needs, and enrich the learning experiences, of students everywhere. And, as the Report to the European Commission by the High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education states:

> *'Graduates need the kind of education that enables them to engage articulately as committed, active, thinking, global citizens as well as economic actors in the ethical, sustainable development of our societies.'*
> (McAleese *et al.,* 2013, p. 13)

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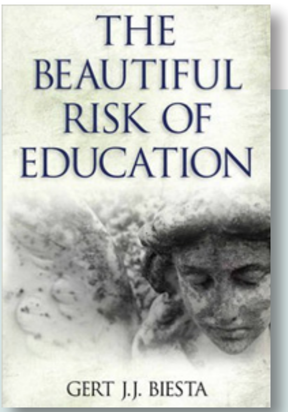
Book Review

The Beautiful Risk of Education

By Gert J. J. Biesta

Routledge, 2014
ISBN: 1612050271



Whilst reading this 163-page book that explores the weakness in education I developed a new metric – the page-read to staring-out-the-train-window-thinking ratio. High ratio books, like this one, demand thought, consideration and reflection (rather like listening to *Ballad of a Thin Man* or *Things Have Changed* from The Wonder Boys) before continuing to read.

This book is demanding, challenging and thought-provoking. Biesta, an education philosopher, describes the *weakness* in education in terms of connections of communication (interpretation, interruption and response) and each chapter discusses weakness in relation to an aspect of educational process. As I understand, this *weakness* is not posed as the antonym of strong, but as a way of noting that education cannot be mandated for and understood in a causal way (the attempt to remove risk), but that the process of educating is one of risk, hence the title. The *weakness* relates to how we can help 'our students to engage with, and thus come into, the world' (p. 4). The risk aspect of education is involved, claims Biesta, in all three of his domains of educational purposes. However, it is perhaps most particularly related to the third one, that of subjectification (the subject-ness of those we educate).

Each chapter tackles a different, one word, topic: creativity, communication, teaching, learning, emancipation, democracy and virtuosity. Within each, the author uses other philosophy writers to aid his interrogation of the topic. For example, for teaching, Biesta draws on the work of Sharon Todd; for emancipation, Jacques Rancière.

There is much that is thought-provoking throughout this book but at times I felt like it was a little beyond my zone of proximal development and I could have used some help to bridge the gap between what was written and what I could connect with. Perhaps I should have tackled his book *Good Education in an Age of Measurement* prior to this work. Having said that there are many, many gems to be found. Within the 'communication' chapter there is some discussion of Dewey noting that communication is a condition of consciousness, that it starts with and requires participation, that it must be of interest and that all then 'have the potential to contribute to a shared world' (p. 42). In 'teaching', there is discussion of teaching as something for the learner that comes from outside of them, that it adds something, that something has 'transcended' the teacher to the student. In this chapter the author also notes that teaching is something experienced as 'a gift of teaching' but one that cannot be produced by the teacher and therefore that the teacher's 'power to teach is weak' (p. 53). Academic developers, and anyone who has read the article (and the response/follow up ones) by Kirschner *et al.* (2006) – 'Why minimal guidance during instruction does not work' – will find the teaching chapter to be a fascinating and engaging discussion about constructivist theory and the learning paradox. Equally, anyone who considers education to be emancipatory will find chapter five to be a must read. In 'learning', there is a brilliant discussion of learning as expressing a judgement, that learning is change, because that change is valued – but who is it that defines it as learning? This is picked up again in 'virtuosity', where education is discussed as learning being done for a reason and for a particular purpose.

It is difficult in a brief review to capture the challenge of this work. It is philosophical. It is demanding. If you are looking for material for a PGCert, or pre-reading for a workshop that is going to spark debate, set aside an hour or three, along with a glass (or three) of NZ Pinot Noir, and read the final chapter about virtuosity. The discussion points raised in these eighteen pages are well worth the time investment; a flavour of it can be gleaned from the subheading titles: fear of being left behind (in competition terms), what is education for, judgement and wisdom in education and becoming educationally wise.

If there is something a teacher would like to be described as it surely must be 'he/she was educationally wise'.

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Information for Contributors

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'We learn from each other': Creating a scholarly community of practice through peer tutoring

Sharon Boyd, Yvonne Black, Sally Couch, Athinodoros Athinodorou and **Jessie Paterson,** Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, University of Edinburgh

This article shares our thoughts on how an online, distance-learning postgraduate peer-tutor training scheme provides an opportunity to integrate scholarship and development for both peer tutors and staff. This work was presented at the 19th annual SEDA conference in November 2015.

In medicine, the recent introduction of structured learning for peer tutors has been shown to enhance the quality of teaching practice (Fellmer-Drüg *et al.,* 2014). In nursing, peer tutoring has been shown to improve academic performance amongst student nurses (Robinson and Niemer, 2010). Further research is underway to determine if the same applies in other science-based disciplines such as veterinary medicine.

We will start by describing the peer-tutor training scheme at the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies (R(D)SVS), and how this supports peer tutors to develop essential skills such as facilitation, organisation and group working. We will then move on to consider the process of mentoring student colleagues as we engage in scholarly and developmental activities. This will include a reflection on how this process can enhance the integration of scholarship in the practice of staff and students. The article concludes with a discussion of future plans to continue the work.

The authors are all part of the peer-tutor team; Sharon and Jessie are members of staff and Yvonne, Athinodoros and Sally have worked as postgraduate peer tutors.

Postgraduate peer-tutor training scheme

Online taught MSc students at the R(D)SVS volunteer as peer tutors for courses delivered as part of a part-time distance education programme – their primary role being to facilitate study groups covering key academic skills. Taking into account research in this area (Beaumont *et al.,* 2012), the training materials include support specifically aimed at new online teaching staff. This includes guidance in online moderating following Salmon's (2012) model, practice sessions and group discussion between peer tutors and staff on the key elements of supporting online students.

To encourage the key components of academic leadership and scholarship development, as reported in McKiggan-Fee *et al.* (2013) and Zaccagnini and Verenikina (2013), peer tutors are given the opportunity and support to apply for Associate Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (AFHEA) while staff apply for Senior Fellow (SFHEA).

Peer-tutor training provided a theoretical basis for the practice of peer tutoring and also created a scholarly community of practice comprising peer tutors and staff. This was fostered by regular online meetings including debrief sessions and end-of-year focus groups. The ongoing process was enhanced by the experiences and reflections of us all while applying for fellowship. This three-phase process of community development is outlined in Figure 1.

Typical feedback from the peer tutors indicates that: 'The current format [of the training] works (for) me, especially with the staff support but also the other experienced peer tutors who have done it before that can support us.' We will continue to monitor feedback and adapt as required as this is a student/staff partnership.

Quotes from the peer tutors:

'Peer tutor training and the experience of peer tutoring has been a lot of fun, opening up new avenues of communication with my peers and with staff at the university.'

'Training and practising as a peer tutor was a lot of fun and introduced me to the richness of being part of a wider teaching and learning community. It also helped me to develop my teaching and learning skills.'

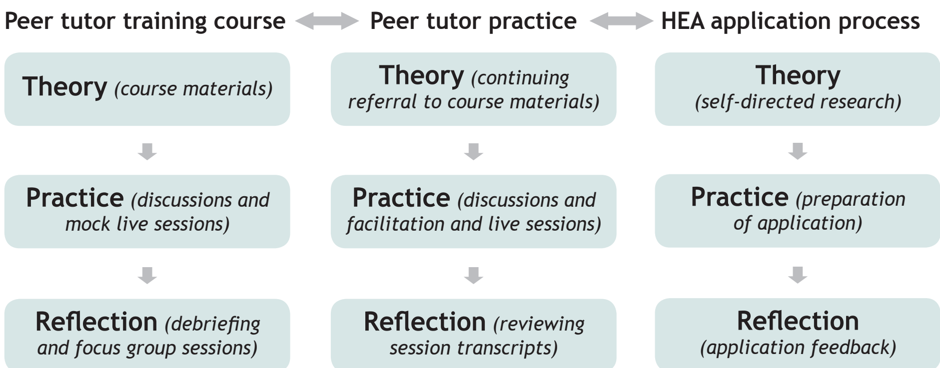

Figure 1 Process of developing a scholarly community building on peer-tutor training

Mentoring and support

As we have said, members of the peer-tutor team attended regular debrief sessions following each course, providing an opportunity to share their experiences, discuss research, and plan for upcoming courses.

> Quote from the peer tutors:
>
> *'I felt that there was a lot of support and guidance, particularly within the first few months of it starting. Lots of opportunities to ask questions…'*

It is important to both Jessie and Sharon that the peer tutors feel supported and can ask questions at any time. We offer various modes of communication to ensure no member of the team feels isolated; this includes email, phone, discussion board, Skype and virtual classroom. In addition, while the course teaching teams appreciate the tutoring sessions for their students, a concern was expressed at the outset that this project would become an added time burden. Mentoring our peer tutor team therefore maximises the benefit for our colleagues by assisting their students and minimising the impact on their time. This draws on skills that we have developed as personal tutors (director of studies) and in our wider student support roles at both postgraduate and undergraduate levels.

Mentoring is also a key requirement for those applying for senior fellowship, as it underpins the development of the academic from one who is developing themselves to one who can support and guide others as they develop. This role has a benefit for the mentor as well as the mentee.

> Quotes from the staff:
>
> *'Working with the peer tutors helped me to build my confidence mentoring those working towards AFHEA and FHEA. The peer tutors inspired and motivated me to work on my SFHEA application and apply for my PhD, as they were also working full time and studying.'*
>
> *'As a follow on from the experience of mentoring the peer tutors I have gone ahead and volunteered to be part of the University's Mentoring Scheme and this in turn informed my SFHEA application.'*

Enhancing opportunities for staff and student scholarship

Fung (2014) highlighted the importance of schemes which create space for personal development, engage students as partners and help to build a community of practice which is keen to inspire and contribute to the learning landscape. The open and dialogic nature of this process has assisted in this space-creation for all participants.

Working on the HEA award enhanced awareness of our own learning processes through self-questioning and reflective practice. It also increased our ability to self-regulate our cognitive strategies for both learning and teaching.

Robinson and Niemer (2010) found evidence that some student mentors went on to develop an interest in an educational career. This was certainly the case for Sally, Yvonne and Athinodoros during their time as peer tutors. Applying for the HEA award, combined with the mentoring support received, created an opportunity to further this interest.

Reflection is a critical part of our development, especially when preparing our applications. In order to foster reflection, enough time and opportunity for development is necessary. Following the establishment of a suitable knowledge base (Hatton and Smith, 1995) consisting of our discussion with students and staff, we incorporated the knowledge gained into our applications. Sharing ideas on how to manage academic skills and listening to students' specific approaches formed an environment of mutual benefit (Evans, 2015). For example, some strategies adopted by the tutees were also used by the peer tutors who were working on their dissertation preparation, and by staff in their SFHEA applications.

Yvonne described this process as a transition from learning to 'pedagogy' – when working on our applications, we researched the theory behind the practice we had undertaken as peer tutors and staff. We have all experienced workplace learning, a very important component of veterinary clinical education. With mentoring support, workplace learning can help students to identify gaps in their knowledge and skills, allowing these to be addressed (Magnier *et al.*, 2011). In this project, we were employing the same workplace learning, and supporting each other in integrating knowledge. Through shared understanding, we adapted and enhanced our teaching practices.

> Quotes from staff:
>
> *'Discussing research with the peer tutors helped me to develop a more critical, in-depth understanding of the theory in practice. As always, teaching a subject helps you understand it better.'*
>
> *'Reflection for some of the peer tutors like myself was something that we struggled with. Scientific writing is normally in the third person so the "I" does not come naturally. Helping the peer tutors helped me.'*

For the peer tutors the experience and recognition of the AFHEA helps with the academic journey.

> Quotes from the peer tutors:
>
> *'Receiving recognition as an AFHEA has aided me in successfully applying to continue studying at doctoral level in another institution, and I hope that my experiences as a peer tutor will help me to make the most of my teaching opportunities there.'*
>
> *'While preparing my AFHEA application I realised that it is a tool that is been widely used in teaching and I was happy to be a part of it.*
>
> *'After being awarded the AFHEA*

status, I was assigned to run two practical and one theoretical course for final year vet students, while doing my internship at a Veterinary Centre. It was great to have positive feedback from my internship supervisor, especially on how well I used the ice-breakers to facilitate the participation of students.'

'Being awarded the AFHEA has given me the confidence to embark on further study and to apply for a doctorate. I am now able to capitalise on my own skills and hopefully will be able to use them in the future to enhance the learning experiences of others.'

Conclusion

We reflected both individually and as a team on whether we make effective use of the inspiration and ideas raised as a result of our discussions on teaching and learning in our discipline.

We are all mentoring peers at different levels – those with AFHEA are now mentoring undergraduate students who are working towards their Associate Fellowship, and those with Fellow or Senior Fellow are mentoring those applying for Fellow or Associate. Our community of practice is growing, and growing stronger.

Looking forward, all participants are involved in the development of our online postgraduate 'hub', a social network where students, alumni and staff can share research and mentor each other in our ongoing development. The skills we have learned and the connections we have forged as a result of this process will be extended to a peer-tutor support network so that alumni can return to connect and support new peer tutors.

We all agree with Ross (2012) that there is little difference between teachers who study and students who teach. The process of supporting and working together in a close-knit team provided each of us with opportunities to learn, reflect and develop our own skills. By mentoring the peer tutors as junior academics, this community of practice guided and supported all our distance-learning students.

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Reflections on a conference in Kerala

Jo Peat, University of Roehampton, SEDA Co-Chair

Carrying on from Gail Hall's (*Educational Developments,* 16.4) piece, 'Confessions of a SEDA Conference Interloper', I wanted to pen a piece on a recent conference I attended.

Conference proceedings have always seemed more or less formal examples of a widely accepted format. Some UK conferences have the feel of a friendly knitting circle; others are more formal, the speaker at the rostrum the focus of the room. Still others take a more interactive approach, alternating between 'informing' their audience and 'being informed' by the same audience, creating an atmosphere of active, participative dialogue. Despite these differences, the actual structure remains largely the same: an opening keynote, a conference dinner, seminars or workshops based on highly worked abstracts and usually a closing address.

Early in 2016 I was honoured to be invited to a conference in Kerala, run by the University of Kerala, with delegates from a multitude of other organisations from across the (huge) state. Bridget Middlemas and I were the keynote speakers and main workshop facilitators for two days. Despite not being certain of whether the conference venue would have internet access, PowerPoint facilities or whether our delegates had access to any form of IT in their daily work, our topic was virtual internationalisation. India is known for its prowess in IT, but this is often not translated down to the actual workplace, particularly in publicly funded institutions.

The main reason for wanting to write this piece was to reflect on the cultural elements that characterised the conference. It opened very differently from a UK academic conference, with a highly stylised ceremony. The senior management from the university and from a number of state bodies were seated on the dais and introduced in turn and at length to the delegates, each standing and bowing as they were introduced. This was followed by the lighting of the oil: each of the people on the dais lit a wick in an ornate oil lamp, decorated in jasmine flowers, which burnt for the duration of the opening ceremony. Clay pots were distributed to those on the dais, filled with jasmine and containing a small pouch of seeds and a note explaining that from small seeds come great ideas. The whole congregation stood as a prayer was sung and the launch of the conference formally concluded.

The invited dignitaries spoke in turn over the two days. Each one spoke from the front without questions or interruptions. In true educational development style, for much of the conference Bridget and I ran workshops and discussion groups rather than speaking from the front. The delegates were very unused to the 'SEDA' way of interactive conferencing, but became fully and highly engaged in the process.

Before each speech, the speaker was introduced formally, at which point s/he stood and bowed and began his/her presentation with the same words: 'honoured delegates on the dais and off the dais.' At the end of the speech, the speaker was formally presented with a gift of a framed Indian painting. Bridget and I were also honoured as visiting dignitaries, presented on stage with a silk stole from a pre-eminent scholar. In turn, we presented other invited speakers with stoles in recognition of their contribution to higher education in Kerala.

The conference closed as formally as it had begun, with a final address and a sung rendition of the national anthem. Interestingly, the only people who joined in with the singing were those on the dais. The delegates 'off the dais' remained as silent as they had been expected to be throughout.

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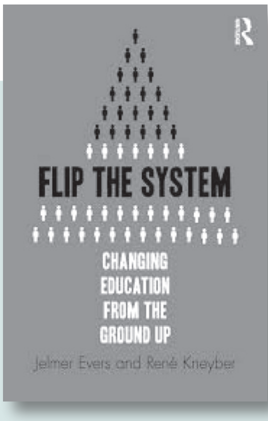
Book Review

Flip the System: changing education from the ground up

Edited by Jelmer Evers and René Kneyber

Routledge
ISBN-10: 1138929980



'Accept ownership, innovate, share purpose, collaborate, engage and motivate one another and students.' (p.184)

While reading 'Flip' I was listening to the 18 CD set 'The Cutting Edge'. In this, admitted, Dylan marathon you can hear Bob's exploration and construction of the different tracks on the three albums released during '65 and '66. I mention it because it illustrates Dylan's active agency in the purposeful construction of his work, and on different takes, including quite an odd one for *Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat,* he can be heard coaching his band towards a final vision of the song, indicative of his developing craft mastery. I have also been reading *Legacy,* subtitled 'what the All Blacks can teach us about the business of life', in which the key is devolved leadership and individual empowerment with regard to mastery, autonomy and purpose. Simply put, match winning is devolved to each player who is given the autonomy to master the skills (be these psychological or physiological) required for the purpose. In addition, a colleague at MMU has recently written 'education is teleological. It deals with ends, and therefore with means, and is value-laden as a consequence. What are the ends, purposes and goals of education?' (Neame, 2015).

In *Flip the System* almost the same argument is put forward in the chapter (10) about teacher agency (and sections two and three of the book). If teachers are to have any real agency in their work they need to be involved in defining the goal of the education they are providing. This book strongly advocates this and illustrates how it might work in a schools' context. Chapter 14 'from top-down to inside-out', provides an illustration of how to do this within a 'teacher-powered school'. I find this term conjures up motor-racing metaphors (powered by Ford) and that teacher-empowered might be a more accurate term. The chapter's authors argue that 'like most reasonable people, under current arrangements, teachers have sought to avoid accepting accountability for outcomes of decisions imposed from the outside. Yet the actions of teachers working in a teacher-powered school arrangement indicate that teachers are very willing to accept accountability for the outcomes of their own decisions' (p. 194).

This book is organised into four parts:
1. A global problem
2. A new paradigm: flip the system
3. Changing the system: collective autonomy, and
4. A question of mindset: supporting and activating teachers.

Whilst these are written from a schools' perspective, with widespread international examples, there is much of interest which is arguably directly transferable to HE. For example the third section, particularly chapter 13, 'teacher-powered schools', contains a 'checklist' of the aspects of culture within an institution that are required for a flipped system. Essentially a system where 'teachers have the capacity to reflect on the purpose of their work, so that they can judge individually and as a profession whether what is required of them and their students is desirable or not' (p. 7). This book is an antidote, if enacted, to the GERM (Global Education Reform Movement) – the neo-liberalisation of education.

Lastly, there are two things within the book that may be of more than passing interest to academic developers: one is the 'hope' survey which is suggested as a means of examining what a student may gain from education aside from a mark (see https://www.hopesurvey.org/), and the other is a website about educational research that 'works' (see http://www.workingoutwhatworks.com/). The latter may be of particular use for students of PGCerts who want a 'way in' to educational scholarship.

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SEDA News

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Call for proposals open until 7 November 2016
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Dear Editor

Help stamp out acronyms!

In the article 'Supporting higher education in college settings – a new SEDA PDF award' – in *Educational Developments* 17.2 – the authors use the acronym PDF four times without once explaining what it means. Please could we try to resist this temptation!

Jim Hartley
Keele University

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