

# EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

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## SWEET strategies for developers working in the third space

**Rhona Sharpe**, Oxford Brookes University

Last year I worked with the Research Training Co-ordinator to produce an Academic Development Framework which specifies the knowledge, behaviours and attributes expected of colleagues at Oxford Brookes and provides a structure for individual development at all stages of an academic's career. This was possible because developers frequently cross boundaries between different communities, speak all their languages, and facilitate conversations about what goes on in the fuzzy boundaries between them. (As you can imagine – most of the conversations were about what went in the overlaps.) Educational developers have the freedom to decide to produce such a framework, the contacts to negotiate what goes into it, and the skills to reach agreement.

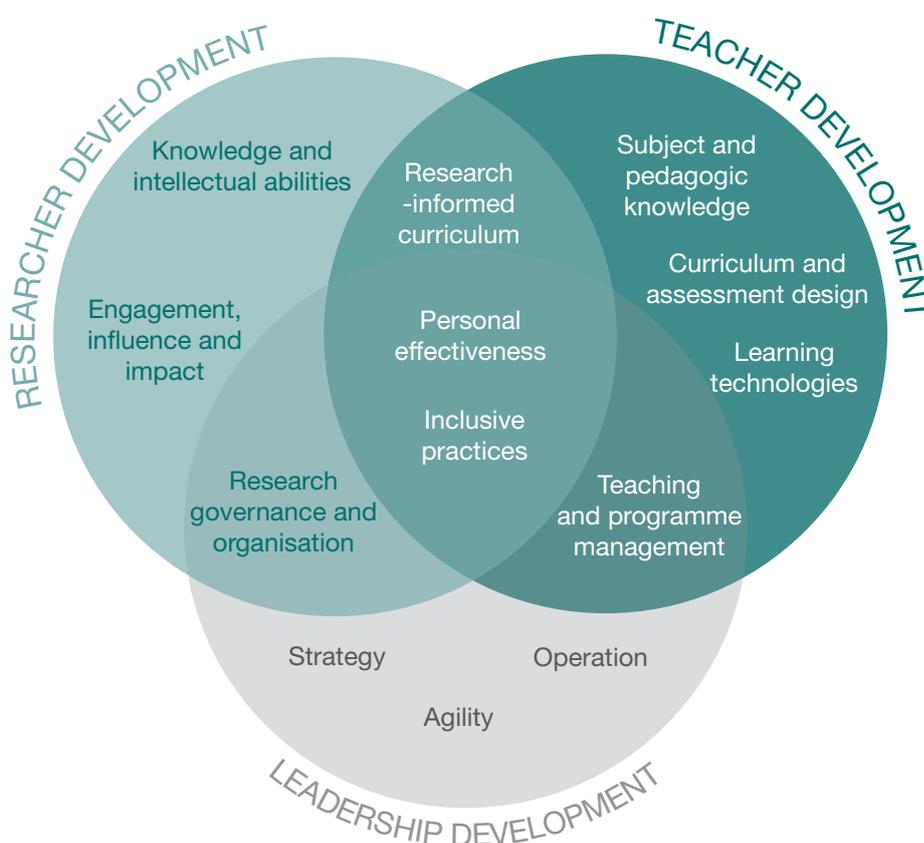


Figure 1 Oxford Brookes' Academic Development Framework

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NB SEDA members automatically receive copies of *Educational Developments*.

The pages of *Educational Developments* are packed full of such ideas for frameworks, tools and resources to support educational development from curriculum design to inclusive teaching and technology-enhanced learning. Our location in what Whitchurch (2008) called the fluid 'third space' between professional and academic domains means we have the flexibility to decide on our priorities, how we conduct our roles, and how our work will be monitored and evaluated.

To what extent are we, the SEDA community, taking advantage of the freedoms that working in the third space provides? How are we evolving our services in response to the changes and challenges our organisations are facing? This article discusses these questions, illustrating the discussion with examples from the Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development (OCSLD).

Like many staff and educational development units, OCSLD firmly occupies the third space. Based within the Directorate of Human Resources at Oxford Brookes University, we combine both educational and staff development functions, delivering a portfolio of personal, career, leadership and educational development.

### Evolving our services

*'OCSLD specialises in providing bespoke staff and educational development which meets institutional strategic and operational needs.'*

Over the last five years, OCSLD has taken the opportunity to evolve our services to support colleagues to respond to the challenges that higher education is facing by providing bespoke staff and educational development interventions. Developers work with linked faculties and directorates to scope the learning and development required to support them to meet their strategic and operational objectives, and to devise appropriate interventions. This ensures that we are prioritising the things that really matter to our clients, such as supporting managers and their teams through an imminent restructure or campus move, guiding a course team to develop a new programme which has been identified by their faculty as important to add to their portfolio, or evaluating a teaching innovation which has the potential to be scalable.

Within this context of working strategically, we describe our approach as:

*'Our approach to working with you is distinctive and transformative, tailoring and delivering work-based interventions for existing teams to meet their immediate and future needs. This is supported by strong expertise in evaluation to monitor outcomes.'*

There are five principles (SWEET) that underpin how we design our services in line with this approach:

- 1) **Staff/student centred:** we want to be really useful to individuals, their departments and the university
- 2) **Work-based:** we want staff to encounter development opportunities through their normal day-to-day work
- 3) **Evidence-based:** we want to promote teaching methods and use staff development techniques that we know work, and to monitor their impact ourselves
- 4) **Efficient:** we want to be able to reach as many colleagues as possible, within the resources we have
- 5) **Technology-enhanced:** we want colleagues to have experiences of technology-enhanced learning as learners, and develop digital literacies across the University.

### Example 1: Participative Process Reviews

An example which exemplifies many of these principles is preparing teams to undertake Participative Process Reviews as ways of bringing about change in

organisational processes that have become burdensome, complicated or costly. Inspired by the Diamond review, and promoted by the Registrar's search for *Lean processes* (Womack and Jones, 2003), Ian Whiting developed a Participative Process Review workshop which managers can commission from OCSLD for a team embarking on the review process. For a readable story of the development and evaluation of Participative Process Reviews, see Ian Whiting's report published in the *Staff Development Forum Digest* (Whiting, 2015). We sought funding from the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education which enabled the trialling and review of the workshops at several different institutions. The evaluation found shifts in thinking, behaviours and practices for individuals, teams and the organisation, noting that 'through Participative Process Reviews solutions become apparent and team engagement and co-operation is fostered'. These process reviews workshops were found to make processes visible and facilitate decisions being made to streamline processes and pressures on staff. They are a robust, evidence-based approach to working with existing teams to improve the efficiency of processes for the benefit of the University community.

### Example 2: Course Design Intensives

Another example where we work with existing teams is the Course Design Intensive (CDI). Initially developed by Greg Benfield in 2002 as part of our implementation of our first e-learning strategy, these curriculum development days have been used to roll out strategic initiatives from the Assessment Compact to Graduate Attributes. The CDI model promotes learner-centred, evidence-informed course design. We bring together extended course teams to create the peer-supported environment necessary to embed new modes of delivery or pedagogic innovations. CDIs use established design principles to make sustainable changes that effect all students on a programme. An evaluation looking back at five years' worth of CDIs found the focus on programme level design effective at implementing strategic curriculum change (Dempster *et al.*, 2012).

### Example 3: Digital Choices Matrix

Technology-enhanced learning is a good example of how we work in the third space crossing boundaries between academic users of technology and central services providers of technology. Faculty and directorate learning and development plans identified a need to develop digital capabilities for colleagues at Oxford Brookes. Tempting though it is to run events that introduce a range of exciting new tools, we wanted to establish something more sustainable. The Digital Choices website was developed by Richard Francis and Mark Childs, is based on the Jisc/NUS digital benchmarking tool and is mapped onto the University Technology Enhanced Learning Framework. Currently a prototype, it will act as a resource bank of good practice, a professional development tool, where colleagues can build a profile of their own digital capabilities and set professional development priorities and objectives.

### Developers as unbounded professionals

These examples illustrate the SWEET principles which we use to design relevant and timely work-based interventions to

support colleagues to meet their strategic and operational objectives. But does this go far enough? The challenges facing higher education providers are enormous and the changes that are needed are more far-reaching than incremental enhancement initiatives can produce. Our organisations need to become more innovative, collaborative and agile places in which to work. Can this SWEET approach also be used to help our universities to develop innovative solutions to the challenges they face or do we need a different approach? How can we take advantage of the freedom working in the third space offers us to promote innovation and collaboration?

Whitchurch (2008) found a number of ways in which professionals were operating when located in the 'third space' between academic and professional services domains. Do you:

- 1) Work within clear structural boundaries defined by your job role and function? (Bounded professional)
- 2) Actively use boundaries for strategic advantage and institutional capacity building? (Cross-boundary professional)
- 3) Disregard boundaries to focus on broadly-based projects and institutional development? (Unbounded professional)
- 4) Have a dedicated appointment spanning professional and academic domains? (Blended professional).

The SEDA community has already started to recognise our roles as cross-boundary professionals by identifying the skills and attributes of boundary spanners (Nerantzi, 2016; Cleaver and Popovic, 2014). These skills are important in enabling us to work effectively within the third space. The most interesting of these roles is, I think, the unbounded professional who is described as having mixed, fluid identities. Unbounded professionals go beyond crossing boundaries to disregarding institutional structures and processes. By contrast, cross-boundary professionals move in and out of the third space on an ongoing basis in order to achieve higher level goals.

### Example 4: Designing and delivering MOOCs

In 2014, after a few years successfully running the First Steps into Learning and Teaching (#FSLT) and Teaching Online Open Course (#TOOC) open online courses from OCSLD, we received funding from the PVC to develop massive open online courses (MOOCs) with the faculties. As usual, we used our SWEET principles to provide support through: working with faculty managers to agree a strategically important MOOC for each faculty; assigning each MOOC team a link educational developer; putting in place accessible digital media production support; and developing a suite of design prompt templates to guide course teams through the important design decisions.

After a year we closed the project early, having run just one of the four planned faculty MOOCs, and our project report noted that the 'stalled progress in some faculties was due to an uncertainty of which budget development of MOOCs should be coming from (teaching or marketing?) and how to allocate staff time within the

workload planning framework'. It came down to structures, particularly the resource allocation model which is dominated by the delivery of academic programmes. Even after significant senior management sponsorship and our support, faculties found it difficult to deliver MOOCs within the current institutional structures.

VCs are concerned about the lack of innovation and our experiences confirmed the findings of PA Consulting's survey of VCs that innovations are difficult to spread where people are constrained by the roles, systems, structures and processes of the traditional spaces (PA Consulting, 2015).

Looking back, I can see that the OCSLD team that successfully created and delivered our MOOCs were operating as unbounded professionals. We have more fluidity and flexibility in our roles and processes than we found in the faculties. For example, we had written job descriptions for, and then recruited the external tutors we needed; we had chosen our preferred form of assessment (badges); we had negotiated with the quality office for a light-touch quality assurance process; we had allocated time and budgets flexibly. Our problem was that we had expected academics to move into our third space and adopt our roles as unbounded professionals, rather than making use of our privileged position to encourage innovation.

### Creating a third space for projects

The final question then is whether developers can create and manage the third space in order to facilitate collaboration and innovation? Encouragement comes from Whitchurch's original study of 54 professional services staff (e.g. HR, finance) taking on projects, such as retention, transition, where it was found that these broadly based, extended projects had *contributed to the development of a third space between professional and academic domains* (Whitchurch, 2008, my emphasis).

#### Example 5: Student Experience projects

At Oxford Brookes, as elsewhere, the student experience has become a strategic priority. The Strategy for Enhancing the Student Experience is implemented (in part) through a number of projects identified and supported by the PVC. The first set of 12 projects ran from 2010 to 2014 and included sweeping (innovative?), university-wide changes such as establishing a Grade Point Average, devising a Student Engagement survey, launching a collaborative Continuing Professional Development scheme, rolling out a new Virtual Learning Environment, and embedding our Graduate Attributes in the curriculum. As the projects came to a close, OCSLD undertook an evaluation of the project managers' experiences.

We were initially interested in the career development of academics specialising in teaching and learning and so our interviews asked questions about the reasons and motivations for becoming a project leader. Actually what we found out was much more interesting. We found that the programme of projects to enhance the student experience

has created an environment with characteristics similar to the third space, which allowed project managers to take on the roles of an unbounded professional (Pavlaou and Sharpe, 2014).

The programme of projects, and the explicit support from the PVC, created a space where senior academics were given the freedom and autonomy to pursue projects to which they were personally committed. Interviewees talked about how they had the independence to decide how to achieve their goals, backed up by the authority of their position as one of the managers of the PVC's student experience projects.

Project managers learnt to use this space to adopt more fluid, flexible identities. One senior academic described the challenge:

*'In the faculty...people trust me and do what I ask them to do, because they believe that if I say it needs doing, it needs doing. Whereas when I'd taken on the [project manager] role, they see me as somebody who's not in the faculty anymore, so that allegiance stops, they'll respond to me as if I was a stranger with my "project manager" hat on.'*

As a response, to gain the trust of colleagues, project managers sometimes used the clout of their project management role and the ultimate authority of the PVC (who was the last person to intervene if everything else failed) and sometimes used their professional credibility. They described the construction of a new academic identity that involves networking, flexibility, multi-tasking and leading by influence. As Whitchurch found previously with professional services staff working on projects e.g. transition and retention, we observed senior academics 'constructing a unique professional profile at the same time as making an innovative contribution to the development of the(ir) institution' (Whitchurch, 2008, p. 388).

### Conclusions

I have argued that as staff and educational developers working in the third space, we should take advantage of our positions to support innovative responses to the challenges that universities currently face. We might do this through making the most of our ability to set our own agenda and evolve our ways of working (e.g. 'SWEET' Strategies), or by deliberately locating innovation projects in this space (e.g. our MOOCs). We also have an important role in guiding other colleagues into this space (e.g. student experience projects), where the lack of adherence to existing protocols can be an advantage in spreading innovation and in developing processes and skills in the new ways of working that our universities will need to thrive.

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## Notes

Thanks to Jay Dempster, Belanda Consulting, for helping to compose the text which describes the OCSLD approach, and for conducting the evaluations of Participative Process Reviews and Course Design Intensives.

Both Course Design Intensives and Participative Process Reviews are available to other institutions, either by downloading the resources from the OCSLD website to run them yourselves, or by booking an OCSLD facilitator.

The Oxford Brookes Academic Development Framework is available at <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/OCSLD/Your-development/Career-development/Academic-development-framework>.

**Professor Rhona Sharpe** is the Head of the Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development at Oxford Brookes University (<https://www.brookes.ac.uk/ocsld/>).

# Action Learning for Academic Development: Learning from experience in two different research-intensive settings

**Claire Stocks**, Liverpool University, **Joseph Hughes** and **Chris Trevitt**, Australian National University (ANU)

This piece results from a collaboration to produce a workshop for the 21st annual SEDA conference. The three of us have a shared interest in supporting academics (novice and established) to maximise the opportunity for us all to learn from our everyday work. That interest has led us to experiment with Action Learning (AL) as an approach to solving teaching problems and also to supporting teachers to reflect on and develop their own teaching practice. We came to realise that although we are using AL in very different ways, we have all found it extremely fruitful. That realisation has led us to consider the potential usefulness of the approach in academic settings more broadly. In this piece, using the experience of two case studies in different research-intensive contexts, we explore some of the features, attributes and, for us, strengths of AL as a form of development work.

AL has been used in Liverpool to support the development of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) through the discussion of teaching challenges that they face in their day-to-day practice. While ostensibly focusing on the solving of problems, it has primarily been used as a tool to support the development of these novice academics in their

teaching roles. In the ANU case, however, the focus has been much more on using AL as a reflective lens on how established academics have come together to work in different teams in order to create a new teaching programme within the Law 'Faculty'. AL has provided a lens through which Joe, as one facilitator of that process, has been able to gain insight into how the work groups have functioned so far, and how they – along with the role of facilitator – might be encouraged to function differently in the future.

## What is Action Learning?

AL typically involves:

1. 'sets' of about six people
2. taking action on real tasks or problems at work
3. learning from reflection on actions taken
4. tasks/problems that are individual rather than collective
5. questioning as the main way to help participants proceed with their tasks/problems
6. use of a facilitator to guide the 'set' through a structured process

Adapted from Pedler *et al.* (2005)

Box 1 What is AL?

## What is Action Learning?

Action Learning is an approach used to foster learning in the workplace, 'a continuous process of learning and reflection, supported by colleagues, with an intention of getting things done' (McGill and Beaty, 2001, p. 21). Box 1 outlines some of the core elements usually involved. The emphasis is on 'getting things done'; there is an emphasis on supporting reflection in order to reach new understandings and *prompt changes in practice*. It aligns nicely with the idea of experiential learning (for instance Kolb's learning cycle, 2014), which suggests that we must complete a cycle of action, reflection, conclusion, and planning for further action in order to develop and improve practice. This process of reflection and action is supported by peers in a 'learning set', which meets on a regular basis over (usually) a number of months for a predetermined amount of time. Sets offer a structured way of working in small groups: practitioners meet regularly and commit to sharing and exploring workplace-related problems, issues and ideas. The group does not offer advice but

provides a confidential space within which individuals can discuss and explore their concerns freely. Sets also have a ‘facilitator’ (in our cases, an educational developer) – someone whose role includes attending to the process of the set, including time management, ensuring that members all have space to contribute and helping the set to work constructively on the issue at hand. Despite these general commonalities, Pedler *et al.* (2005) note the difficulties that can arise due to the lack of an agreed definition of action learning. At the same time, they suggest this can be a strength, with their survey findings... ‘reveal[ing] a picture of a living practice that is changing and developing’... ‘great variations in personal practice, despite broad agreement on the key features or principles’ (p. 58).

The learning set process (see Figure 1) can be more or less structured – in general, some time is required for the designated presenter to explain the issue at hand, after which all participants discuss it for a period of time before a course of action is determined by the presenter. In the next meeting that presenter would generally be required to report on progress made (or not) before attention turns to a new issue (generally offered by a new presenter from the set).

This assumes that set members bring different challenges to the group (as at Liverpool), but this approach can be varied to support a group of members who are all working on the same issue (as at ANU). The really important thing about the process is that learning and reflection should lead to action, so that practice is improved and challenges are addressed. This is AL’s defining feature.

### Case study 1: Graduate Teaching Assistant development at Liverpool University

Liverpool University offers a range of educational development programmes (from ‘Teaching for Researchers’ which is primarily for post-docs to an MA/Dip) but, until 2015, there was no established route for Graduate Teaching Assistants to gain recognition for their teaching via the HEA framework. A well-established and well-received programme of initial training workshops had been in place for a number of years, and so Claire’s (first author) main role was to build on this workshop programme, by providing a route to recognition at Associate Fellow of the HEA. This section is in Claire’s voice.

In designing a route for GTAs to gaining AFHEA, the following was

taken into account:

- There was already a *wealth of accredited programmes* within the unit. In addition to the programmes, there is also an accredited framework, ULTRA (the University of Liverpool Teaching Recognition and Accreditation scheme), which was regularly awarding recognition at Fellow and Senior Fellow level, but had yet to recognise any Associate Fellows. For these reasons, I decided to use AL to support GTAs to make a claim for recognition via the ULTRA framework
- *PhD students who teach can be doing a vast range of different activities* as part of their teaching – some are demonstrating in labs, some leading fieldwork trips, some formatively assessing, some summatively assessing, etc. Designing a workshop programme for such differing experiences without making it very generic, and without delivering at least some redundant information, is virtually impossible
- *PhD students are time poor* – they worry about being effective teachers, but see themselves as being primarily in the University to research. Time is very precious, so the learning had to be relevant and impactful
- *Supervisors would need to be supportive* (or at least not obstructive) and they were likely to be more supportive of an approach which built on the teaching already being done by the GTAs, which delivered timely and relevant support/training and which contributed to improving teaching in the immediate future
- *The existing workshop programme was working well to support participants to get started in teaching.* There was therefore an opportunity for this new intervention to support participants to learn about teaching and how to improve it
- *I have a qualification in coaching and mentoring* and wanted to continue to use those skills in some form. The

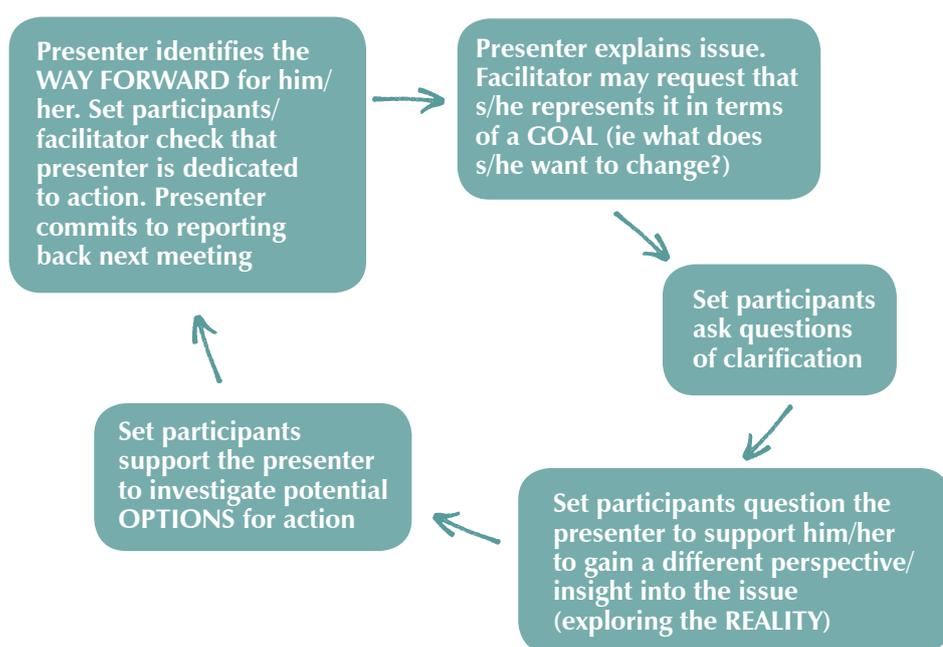


Figure 1 AL set process in Liverpool, which incorporates the ‘GROW’ model (Goal, Reality, Options, Way Forward) as a structural device

facilitation of learning sets made this possible.

AL seemed like it might have real potential as an intervention which could meet the particular demands of the GTA cohort in a research-intensive institution.

## Case study 2: Development of a new (online, PBL) course in Law at ANU

While we use the term 'Faculty' in this piece, ANU actually comprises seven different academic 'Colleges' (not 'Faculties') of which Law is one. ANU is a strongly research-led institution where teaching traditionally plays a secondary interest: it repeatedly features as one of the few top internationally-rated higher education institutions in Australia. In the 'Faculty' there are two distinct academic staff populations aligned with the traditional segregation of the discipline of Law into 'scholarly academic study' and 'preparation for practice'. To date, this segregation has been manifest in their different teaching programmes. The 'Faculty' has an in-house education and innovation team, CEIST (College Educational and Innovation Support Team), which supports operational and strategic educational development initiatives.

In 2011, the 'Faculty' committed to a new strategic initiative – to design and develop a new online, PBL, graduate entry law degree (*i.e.* Juris Doctor). This was an initiative motivated by at least two factors: (1) the desire to reach a student population under-represented at ANU, and (2) by a pressing need, according to some, to get the 'two academic staff populations' to interact more closely, and learn to appreciate and play to one another's strengths more. That is, one staff grouping was strong in scholarship and 'research' performance – especially as these attributes are traditionally understood – while the other was highly practice-oriented with a long history and established skills-base in online educational programme design and innovation. CEIST was charged with a leadership role in this new curriculum development initiative, with a temporary boost to its numbers.

As a new appointment within CEIST, Joe (second author) was positioned as a group facilitator for a sub-group working on this new initiative. As the project matured, and his involvement increased, Joe was deployed further across other sub-groups within the project, culminating in a central role on a programme-wide advisory group. His role was to facilitate the development of several aspects of curriculum design and ensure integration and cohesion of these aspects across the programme as a whole. This section is in Joe's voice.

There were several defining elements that help characterise the situation. For example, elements uncommon to established academic work included:

- Programme-level educational design, aspiring to a spiral curriculum that results in a more integrated student experience
- New pedagogical approach – PBL, fully online
- Academics working in designated small teams over an extended period for curriculum design purposes
- Academics coming together from the two distinct 'staff populations' of the 'Faculty', and needing to explore and establish mutually respectful ways of working together.

I have used AL in this ANU case study:

- As a lens through which to examine our curriculum development activities, and the experience of supporting the development of a new online programme, using a new pedagogy; an experience which centred around academics required to come together to collaborate in ways unfamiliar to them, and which at times possibly conflicted with their understanding of their own professional identity as well as their understanding of teaching and learning in higher education
- To help identify priorities for moving forward as a development team, given the need to develop

many more courses within the programme.

As Table 1 illustrates, there are a number of key points of contrast across the two case studies. In the Liverpool case, AL was used explicitly as a design for the main support offered to GTAs. At ANU, AL was not (even implicitly) part of the design of the support offered to the academics who came together to devise a new teaching programme. Rather, AL has offered the facilitator a way of looking back over an intensive experience (one still only partially complete), with a view to better understanding the process and, especially, perhaps positioning things somewhat differently going forward. The particular strengths of AL have provided benefits in both cases, both for the participants involved and for us as developers and facilitators.

## What have we learned so far about particular benefits of AL?

At Liverpool:

- The AL structure helped *improve current teaching* by addressing real issues currently faced by GTAs. Learning sets are immediately useful and provide support in lieu of the Research Supervisor (often the *de facto* expectation in research-led institutions)
- *The learning gained during AL set activities is applied to practice*, thereby addressing an oft-reported criticism of the workshop approach in development work. The experience introduces set participants to one (structured) route to learning from experience for the purpose of improving their own practice
- Initially, participants may feel that a challenge faced by a colleague in another department has little to do with them but, through discussion, they inevitably come to see *connections with their own context*. They also realise that their problems are generally not novel, and are often connected to strategic decisions made at departmental or institutional level.

At ANU:

- The notion of AL has offered a *powerful framework* to review a previously established group structure and process, with a view to seeking efficiency and effectiveness gains moving forward.

- *The process of group dialogue* is actively cultivated through facilitation, so emphasis can be directed to building on participants' experience rather than delivery of 'content'. Discussions often enabled individuals to achieve greater insights into their own contexts, as well as their own developing professional

skills in context. Discussions often focused on professional values at work, and the impact these had on day-to-day judgments

- *Working in small, collaborative, groups helps deepen individual diagnostic and communications skills,* including:

At Liverpool and ANU:

LIVERPOOL	ANU
AL explicitly introduced to participants as main development approach	AL not explicitly introduced to groups, but rather used as an analytical lens for reviewing group activities
Key 'principles' of AL introduced in the briefing workshop, ground rules for each set discussed	Group participation 'ground rules' evolved
Group size c. 7 people (all PhD students, generally 2nd year, regular teaching, across a range of disciplines) plus facilitator. Current cohort is 21 participants across 3 sets	Group make-up fluctuated (in the range of 3-8 participants; mix of Educational Developers and established Academics; how responsibilities were apportioned, and changed over time)
Two people present their challenges at each meeting (which lasts 2 hours) and report back at the following meeting	Participants didn't bring their own problems to the group, but were expected to contribute to the common task of curriculum development
Participants are in/beginning the process of forming their professional identity (novice academics)	Professional identity of participants already well established to a great extent = established academics in a research-intensive University
Eligible participants invited to apply, c. 25% of invitees actually join the sets	Participants quasi-selected: i.e. senior level directives in the Faculty encouraged 'buy-in' to the curriculum development task by academics (and, to a large extent, this happened very satisfactorily)
<p>Opportunities to learn about role of facilitator as supporting people to make their own choices about action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning about own approach to dealing with challenges</li> <li>• Development of facilitation skills and models, e.g. 'GROW' (see Figure 1)</li> <li>• Recognising and handling resistance to change in set members</li> <li>• Learning how to hold members back from suggesting solutions</li> </ul>	<p>Some points of tension are associated with the role of facilitator as one to support people making their own choices about action to take:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developer as tech training support staff vs. advisor on PBL vs. decision-maker. How do we decide if/when to adopt a stance on that spectrum?</li> <li>• What is the impact, and how do we best deal with it, if participants perceive us one way on that spectrum and we see ourselves in another? Do differences affect our capacity to act/exercise agency?</li> </ul>
Facilitator role is to support (and expose) process. Should recede over time	Facilitator role changed, as group members moved from 'individual, independent academic' towards a more genuine member of a 'team' committed to achieving constructive outcomes
Facilitator role supports multidisciplinary cohort	Facilitator role required drawing together two relatively distinct 'academic staff populations'
Facilitator from central Educational Development unit	Facilitator from an in-house (Law 'Faculty') Educational Development unit (CEIST)

Table 1 Points of contrast in our uses of AL

- Active listening and focused attention
  - Giving and receiving feedback
  - Developing vocabulary around teaching concepts
  - Posing questions that support learning and reflection
  - Slowing down, pacing discussion and avoiding foreclosure
- *Developing as a facilitator.* The experience of facilitation across all three authors of this article spans many decades and a variety of institutional contexts in two different countries. Nevertheless, all three of us acknowledge that each time we work with a new group we are, to an extent, engaging with the unknown. 'Learning' for committed or would-be facilitators is, therefore, a necessary disposition. Finding ways to become comfortable with any uncertainty and/or discomfort implied is essential
  - *The reframing of what it means to engage in 'development work'* in academic and higher education contexts has been an important by-product, for us, of the act of putting this article together. The experience of using AL has caused us to begin to think of 'development work' as focused around engaging our academic colleagues in dialogue with one another, as well as the development of teaching practice *per se*. As such, it offers one mechanism for cultivating the educational literacy required to underpin meaningful dialogue around teaching and learning between colleagues (within and across disciplines).

### Evaluation so far...

At Liverpool, four of the pilot group of ten have now been awarded their AFHEA. Another three suspended their engagement for personal reasons, and a further three are expected to complete this academic year. At ANU we have just completed the first substantive programme review (formative evaluation over two half-day meetings on two successive days, involving a dozen or more academic and educational support staff, along with senior academics in key leadership positions). The orderly, informed and powerfully constructive discussion was

in marked contrast to the *ad hoc* and circular nature of the discussion that seemed to prevail at all too many of the meetings during the early stages of the programme; this augurs well for constructive, focused and energetic progress going forward. Further, the group on day two paused to make a celebratory comment to this effect, even as they acknowledged the massive task ahead and need for ongoing vigilance if we are to stay on track.

In conclusion, AL has been a very fruitful approach in each of our (very different) educational development contexts. The particular strengths of the process help to ensure groups, as well as individuals, get things accomplished at the same time as they engage in purposeful learning during the process. Our experience suggests it is especially suited to research-intensive contexts because of its focus on real and timely issues (so it's not distracting from the research that our participants are meant to be doing), because of the democratic approach where experience and expertise (grounded in participants' contexts) is recognised, and the fact that it is driven by participants (and their issues) rather than the facilitator's agenda.

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# 'Can we find five minutes for a chat?': Fostering effective dialogue between educational developers and leaders of learning and teaching in universities

**Sally Brown**, Leeds Metropolitan University, and **Shân Wareing**, London South Bank University

*Shân: Like Sally, I am an educational developer who became a PVC. This journey has been very important to me. Before I moved into a PVC role, I was very much seeking to influence institutional policy and culture with educational development principles and values. After the transition, I could see the importance of educational development to my approach as a PVC, to my decision-making, to the way I relate to people, to what I believe to be the purpose of universities. Because of this I welcomed the opportunity to work with Sally to explore the relationship between educational developers' and PVCs' learning and teaching, with the goals of increasing the effectiveness of the relationship and of supporting the careers of educational developers who also think they might move into PVC roles.*

Sally: Shân and I enjoy working together and enjoyed collaborating on our chapter on moving from educational developers to being senior managers in universities in David Baume and Celia Popovic's 2016 book on *Advancing Practice in Academic Development*. Given the topic of the SEDA November 2016 conference, *Surviving and Thriving: Effective Innovation and Collaboration in the New Higher Education*, offering a session together there was an attractive proposition. The workshop we delivered was designed to help foster better mutual understanding between educational developers and HE senior managers by providing a playful space to consider some very serious issues about confidence, self-efficacy and continuous self- and professional development, so that co-working becomes congenial and productive. The mechanism we chose to bring the workshop to life was role-play.

*Before our paper at the SEDA conference, a few people said 'role-play! You're brave', and I tended to respond facetiously with 'she made me', at which no one seemed at all surprised. But that is a rather misleading representation of how we ended up sitting across a desk on a platform at the SEDA conference acting out a dysfunctional relationship. Sally said, 'let's do something a bit different, what about role-play?' and I said 'Ok, good idea', which is hardly an arm twisted up my back although I didn't appreciate the consequences of my reply at the time.*

Telling stories is an essential part of human experience and I believe that acting them out brings them life and helps us make sense of our lives. Role-play for me has been an

integral part of my professional life from the early days of my career when I used therapeutic drama with very naughty boys. Later, as a secondary school teacher I was privileged to have the opportunity to study on an in-service teachers' Associated Drama Board Educational Diploma, where our guest lecturer was the renowned educator Dorothy Heathcote, who used drama as a tool to promote holistic learning in schools. Problem-solving lay at the heart of her methodology and adopting different roles became its most famous feature. Long before the ludic approach to teaching and development became a common term in higher education, (see, for example, Nerantzi and McCusker, 2014), Heathcote used the term 'play' to describe how novices can become experts by adopting and exploring roles. In a dialogue with Gavin Bolton (Heathcote and Bolton, 1994), Heathcote said:

*'I consider that mantle of the expert work becomes deep social (and sometimes personal) play because (a) students know that they are contracting into fiction, (b) they understand the power they have within that fiction to direct, decide and function, (c) the 'spectator' in them must be awakened so that they perceive and enjoy the world of action and responsibility, even as they function in it, and (d) they grow in expertise through the amazing range of conventions that must be harnessed...'* (Heathcote and Bolton, 1994, p. 18)

It only came to me as I wrote this article how much my early work with Heathcote has impacted on my approaches to teaching and learning, as well as solving problems and managing complex situations throughout my professional life. I even kept a 'magic jacket' (boring, black but symbolically powerful) in my wardrobe at work when I was a PVC, which I put on when I was going to what I anticipated would be a difficult meeting, hence adopting the mantle of the competent and knowledgeable university leader.

So when Shân and I thought about how we would translate our chapter into a workshop, using role-play for our session seemed to me a great idea. I know some people find doing role-play profoundly uncomfortable, but knowing that Shân like me, came from a literature background, I felt that acting out our dilemmas might be a really interesting process. She seemed to be up for it; I talked through with her a couple of scenarios that we might use and she and I both agreed to work out a few more.

*Let's take some of the situations we wrote about, and turn them into conversations between an educational developer and a PVC, and explore them through role-play, suggested Sally.*

We ended up with seven scenarios, and the two that came across to us as most heartfelt were the ones we decided to role-play during the session.

*Each scenario was rooted in our experiences but not specific to one time or one person. Interestingly, once we collated our expanded scenarios into a single document, I could no longer recall which were mine and which were Sally's, suggesting we had successfully picked up on some recurring themes and relationships.*

We were offered a 45-minute slot. Although we could easily have filled a whole hour and a half, we decided to act out two scenarios and to ask participants to enact with a partner one scenario themselves, to provide a coherent activity in our allocated 45 minutes and to give participants opportunities to play also.

When people get most anxious about role-play, they tend to do so when it's a matter of a public performance, whereas my experience working with difficult children and adolescents showed that in a large, busy room people working in pairs tended to get involved in their own dialogues without worrying about what was going on around them. This was very much what seemed to happen in the SEDA workshop session. For us doing our role-plays, I tended to think we could go with the flow of the moment, but Shân favoured a more rehearsed experience: somehow we managed to reach a compromise on how to manage the session.

*I fitted into the category of people Sally identifies above, who are anxious about a public performance! It'll be fine, I thought beforehand, even fun. But closer to the time, it certainly wasn't feeling like fun, and I was beginning to suspect it might not be fine. 'I'll prepare my role-play characters', I reassured Sally (who didn't need reassuring), and myself. 'Right, I'll be taking this approach, and this angle, and I'll assume this about your motivation', I told her agitatedly just before our slot. 'OK' she said, with a hint of 'whatever'.*

The one thing I was worried about was whether we would get so involved in our role-play that we would overrun our proposed five minutes for each of our two scenarios and wouldn't allow enough time for discussion and audience role-play. We solved this by the genius last-minute thought of nominating our session chair Sandy as the PVC's PA who was to rush in after four and a half minutes to tell the PVC that another appointment was awaiting. By prior agreement, we both brought a pink formal jacket to the workshop (those who know Shân and me know it wouldn't have been possible for us to share a single jacket as we are very different in shape) and wore it when we adopted the mantle of the Senior Manager.

*I will dry up, I thought. I will look stupid and people will wonder how I managed to get my job. No one will come. Everyone will come. It was quite stressful. Sally on the other hand looked like she was enjoying herself. 'You do the talking', I said.*

Our two scenarios:

1) Sandra/Sam as a newly-appointed PVC visited the Educational Development Centre for the first time and was surprised to see how large the office was, and how many people were working there. It seemed to him/her to be much larger than the Physics department where s/he worked previously. Her/his friends in the Maths department and in Allied Health have complained that the PGCert in Learning and Teaching is not relevant to their new lecturers. So the PVC has decided to save money and increase the relevance of Educational Development by downsizing the unit by 75% and using the money released to fund 0.5 secondments in the Schools to deliver subject-based staff and curriculum development. In this conversation today, s/he wants Toni/Tony the Educational Developer's input to help him/her decide what 25% of the central unit would still be needed in the devolved structure. No formal restructuring proposal has been prepared yet.

2) Mike/Mary is an Educational Developer who is strongly motivated by a sense of social justice. S/he distrusts authority, which in his/her experience is always combined with corruption and selfishness. In his/her view, senior managers have sold out on their principles to earn big salaries, order other people around, ignore the needs of the poor and vulnerable, and avoid doing real work. Luckily they are also usually too stupid and lazy to obstruct him/her in her mission to revolutionise the status quo. His/her way of dealing with line managers is to appear to meet their expectations but in practice to follow his/her own direction. S/he doesn't engage in real conversations with them. Any attempt to performance manage him/her is met with evasion and legalistic challenge. The PVC Ruth/Ray has asked him/her to develop a teaching observation scheme as part of the probation for new teaching staff. Mike/Mary has interpreted the brief according to his/her own priorities, and created a voluntary peer development scheme, based on a reading group discussing Freire and micro teaching in pairs. The PVC and the Educational Developer are meeting for a progress review of the scheme.

In each of our two role-plays, time seemed to me to go very fast. We followed the lines we had more or less agreed in advance, but actually once we were in role we both got quite engaged and it felt very natural. In fact, for me, now six years out of full-time work, it felt horribly familiar!

*And after all, I did enjoy it. I found my inner ruthless Pro-Vice-Chancellor, and my inner obstructive and single-minded*

*educational developer. My overall reaction was of catharsis as I explored sides of myself that perhaps I understand only partially when I went through them for real but now bringing experience and reflection to them, understand differently. We hammed it up a bit, but not a huge amount. The audience seemed both engaged and to have quite complex reactions to our depictions of educational developers interacting with pro-vice-chancellors. 'You weren't listening to her', they said; 'is it always like that?' 'I don't get involved in those conversations yet, but I guess I will one day and it's good to get a sense of how they play out, what happens, what's at stake'.*

Then it was time for the 40 participants to join in. Having played out our two role-plays, we asked participants to talk about the scenarios with the following prompts:

- What are the big issues here?
- If you were the senior manager here how would you play this meeting and what would your objectives be?
- If you were the educational developer here, how could you best advance improvements to the student experience?
- What are the biggest individual and institutional dangers here and how could they be averted?
- What would be the best possible outcomes in each case for each party?

Time was tight, so we dealt with the discussion in plenary and then moved on to asking them to do a bit of role-playing themselves. They were asked to choose just one of the remaining unplayed scenarios and to enact the situation for five minutes.

Here are our other five scenarios:

3) Alan/Alana is an eager newly appointed PVC with not much understanding of learning and teaching issues but who wants to make a big impact in this job, which s/he thinks will put him/her on the ladder to becoming a Vice-Chancellor within a couple of years. Steve/Steph is an Educational Developer who knows if s/he handles the situation right, s/he might be able to 'manage up', that is, impact significantly on the future direction of the university, which up to this point has been rather half-hearted about learning and teaching, with poor NSS scores and a fairly middling research record. Alana/Alan has big ideas about changes that can be made to energise what s/he sees as a teaching complement who are rather stuck in their ways. This is their first real one-to-one conversation.

4) Bel/Bena is delighted to have been promoted through the ranks to be a new Educational Developer in a small university without an established learning and teaching centre. All fired up from three conferences over the summer before s/he started in post, s/he has clear and ambitious plans to push through an ambitious change

management plan. The senior manager Peter/Petra to whom s/he reports is approaching retirement and is actually rather hoping for a quiet life over the next couple of years before stepping down. His/her way of treating Bel/Bena is to find all sorts of regulatory and systemic reasons to prevent much happening, impressing on him/her that all these ideas have been tried before but didn't work. In this conversation, Bel/Bena is trying to convince his/her manager that the university really should be keeping up with the sector by ensuring within the year that all students are receiving assignments and marking/giving feedback electronically, because of the powerful benefits for students.

5) Ali/Ally is a PVC who is a very enthusiastic and successful teacher with institutional awards for good teaching and recognition from his/her own subject professional body for services to teaching. With no knowledge of the history of or the research-led basis of Educational Development, s/he is on a mission to tell everyone to teach like s/he has always done, as it obviously works. In this conversation, long-established Educational Developer Suni/Si, who has worked in the university for a decade and has a good track record of publications on student engagement and effective lecturing, is trying to convince the PVC that there are very many models of good university teaching rather than a ubiquitous approach that everyone should follow.

6) Eloise/Ed is a PVC who is astute about politics and policy, and has a record for being an innovative researcher and teacher. S/he's been promoted quickly and doesn't have personal experience of bringing about institutional change. S/he sees opportunities in the current national policy environment if the university moves quickly to make a name for itself in blended learning and student engagement. S/he wants the Educational Developer Zena/Zak to ensure the university offers a consistent and distinctive education in which all courses are taught using blended learning for all year-one modules, with effect from September 2017. S/he wants to be able to check all courses have sites in the virtual learning environment which conform to a check list of five aspects of blended learning which she wants the educational developer to develop. S/he also sets Zena/Zak the target of achieving university scores for student engagement in the revised NSS in the top 10% in the UK in August 2017, and wants one or two key initiatives to deliver this to be announced and implemented in the next three months. This is one of their regular one-to-ones where Eloise/Ed is reminding Zena/Zak of the goals and asking for an update.

7) Freya/Fred works in a university with a very flat management structure with a Vice-Chancellor who likes to give her senior managers lots of autonomy (but penalises them if things go wrong!). S/he is seeking help on this occasion from Dani/Danny, the Educational Developer because two of the six Deans are passively resisting the implementation of a policy that Freya/Fred took through Academic Board concerning expectations about the implementation of relevant learning technologies within each programme (although not necessarily each module). In this conversation, s/he is seeking research-based evidence to help make the case to the VC for her to take a tougher line. Dani/Danny wants to be helpful but doesn't want to get caught up in a turf war which s/he knows could put at risk her own position as a secondee from one of the faculties concerned. There is history in this university of such things happening!

The room was very rapidly full of an amazing buzz of people discovering their own senior managers and badly-done-by educational developers. Concerns can arise about using role-play when people forget at the end of the session that they were in role, and sometimes carry forward conflict that was engendered in 'play', so I did what I always used to do with my young people and asked participants to start with the mantra 'This is a role-play: it is not the real me' and to finish similarly by saying 'that was a role-play, that was not actually me talking'. The 'players' seemed to enjoy the opportunity to live (or re-live) common and realistic higher education scenarios, and like us, seemed to learn from the experience.

*So in conclusion, I would not have done the role-play had Sally not prompted me but I am very glad I did. I felt more sympathy for characters (on both sides of the desk) who had been difficult for me to understand when I had been one of them, or sat opposite them. I felt I had grown through the empathy, the playfulness, and through the process which allowed us to explore emotional and power relationships between colleagues, and our relationships with our professional identities and the work we invest ourselves in. And I saw my own skills differently too. Released from my own sense of self I found I could perfectly well behave in ways that seemed, at least to me, different from my normal behaviour. As if I were expanding my repertoire. Hmm, good to know, I thought.*

Me too, Shân! It was apparent in the short final plenary that people had fully engaged and found the scenarios only too believable. They commented on their realism and said that they saw how each of the roles had problems associated with it. We concluded by inviting people to use the scenarios as an open resource and have fun playing them out back at their own institutions. We look forward to hearing how that went.

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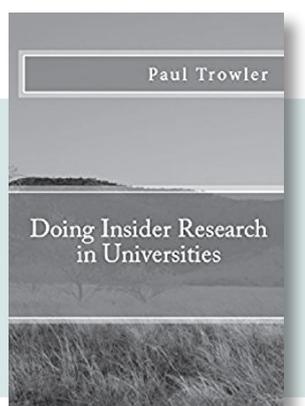
## Book Review

### Doing Insider Research in Universities

Paul Trowler

ISBN 9781500672720

SRHE e-book



This is a curious little book. It bears the name of no publisher, but careful reading leads us to discover on the last page that it is one of a series of e-books published in the SRHE *Doctoral Research into Higher Education Series* available on Amazon. It seems hard, even with Google or Amazon, to find out any more – except there seems to be a series of short texts here, several by Paul Trowler, and all of these are lavishly praised.

This particular text contains 6 chapters and a list of resources in 70 pages. Although it is short, it covers an area of vital interest to many of us. Essentially it is about how to be an academic doing research on academia. Here any previous research is sparse and mainly concerned with methodology, management and administration.

Much more interesting, of course, is research about ourselves as academics

– why do we do what we do, what are our open and hidden agenda, how can we do research on colleagues without (and with) their knowledge and permission, what methodologies are open to us, and so on? Regrettably, there seems to be even less published on these issues and the spatial constraints of this text mean that readers are only alerted to these issues here.

Today, when every university has its own ethics committee – with different regulations and procedures for all – we might ask what effect does the context have on what we might do, what we can do, and how may we report it? Maybe the campus novel is worth writing after all.

**James Hartley** is Emeritus Professor of Psychology at Keele University.

# Whatever happened to Programme Assessment Strategies?

Ruth Whitfield, University of Bradford, and Peter Hartley, Edge Hill University

In her excellent summary of developments and issues from the TESTA project in a recent *Educational Developments*, Tansy Jessop wondered whether she would still be writing about the challenges of assessment across courses/programmes in a few years' time (Jessop, 2016). While admitting to 'loving the idea' of TESTA's continued activity through 2019, she was also anxious 'that it may signal the persistence of troubling issues in assessment and feedback' (p. 8). We have no doubt that she will still be contributing way beyond 2019 – issues that she and colleagues are confronting will not be resolved that quickly.

This article summarises how we reached this conclusion by revisiting major concepts and developments arising from the PASS project. While recognising that projects like TESTA and PASS have stimulated some changes across the sector, we conclude that significant issues remain for assessment in higher education which will keep us occupied for more than a few years.

## Understanding the PASS approach – A brief history

Programme Assessment Strategies ([www.pass.brad.ac.uk](http://www.pass.brad.ac.uk)) was an educational project funded (like TESTA) by the Higher

Education Academy (HEA) through the now discontinued group projects strand of the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (2010-13). The website is still live, containing all the case studies and resources mentioned below. It aimed to confront a fundamental issue for every HE course/programme leader: how to design an effective, efficient, inclusive and sustainable assessment strategy which delivers the key course/programme outcomes.

The project defined programme-focused assessment as:

*'...assessment...specifically designed to address major programme outcomes rather than very specific or isolated components of the course. It follows then that such assessment is integrative in nature, trying to bring together understanding and skills in ways which represent key programme aims. As a result, the assessment is likely to be more authentic and meaningful to students, staff and external stakeholders.'*  
(From the PASS Position Paper – <http://tinyurl.com/hslzpped>)

The project team proposed four key types of programme-focused assessment (PFA), each with its own variants, as set out in Figure 1:

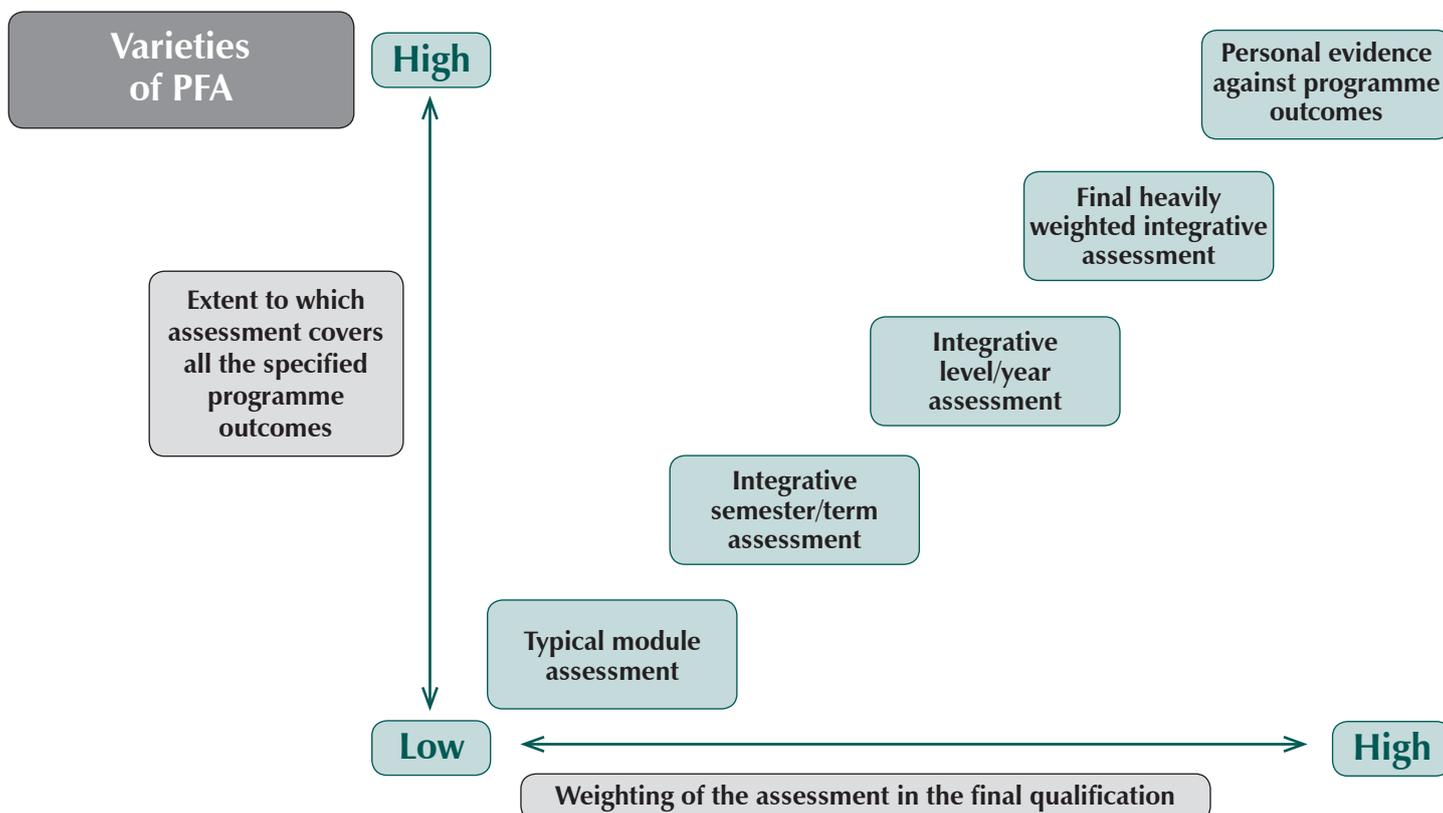


Figure 1 Varieties of Programme Focused Assessment

- 1) *Integrative semester/term assessment* – Assessments that demonstrate that students satisfy all the learning outcomes specified for one semester/term of the programme
- 2) *Integrative level/year assessment* – Assessments that demonstrate that students satisfy all the learning outcomes specified for one level/year of the programme (horizontal), or more than one level/year of the programme (vertical)
- 3) *Final, heavily weighted integrative assessment* – As a major (but not necessarily the total) part of the final programme assessment, these assessments demonstrate that students satisfy all the learning outcomes specified at programme level
- 4) *Assessment by submission of personal evidence against programme learning outcomes* – In order to pass the programme, students must submit work (often in the form of a portfolio) which demonstrates that they satisfy all the learning outcomes specified at programme level.

The first (rather depressing) finding from the project was the very few examples of courses/programmes at undergraduate level using assessments which reflected the definitions towards the upper right area of the diagram above. Assessments were predominantly ‘rooted’ in modules, focusing on module objectives and content with little or no explicit reference to the general programme outcomes. Even modules suggested as ‘integrative’ often turned out to be less so. For example, the Final Year Project or Dissertation module is often seen as a ‘capstone’ module. But this can often be a very specific and narrow investigation which only tests *some* of the programme objectives, albeit in significant depth.

More encouraging findings came from the small number of course teams implementing new course designs with a strong integrative emphasis. Among these were several which managed to do so without causing significant problems for their administrative systems in terms of recording grades and credit. For example, Business Management at Coventry implemented integrative case studies worth 50% of the total grades in semester 2 of each year; BioSciences at Brunel took full advantage of new flexible regulations which allowed course teams to define their curriculum in terms of ‘study blocks’ and ‘assessment blocks’ as well as conventional modules. Assessment blocks assess performance across more than one study block, giving opportunities for integrative assessment.

General outcomes from PASS included:

- Case studies on PFA across a range of subject disciplines
- Guidance on factors which influence the adoption and implementation of PFA
- A tried and tested workshop format which programme teams can use to review/revise their assessment strategies
- Ideas and approaches to evaluate the impact of PFA.

The formal evaluation of the project, conducted by ASKe at Oxford Brookes in 2013, concluded:

*‘Whether or not the PASS name is specifically remembered, the project has contributed to the gradual “seeping” of PFA [programme focused assessment] ideas. PFA ideas were familiar to the ten PVCs/ILLTs/QA and QAA representatives we interviewed. The growing interest in PFA has been fostered by the multiple other initiatives, projects and agendas supporting programme-based thinking, including the employability agenda, TESTA, and the ASKe Assessment Standards Manifesto. Many see PFA not as an end in itself, but rather as a means to accomplish other goals, such as employability or reducing the assessment burden.’*

## Has assessment in Higher Education moved with the times?

To say that the Higher Education landscape is changing is no understatement, but are our assessment strategies moving with the times? Before returning to outcomes from PASS, it is worth recognising the wealth of information which is now available to course teams, thanks to major initiatives such as the JISC Assessment and Feedback Programme, the Scottish Enhancement Themes, outputs from the CETLs (ASKe and AfL), and specific publications (e.g. from HEA, NUS etc.).

There has been a corresponding growth in research thanks to the sustained efforts of a number of scholars. We have been particularly influenced by the work of individuals including David Boud, Nancy Falchikov, David Nicol, Dai Hounsell, Royce Sadler, Sue Bloxham, Margaret Price *et al.* (further details on the PASS website). These and other authors have undoubtedly influenced many of us but we are not convinced that this has led to the sea change which Tansy Jessop and others have called for. There are numerous approaches and frameworks which deserve further detailed investigation. For example, David Boud recently revisited the concept of ‘sustainable assessment’. He argues that the changing social and economic context in which we now operate and the changes in student expectations and demands from employers support the need for sustainable assessment where assessment ‘meets the needs of the present and [also] prepares students to meet their own future learning needs’ (Boud and Soler, 2016). Key elements of developing informed judgement from the perspective of the students are proposed as:

- 1) Identifying oneself as an active learner
- 2) Identifying one’s own level of knowledge and the gaps in this
- 3) Practising, testing and judging
- 4) Developing these skills over time
- 5) Embodying reflexivity and commitment.

One obvious implication here is that many course/programmes are not developing these. Another call for a fundamental rethink of assessment practice comes from David Carless, offering a framework which aims to ‘depict the integration of three key drivers of learning-oriented assessment’ (Carless, 2015, p. 6). His three drivers are ‘learning-oriented assessment tasks’, ‘student engagement with feedback’, and ‘developing evaluative expertise’ and his main argument is that ‘it is the interplay of these three

elements which impacts significantly on the kind of learning which students derive from assessment processes' (*op. cit.*, p. 6). His book explores these elements and their interplay through systematic literature reviews and practical examples from the work of award-winning teachers.

Further evidence that we still have serious problems to resolve can be inferred from the new HEA Transforming Assessment Framework. This aims to provide a clear structure and process to rethink and reframe assessment policy and practice – <http://tinyurl.com/z3duz2y>. The publication of this framework builds on and synthesises previous work, both practical and theoretical, and clearly indicates that assessment in higher education is still 'work in progress'.

We were heartened to see that ideals which informed PASS (and TESTA) are reflected in the second of the six tenets which comprise the HEA Framework:

*'Ensuring assessment is fit for purpose – achievement of programme outcomes through a variety of routes reflecting ability at the end of a programme not accumulation of marks.'*

This strengthens our conviction that the ideas and approaches embedded in PASS can still provide course teams/programmes with necessary insights to deliver this tenet, as summarised in Figure 2.

Our convictions have been further strengthened by an upsurge in invitations from a range of institutions to discuss these issues (e.g. Whitfield, 2016). This has led to many conversations with course leaders and tutors. Sadly, it appears that some if not all of Chris Rust's 'Assessment Issues' (a summary report prepared by Chris for PASS at the start of the project) are as relevant today as they were then:

- 1) Not assessing programme outcomes
- 2) Atomisation of assessment
- 3) Students and staff failing to see the links/coherence of the programme
- 4) Modules too short for complex learning
- 5) Surface learning and 'tick-box' mentality
- 6) Inappropriate 'one-size-fits-all'
- 7) Over-standardisation in regulations
- 8) Too much summative – not enough formative assessment.

This led us to revisit PASS more systematically. In 2016, we surveyed the SEDA community together with those who had offered case studies and expressed interest in the project, to try to establish whether the 'seepage' of PFA referred to in the evaluation report continues.

### Was PFA a PASSing fantasy?

Our first observation and major difficulty was in tracking down colleagues who were associated with PASS; the changing landscape of HE has led to many colleagues moving on to new things, and it became evident that without their championing of PFA there was little evidence of the longevity of impact of PASS. That said, it was gratifying to establish that the majority of the respondents felt that the outputs from the PASS project had been extremely useful to them (Figure 3):

We found evidence of PFA being demonstrated through:

- Stage-based assessments (synoptic exams)
- Integrated assessments at each level of study
- Cross-modular integrated programme level assessment.

Responses to the question 'What was the most successful use of PFA?' were also very encouraging, as the following quotes indicate:

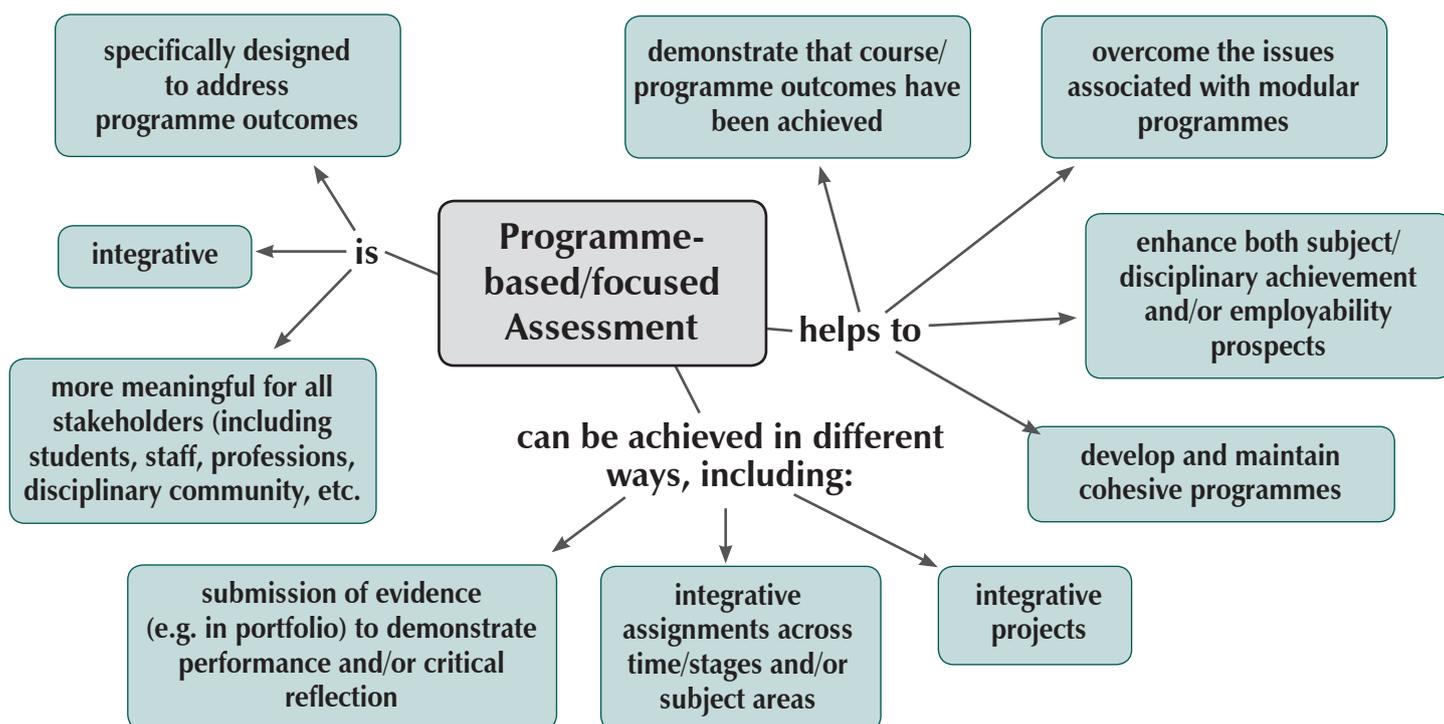


Figure 2 Programme Focused Assessment

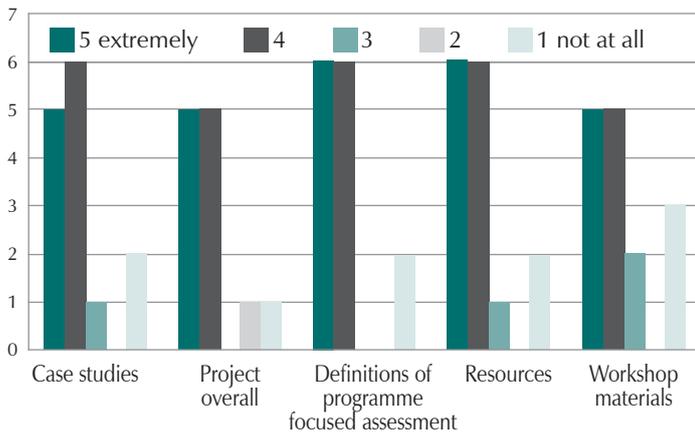


Figure 3 Usefulness of PASS outputs

*‘The fact that it has encouraged students to think “beyond the module” to how things inter-relate in real practice; also the fact that it has allowed us to require students to repeat significant teaching blocks if the stage-based assessment suggests they aren’t safely integrating their knowledge with a goal of patient safety.’*

*‘Providing a means to encourage students to bring together different elements of their learning. Made some assessments more authentic than when artificially creating modular-based cases (health-related degree programme). The e-portfolio has the potential to be hugely successful in demonstrating genuinely programmed focused outcomes but I don’t think we utilised this as well as we could have done.’*

### One success story leads to another

Our respondents did agree that PASS had stimulated their thinking about assessment and the surrounding processes and had often led to consequences and change which we had not anticipated. For example, one PASS case study was the redesigned MPharm from the School of Pharmacy at the University of Bradford. We were with the School from day one of the new design when we facilitated a visioning workshop back in 2010. Many will be familiar with their adoption of Team Based Learning (TBL). The curriculum design was influenced by PFA both in terms of general principles and specific innovation. Using PFA principles, they have developed a ‘long-loop’ assessment using TBL to ensure that essential learning from stage 1 of the programme is carried over into stage 2. Key stages and features in this long loop are as follows (Hartley *et al.*, 2015):

- Stage 1 students revised and revisited Stage 1 concepts in the summer vacation
- In September, students sat a 40-question individual readiness assurance test (iRAT) drawn from questions previously set in Stage 1, that were important to Stage 2 or that were particularly challenging
- This was followed by a team readiness assurance test (tRAT), where students answered the questions in their new Stage 2 teams (for IRATs and tRATs, see <http://tinyurl.com/hxg9grz>)
- This long-loop assessment is summative with marks contributing towards the Stage 2 final synoptic assessment.

The first cohort of the newly designed programme graduated in the summer of 2016 with notably increased pass rates in the final pre-registration exams. These are just rewards for a programme team that has worked hard to teach out the old programme and deliver a radically changed programme in tandem. Their evaluation of PFA is summarised in Figure 4 below.

PFA – the Pharmacy experience	
Benefits	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction in assessment burden</li> <li>• Truly assesses Programme outcomes</li> <li>• Team-Based-Learning motivates and incentivises preparation through assessment for learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial lack of understanding of how it could work and what could be achieved through PFA</li> <li>• Overcoming module obsession</li> <li>• Overcoming regulations and systems</li> <li>• Time to plan, explain and develop staff</li> <li>• Reassessment challenges</li> <li>• Implementing in a large programme – over 50 teaching staff.</li> </ul>

Figure 4 PFA – the Pharmacy experience

The learning from this programme influenced the design of their new Physician Associate programme where the final programme assessments will be assessed through students demonstrating that they can regularly and consistently perform or do the tasks of a physician associate (using the Framework for clinical assessment – Miller, 1990).

The final synoptic summative assessment for the Physician Associate programme is the successful completion of *all* elements of an e-portfolio developed throughout the programme. The e-portfolio provides evidence of learning and reflections on learning experiences and supervised learning events and includes:

- A final assessed reflective essay bringing together components from the portfolio
- Record of engagement with Supervised Learning Events
- Clinical supervisors end-of-placement reports
- Evidence of satisfactory demonstration of core procedural skills through Direct observation of procedural skills
- Team Assessment Behaviour (multisource feedback previously known as a 360-degree feedback).

### Implementing PFA

From the case studies that emerged through PASS, there was evidence that PFA can have a positive impact if certain elements are in place. The most important of these are summarised in Figure 5.

The evidence from the MPharm redesign supports our original thinking, as do responses to our recent survey:

*‘An unexpected long-term impact of programme-focused assessment was the facilitation of conversations between staff in designing assessments (which had previously not happened to the same extent).’*

*'Better prepares students for lifelong learning, and for passing healthcare professional external assessments (which are similar).'*

Realising the benefits of PFA is not without its challenges. For example, the University of Bradford's curriculum framework promotes a programme focus; however, reflecting on the curriculum framework workshops that are an integral part of the design process, we conclude:

- PFA can be seen as complex – explaining the vision (and convincing people to take the time to explore the ideas) is not always that easy
- We are still very module-centric – few lecturers nowadays have experienced anything other than a modular system
- QA regulations/systems are typically not set up for PFA – they will require some adjustment
- An investment in time is needed to think creatively re both planning and implementation. This requires participation from everyone in a context where assembling all the course team for an extended discussion is increasingly problematic, dealing with teaching staff who feel increasingly pressurised in other directions
- PFA is particularly challenging where modules are used by multiple programmes.

More important advice for those starting out with PFA came from our other respondents, notably to:

- Be clear on the goals/aims of your programme overall, and each stage of your programme. It is useful to work back from there to a sensible assessment that does what you want academically, then talk to your administrators, not just academics!
- Work with colleagues in Academic Quality Units early

and regularly throughout the programme design, development and implementation stages to consider all aspects of the assessment processes

- Explain clearly, and repeatedly, to students (and staff) the rationale for the choices of assessment, focusing on preparing for the future
- Be prepared to raise challenges to institutional regulations/process barriers which could impede the implementation of such a strategy.

### And where will we be in 2019?

At that point, we will know a lot more about the nature and impact of new pressures like TEF. While this is placing renewed emphasis on assessment, it may encourage institutions to look for 'short-term fixes' rather than the more long-term investment needed to embed processes like PASS or TESTA. So, we expect and look forward to Tansy's next update.

Other relevant projects will have delivered by then, such as the HEFCE-sponsored projects on learning gain, and we should be able to evaluate the immediate impact of the new HEA framework and its development. We will continue to discuss the pros and cons of PFA with anyone and everyone prepared to give us their time. Although the PASS project is formally completed, the ideas are too important to file away!

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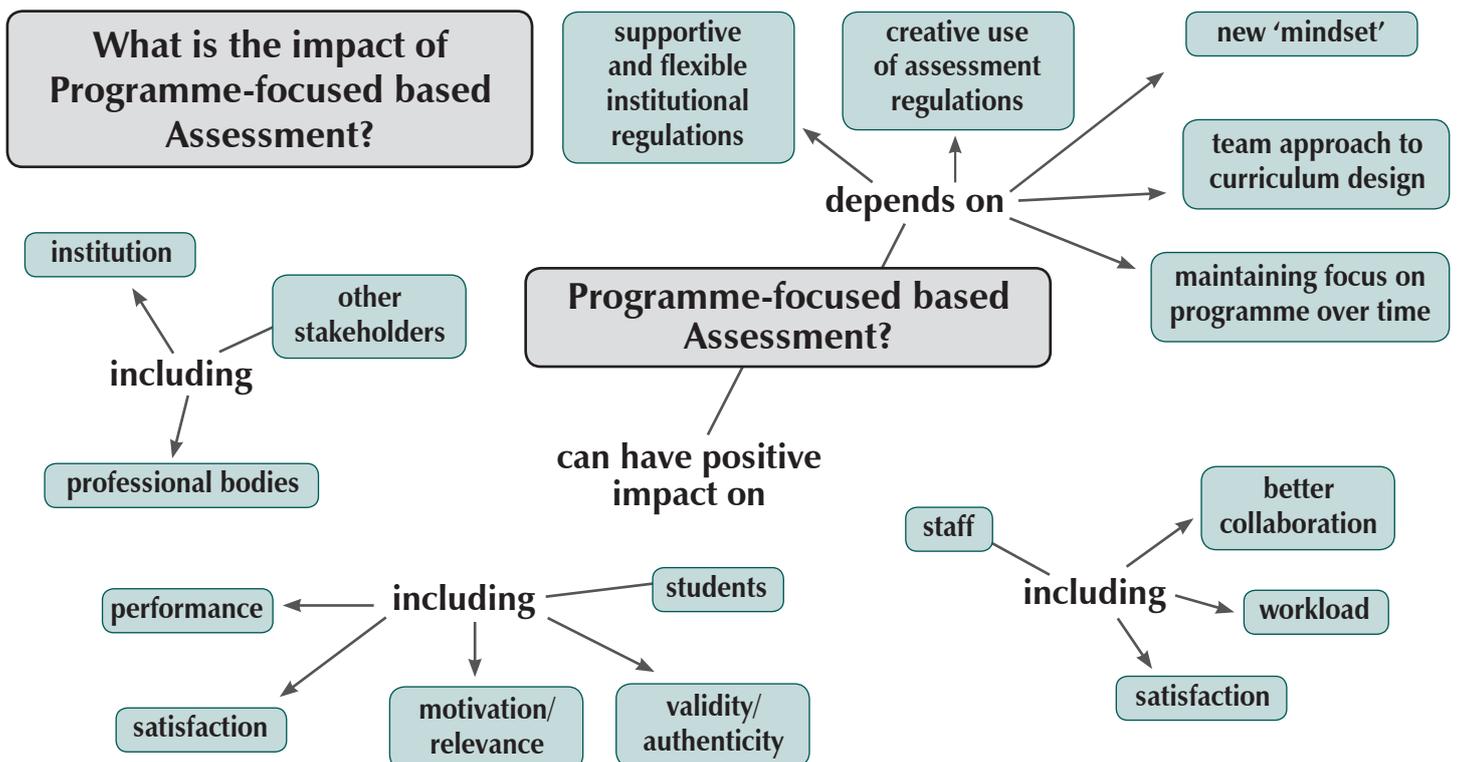


Figure 5 Potential impact of PFA

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# How can we ensure students can participate in a dialogue around teaching and learning in the complex landscape of contemporary HE?

**Rebecca Turner**, University of Plymouth, and **Ellie Russell**, National Union of Students

Over the past decade, the role of students in HE has changed considerably. Traditionally, students were seen as passive consumers of HE, with the remit for their 'engagement' within the university community generally centred on student unions and elected officers (Brooks *et al.*, 2015). Now students take an active role in all aspects of HE with students involved in activities such as quality assurance, curriculum innovation and policy developments. Engaging students actively in not only their teaching and learning, but more broadly in their institution, is recognised as hugely beneficial in terms of promoting a sense of ownership and belonging, and can enhance the overall quality of their HE experience (Kuh *et al.*, 2007).

Work to engage students has been taken forward by the agenda for 'students as partners', which has sought to develop ways of partnership working with students, and supported through organisations such as The Student Exchange Partnership (TSEP), an HEFCE-funded project that champions and develops student engagement policy and practice in the English HE sector and brings together various sector bodies to tackle cross-sector challenges

relating to student engagement at a national level. 'Students as partners' is a shorthand that carries various possibilities for what can be produced through associated practices, from extending individual students' understanding to developments in curriculum, quality and learning experiences (NUS, 2012). Integral to the remit of partnership working is the development of relationships between staff and students that are built on 'trust, inter-dependence and agency' (Healey *et al.*, 2014, 7). Through this it is believed that sustainable and mutually beneficially partnerships will develop and result in new ways of thinking and working in contemporary HE. The work of Healey *et al.* builds on early recommendations of a number of educational developers (e.g. Campbell *et al.*, 2009; Peat, 2011), who in reporting examples of student input to educational development activities cites meaningful ways to promote productive partnership working. These recommendations addressed logistical and practical issues relating to partnership working with students as well as the need to consider more challenging aspects such as developing legitimacy in the student voice and creating safe or neutral spaces in which students can provide feedback or offer

insights to support innovation work (Campbell *et al.*, 2009).

Much of the current discourse surrounding students as partners builds on these initial recommendations. However, it has been extended to consider how 'partnership learning communities' can be developed in institutions to foster a shared vision and values between staff and students (Healey *et al.*, 2014). These are clearly at the heart of successful partnerships, but their development, and perhaps persistence, are threatened by students having been perceived as, and even initially experiencing the community from the position of, a 'novice' (Lea, 2005). Healey *et al.* (2014) discounts this concern, stating that through partnership learning communities the traditional roles of staff and students are disrupted by members taking on new roles and traditional hierarchies are being changed. Whilst in principle we recognise this may often be the case, we question the extent to which students and student representatives in these partnerships possess the discourse and capital in which to engage in discussions around teaching and learning fully and equally, and the extent to which they receive the necessary support to adopt these engaged behaviours.

The NUS 'Manifesto for Partnership' posited students as apprentices in the business of student engagement and suggested that support to adopt the language and practices necessary to engage as partners could come from a variety of sources, including the students' union. An aspect of the discourse on students as partners has been the role of the students' union in fostering student voice and participation, and the conditions needed for students' unions and their institutions to work effectively together. In the majority of HEIs, students' unions and student representative systems are the primary vehicle for achieving student partnership in activities like quality assurance and enhancement, policy development, student service delivery and widening participation. There is space within a partnership approach for both individual and collective engagement, but this raises questions about how the tensions between them can be effectively navigated (NUS, 2012). Students' union officers are often at the forefront of navigating these tensions, leading efforts to empower individuals in order to effectively advocate on their behalf. Their roles are unique – temporary yet immersive, often gifted to them on the basis of ambitious pledges, and depending on the capacity of their students' union and how they conceive of their own role, their focus can be both strategic and operational. This role requires a different understanding of the support needed to facilitate their 'engagement' to that of other students engaged in representative or partnership activities, although there could be some commonalities.

It was against this backdrop that a recent study (Turner *et al.*, 2016) examined how elected student union officers with a remit for 'education' (*i.e.* supporting issues relating to teaching and learning, course representation and other related activities) engaged with activities such as teaching enhancement and quality assurance activities. They found that often officers lacked the training or support with which to participate in a meaningful dialogue around teaching and learning. This resulted in them reflecting back on

their own undergraduate experiences and that of their peers to shape the support offered to the students they represented. This meant their ability to fully participate, and therefore advocate, on behalf of the student body, was to a certain extent compromised. These findings echo the concerns of Brennan and Williams (2004) who identified the absence of a wider understanding of pedagogic practice as potentially limiting the extent to which students could make a meaningful contribution to their institutions.

The need to develop the capacity of both current students, and those serving in student representative or advocacy roles, is clear. Indeed, this need is not currently being overlooked, though the extent to which it is recognised or supported is perhaps where attention should be focused. In addition to TSEP's work, the NUS have introduced Student Lead Teaching Awards and several universities (*e.g.* University of Portsmouth's student-staff professional development partnerships) have promoted a student-centred dialogue around teaching and learning. Alternative routes to recognising good teaching and the breadth of the student experience through the Student Lead Teaching Awards have created a forum through which students can recognise, and more importantly, reflect on what constitutes 'good' teaching (Swain, 2013). Programmes of training and support led by individual Student Unions for course/programme representatives are essential in fostering dialogue between students and staff around their experiences (AMSU/NUS, 2009). Many of these activities sit outside what may be recognised by an institution as its 'students as partners' work; however, they have an integral role to develop the capacity for students to participate inclusively in the discourse around teaching and learning.

The authors of the piece came together due to a shared interest in building on this growing portfolio of activities which see students, and student representatives, take a greater role in shaping teaching and learning. Individually, we have each observed the growing engagement of students

in educational development activities, and believe that across the SEDA community many examples exist of 1) student engagement in educational development work, and 2) partnership working with Student Unions to enhance teaching and learning. We are using this short article to put a call out to readers of *Educational Developments*, and their colleagues, to consider what is taking place within their institutions and to share these examples with us. We are interested in examples that are emerging or firmly established, proved successful or had unexpected outcomes, as we want to use these to continue a dialogue around these themes. We are unsure the direction this dialogue may take, and this will largely depend on the response of readers; however, we are keen to build up examples from across the whole sector (including those within private providers, college-based HE as well as more traditional university settings). At this stage we envisage using TSEP as a focal point, and based on the response we aim to develop case studies of student engagement in education development activities, which we anticipate can be used to further dialogue locally and nationally.

If you have practice you are happy to share with us, please in the first instance contact Rebecca Turner ([rebecca.turner@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:rebecca.turner@plymouth.ac.uk)).

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# Structured peer feedback between universities – Learning from the REACT project

**Tom Lowe, Elisabeth Dunne and Stuart Sims**, University of Winchester and **Wilko Luebsen**, London Metropolitan University

Learning from peers has become common practice in our Higher Education institutions over recent years, both for students and for staff. Benefits are considered to be numerous (Boud, 2001) and are perceived as a cornerstone of the development of academic learning communities (Boud and Middleton, 2003). The benefits to students have been highlighted in areas such as peer-assisted learning and success schemes (Keenan, 2014), and peer marking and feedback (Brown *et al.*, 2013). Peer observation of teaching between colleagues (Martin and Double, 1998) is also widely used as a positive means for supporting staff in their teaching and for promoting enhancement and change. Building on these approaches, the REACT team have been trialling the use of peer feedback, support and critique as part of a multi-university development programme, developing a wide community of learners.

REACT (Realising Engagement through Active Culture Transformation) is a two-year HEFCE-funded project aimed at researching, evaluating and enhancing student engagement practices in regards to 'hard-to-reach' students in UK HE. The initiative is run by a core staff team of student engagement practitioners and researchers from the Universities of Winchester and Exeter and London Metropolitan University working in partnership, and is designed to build on specific innovative practices at these three institutions: the Student Fellows Scheme (Sims *et al.*, 2014), Students as Change Agents (Dunne and Zandstra, 2013) and Peer-Assisted Student Success (Warren and Luebsen, 2017). The project also reached out to a further thirteen universities to create a collaborative partnership of 16 institutions in all, spread across the UK. All partners were expected to develop their own projects aimed at enhancing student engagement and engaging 'hard-to-reach' students, with institutional teams being encouraged rather than a single individual taking responsibility. Such teams were made up of a mixture of stakeholders from, for example, Learning and Teaching

units, Faculties and Student Unions. Example projects involved empowering students and staff to work together on partnership projects, specifically identifying 'hard-to-reach' students, evaluating current student engagement practice and its accessibility, and spreading practice beyond one particular Faculty.

As part of the overall initiative, the REACT team devised a 'Collaborative Development Programme'. This included workshop-style 'Development Days' at the start of the programme, attended by all participant institutions; many have also received bespoke consultancy visits from members of the REACT team. Throughout these sessions, stakeholders were encouraged to begin frank and open conversations and collaboratively support and help one another through peer feedback.

REACT core team members are experienced in a range of student engagement areas, but it was recognised that a number of the institutional stakeholders also have considerable expertise in student engagement, and that sharing of practice and ideas across institutions would be worth continuing. Indeed, several of the institutional groups asked for further opportunities to learn from the REACT community and to continue sharing practice. For these reasons, it was decided to run a 'REACT Discussion Event'. This event was repeated twice in one week, in different locations, to allow as many as possible of the partner Universities to attend. Each institution was invited to both days, but was asked to present their REACT project at just one of the days, to avoid an overburdening number of presentations and to allow for maximum discussion.

The purpose of each Discussion Event was to create open and collaborative conversations about REACT institutional projects, the highs and the lows, and particularly about those challenges and issues that might be shared and

addressed by others during the day. A deliberately structured approach was used, wherein each institution was given ten minutes to update colleagues on the progress of their REACT project progress and, most significantly, to identify key challenges at their institution over the past 6-8 months. In particular, presenters were asked to highlight an essential question emanating from their presentation that could be addressed by all attendees. Two presentations were given without a break before the key questions were discussed in small workshop-style groups. Participants in these groups were deliberately mixed to come from different universities so that delegates could offer cross-institutional peer feedback. Discussions were then fed back to the larger group.

Challenges on both days broadly covered similar areas:

- Communication – to ‘hard-to-reach’ groups of staff as well as students
- Sustainability of change
- Cross-institutional collaboration
- Evaluation of initiatives.

Importantly, strict ‘Chatham House Rules’ were applied, and ‘no tweeting’ and ‘no photography’ agreements were established at the start of the day, so as to create a formative, mutually open environment where all could work collaboratively as a sector.

Feedback suggests that the Discussion Event days were highly valued, even though the REACT team had initially been unsure about how open delegates would want to be. In a feedback survey after the event, 62% of participants agreed that it was ‘very useful’ to get feedback specifically on their own problem questions. However, interestingly, attendees were more enthusiastic about hearing about the work of others (85% found this ‘very useful’) and working with others to resolve more general problems (75% ‘very useful’). This suggests an inherent value in working in a collaborative community of practice rather than simply addressing one’s own needs. This was also supported by some of the open responses to the survey, in a question about the benefits of an event focused around peer feedback:

*‘Lots of sharing practice around mutual themes, a great means of working between institutions where conferences don’t currently meet.’*

*‘It enabled us to reflect on each of the projects and thus through them, our own.’*

*‘Very supportive group, and interesting to tackle such a challenging issue.’*

The balance of the day around individual attention and thematic group discussion in particular received praise:

*‘I thought the reflective discussion after every two presentations was a really effective format.’*

*‘It validated our work.’*



*Elisabeth Dunne and colleagues at a Discussion Event; Wilko Luebsen is at the far table by the door*

Hence the design of the days seemed to be useful both for participants, and for the REACT core team in the highlighting of sectoral challenges facing institutions and Student Unions working in this area. Across the two days, around sixty delegates were engaged in learning from peers in a way that was both enjoyable and mutually supportive. The benefits of a ‘warts and all’ discussion from across a diverse group of stakeholders allowed for direct problem-solving, drawing our shared expertise into a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Many conferences and other forms of group meeting allow for a similar kind of process, but the Discussion Days, in the way they were structured, seemed to promote a particularly strong focus on genuine sharing of issues. Representatives of many different universities (from largest Russell group to smallest teaching-focused institution) showed how they could all be involved in a collaborative endeavour with a shared purpose and learn from each other in ways that could support their own understanding and implementation of practice. Overall, this experience suggests that focused cross-institutional learning and mutual support from peers, especially in an ethos that encourages openness and honesty, is an approach that is worthy of more attention as the sector struggles with the enormous challenge of providing the best possible opportunities for all students.

For more information, please contact the team by email ([react@winchester.ac.uk](mailto:react@winchester.ac.uk)), visit the REACT website ([www.studentengagement.ac.uk](http://www.studentengagement.ac.uk)) or register for the REACT Conference on Tuesday 2 May 2017 at the University of Winchester to hear from all 16 institutions involved in the Collaborative Development Programme ([store.winchester.ac.uk](http://store.winchester.ac.uk)).

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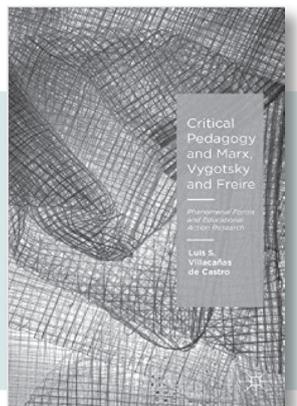
## Book Review

### Critical Pedagogy and Marx, Vygotsky and Freire: Phenomenal Forms and Educational Action Research

Luis S. Villacañas de Castro

Palgrave Macmillan

2016



According to Charles Baudelaire, the greatest trick the devil ever pulled was getting people to believe he didn't exist. In a similar vein, de Castro's central thesis and one which goes down a well-trodden path is that we cannot really understand and explain the world since we are a part of it – that there are *phenomenal forms* that obscure the real nature of the world and our place in it. Unless, of course, we happen to be one of the 'great thinkers' portrayed in this short text whose analytical abilities are able to 'see through' the appearances of the world to a truth that lies beyond:

'...it is only when we realize that we are but the effects of objective causes that lay well hidden in the nature and the history of the very objects which we wish to understand, do we finally come across the real complexity of the epistemological (and pedagogical) problems posed by phenomenal forms.' (pp. 6-7)

The central question this text addresses, therefore, is what is the appropriate pedagogic approach to adopt once we have the blinkers removed from our eyes and we can see the world for what it really is?

To answer this question, in Part One de Castro reprises his earlier work, only published in Spanish but which translates as *The Copernican Turn and the Social Sciences* (2013), where he examined the ideas of Freud, Marx, neo-Darwinism and relativity theory in order to understand the ways in which these 'revolutionary' theories were able to contribute new knowledge to our understanding of reality.

In Part Two, de Castro progresses his analysis down more well-trodden paths including a critical review of the Marxist ideas of Althusser, Habermas, Heidegger, Luxemburg and so on. This analysis has a theoretical objective, to outline the need for a critical pedagogy. Using an analysis of the work of Paulo Freire, de Castro outlines the parameters of how Freire's pedagogic ideas might be developed in Part Three.

In Part Three, de Castro celebrates the work of the educationalist John Elliot, now Emeritus Professor of Education at the University of East Anglia, as well as re-visiting the work of Vygotsky with a particular emphasis on Vygotsky's notion of

a *zone of proximal development*.

In a nutshell (and this short review cannot do justice to the complexity and sophistication of Elliott's work and its description in this text) de Castro examines Elliott's espousal of action research for educational change. De Castro affirms Elliott's assertion that the way children are taught is more important than the content of what is taught – a move away from an objectives curriculum model towards a process curriculum model. In critiquing Elliott's work as being overly liberal, de Castro then develops his own pedagogic model – that of *meta-action research*, from teacher-as-researcher to student-as-researcher; from individual action research to collective (not class) action research. He concludes by drawing on his own teaching experiences as an illustrative case study.

Overall, it is refreshing to have the whole idea of a critical pedagogy highlighted once more, though many of the discussions in this text are not new and, although there is passing reference to ideas developed since these arguments were first aired, one might have expected to see the critiques of bell hooks or Kathleen Walter being given more space or, indeed, more discussion of the global impact of the ideas of Freire or Elliott such as the influence of Freire on Amílcar Cabral in Guinea-Bissau or Elliott's work with the OECD.

**Steve Outram** is Director of the Centre for Recording Achievement and an independent consultant.

# Everything and nothing: Capturing hearts, minds and credit at the Royal College of Art

**Chris Mitchell**, Royal College of Art

*'There are no rules. That is how art is born, how breakthroughs happen. Go against the rules or ignore the rules. That is what invention is about.'* (Frankenthaler, 1994)

Artists and designers don't always like rules. There can be a suspicion that writing down a rule is like pinning a butterfly to a mounting board. It's still recognisably a butterfly but something fundamental has been lost along the way. As a consequence, Programme Specifications at the Royal College of Art were not – as far as these things go – particularly specific. The College operated a minimal academic framework that only required its 2-year MA programmes to have three core units: an 80-credit unit called Studio Practice 1, a 120-credit unit called Studio Practice 2, and a 40-credit dissertation. This gave Heads of Programme a very blank canvas on which to express their individual vision of the discipline.

This light-touch approach to curriculum design and delivery did, however, come at a cost. The lack of a shared ethos and common approaches to issues such as timetabling, assessment and resourcing led to disappointing student feedback in those areas. Equally, the individual – and often implicit – nature of each curriculum made it difficult to develop cross-programme activity, establish external collaborations, or effectively coordinate central services. The absence of rules had arguably led to an archipelago effect, with programmes operating at a distance from each other. This did not help to generate or sustain curriculum innovation.

This was all about to change. The RCA had a new strategic vision, which involved a major expansion of the number and diversity of programmes, and an accompanying expansion of the College's estate in Battersea. This vision aimed to foster interdisciplinarity through the development of cross-school and cross-college provision, create new flexible modes of learning, and develop collaborative awards/exchange programmes with strategic partners. This would not be achieved through the existing 'everything and nothing' framework.

## One step beyond

Our task in the College's Academic Development Office was to develop a new academic framework that described the College-wide educational ethos and credit framework across all academic programmes. This means establishing a common set of principles for an RCA education, that would be equally applicable to programmes as diverse as Sculpture and Service Design.

To this end the office conducted a consultation between February and May 2016. This comprised:

- Three staff consultation workshops
- An online staff consultation survey
- Individual meetings with staff
- Discussion at Academic Standards and Learning and Teaching Committees.

Unfortunately, three planned student consultation workshops were cancelled due to poor take-up. However, the student voice was heard through the Students' Union and Learning and Teaching Committee representatives.

This consultation was one of the most challenging and rewarding projects of my time at the College. This article aims to reflect on the experience and offers seven tips to those embarking on a similar project. I am hugely indebted to my former colleague James Perkins for his enormous contribution to this; his enthusiasm, energy and drive were essential elements in the process.

## Consultation tip no. 1: Don't fix the outcomes

Or – in other words – don't ask a question unless you're interested in the answer. People won't engage in a consultation if they feel that the key decisions have already been made. We were at pains during the consultation meetings to stress that we weren't there to defend a singular vision of what the resulting framework would look like.

It is to the credit of the College's Senior Management Team that – despite some initial nervousness – they were open to the idea that the solution would emerge through the consultation rather than prior to it. That doesn't mean that you start with a blank sheet. You may not know what the actual solution is yet, but you should be able to define what characteristics it has so that you can know it when you see it.

We did present a couple of different examples of potential frameworks to help get the discussions started. We didn't shed a tear when our straw men were torn to shreds. They had played their part.

## Consultation tip no. 2: Don't rubbish the past

Marketers often create a demand by both selling the benefits of the new and trashing the old. After all, how could you possibly live another day using that brand of soap powder? Doesn't it leave stains in your clothes? Doesn't it irritate your skin? Doesn't it fade the vibrant colour of your favourite t-shirt?

However successful this approach appears to be in choosing cleaning products, dog food and governments, I would advise against it. Change is not intrinsically good or bad. Those who

praise innovation for its own sake tend to forget that one of the likely consequences of experimentation is failure (i.e. in evolutionary terms ‘adapt or die’ usually becomes ‘adapt and die’). There may be some perfectly good reasons for doing nothing at all, and they should be listened to.

You might also lose the goodwill of those that you are consulting with if you try to convince them that what they’re currently doing is either meagre or moribund. The past may indeed be another country, but it is a country that we’ve all been resident in. It’s much better to acknowledge the weaknesses and strengths of the *status quo* before you propose something different.

### Consultation tip no. 3: Don’t assume that everybody thinks the same way

*‘[The existing framework] prevents collaboration and innovation and undermines the advancement of school-wide teaching structures at the RCA. It also does not reflect the reality of the industries in which the students will work.’ (Consultation response)*

We were told that the Fine Artists wouldn’t like it. As a consequence we feared walking into workshops to face crossed arms and crosser faces. This was sometimes true, and sometimes not. We learned that you could never confidently predict what someone thought on the basis of his or her role, length of service or disciplinary background. For every academic wanting a blank slate there was another frustrated by the lack of guidance. For every technician wanting more effective coordination across programmes, there was another content to deal with programmes on a case-by-case basis. When there’s so much talk of tribes and territories in university life it is sometimes easy to forget just how much diversity of opinion there is.

### Consultation tip no. 4: ‘The devil can wait’

While the devil is very much in the detail, that doesn’t mean that you have to start there. We had a number of

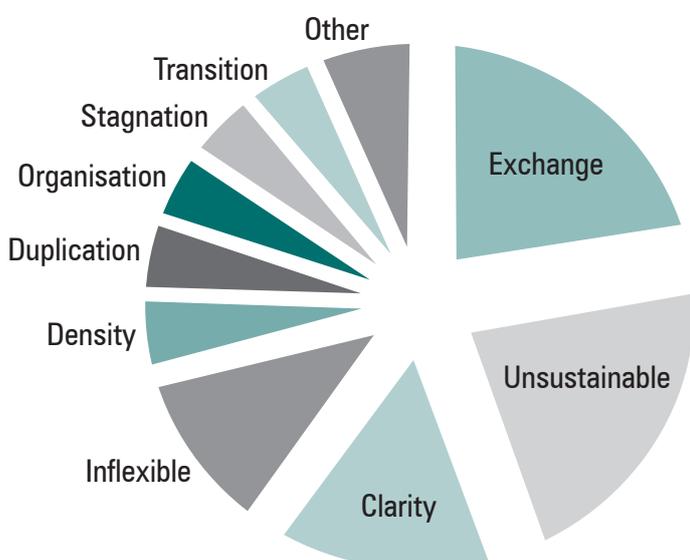


Figure 1 A neat exploding pie chart

consultation participants who wanted to explore the implications of each of the proposals on the day-to-day operation of each programme. Which day would the College-wide units be delivered on? How would priority access to certain technical resource be established? Who would choose which elective units get the go-ahead?

These are all important questions. However, at the consultation stage we wanted to keep participants focused on the bigger picture for as long as possible so that we could establish the principles before we established the practice. I think that this was the right approach, although I would keep a list of all of the practical questions as well. You’ll need that list soon enough.

### Consultation tip no. 5: Be clear about what happens next

So you’ve asked a lot of questions, analysed the answers and presented them in the form of neat exploding pie charts (Figure 1). What happens next? We found it important to be clear about what the decision-making process was.

The purpose of the consultation was to inform a report that was presented to our Academic Standards Committee (ASC). If ASC approved the report and its recommendations then it would be presented at Senate. Ultimately it was the responsibility of Senate to decide whether to thank us for our work but send us back to the drawing board, or to approve it as the new academic framework.

In individual consultation workshops a consensus would often emerge. At those times we had to remind participants that what was being said was more significant than how many people were saying it. Universities are rarely democracies, and this was no exception.

### Consultation tip no. 6: Find a better way to involve students and then let us know

The most disappointing aspect of the consultation was the lack of interest from current students. This was a perfectly reasonable response; we intended to align programmes to the new academic framework at the point of validation, so participating students would have long since graduated by the time it took effect.

We were able to consult with students through their representation on our Learning and Teaching Committee which is co-chaired by the Students’ Union President and includes student representation for each of six academic schools. We did however feel that we missed a valuable opportunity to co-design a curriculum with those with the most immediate insight on what the student experience is.

### Consultation tip no. 7: Don’t assume that your work is done

*‘Human relations rather than abstract procedures lie at the heart of things.’ (Survey Consultation response)*

Our Senate did approve the new academic framework. It now provides a common structure for all masters programmes that describes the transition from taught to independent study, agrees common definitions for key elements of the curriculum, and introduces collaboration provision at both school and College-wide level. In effect, we have rewritten the rulebook. This felt like a significant achievement. It was also the easy bit.

Our task for the next 18 months is to translate those abstract procedures into reality. This involves a lot of work both in revalidating every programme to this framework, and in

creating underlying administrative structures that support the changes being made. The consultation helped prepare the ground for these changes. Our biggest challenge will be to enact them successfully so that they make a positive difference to the student experience. Wish us luck.

## References

Frankenthaler, H. (1994) Crown Point Press: 'Biographical summary' [online] (available at: <http://tinyurl.com/zg7ouss>).

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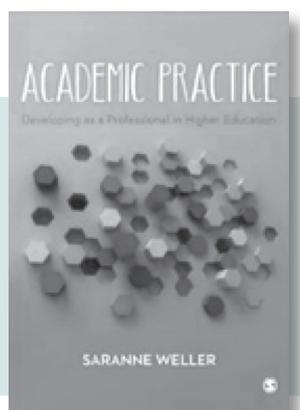
# Book Review

## Academic Practice: Developing as a Professional in Higher Education

Saranne Weller

Sage Publishing

ISBN: 9781446274231



When I read books like this one I always wonder about who is the intended audience. This one is entitled 'academic practice' but is really focused on teaching as an academic practice. The blurb suggests that the book is 'essential reading for higher education faculty [not sure why this Americanism is used!] undertaking PD courses'. I am inclined to agree. Yet what makes it essential? This book, of 260 pages, is divided into three sections: from disciplinary expert to teacher, rethinking the university context and from disciplinary teacher to scholarly teacher (104, 100 and 17 pages respectively – the remainder being introduction and so on). Each chapter within each section contains a list of learning objectives, illustrative case studies, a 'focus on practice' (which offers useful review/reflection prompting questions), and a tight conclusion followed by some very useful further reading suggestions. For example, in the chapter 'developing disciplinary understanding' the 'Thinking Writing' link to Queen Mary University is very interesting and one I would not perhaps have encountered unless I had read about it here.

I have recently read three books targeting similar audiences and we PGCLTHE tutors now have a surfeit of choice, which is no bad thing. This book is certainly one to have either as essential or supplemental reading. For me, there are three standout chapters: 'teaching for employability', 'developing inclusive learning and teaching' and 'internationalising teaching in practice'. These chapters have really useful recommendations for practice that emerge after more theoretical/philosophical discussion. However, whilst important ideas are contained within these specific chapters, they have a much greater bearing on 'good' teaching in general. For example, 'ensure all handouts... meet accessibility requirements and use a sans serif font of at least 12pt ...' (p.148) is useful to know and is not unique to being inclusive. The theory sections of these chapters raise interesting debates that could be restructured into PGCert activities. In the inclusive chapter, the material that examines the assumptions/expectation (p. 135 onwards) and conceptions of diversity is an in-class debate waiting to happen.

This competent and confident book offers plenty of material for consideration and contemplation. However, I felt something was missing and I have struggled to identify what it was. My thought is that the chapters are a little disjointed and the overall thread is not fully apparent. I wondered if there was an opportunity for a kind of academic practice workbook (perhaps online) to accompany this text so that the journey of the book, as outlined in the rationale and structure, was more overt. An alternative could be to have at the end of each section a summary that links or flows to the next. For section 1, for example, which was intended to 'develop our awareness of beliefs, values and assumptions' (p. 5), a summary task could be to draft up a teaching philosophy statement.

One final point, all mentions of Kolb, I feel, ought to be followed up with Peter Jarvis's take on the cycle. Jarvis notes that reflection can lead to reinforcement or no change as well as change.

For new academic staff this book adds to the selection of good texts that are available to them to prompt development and enhancement of their teaching practice. It is worth considering as a key text for a PGCLTHE.

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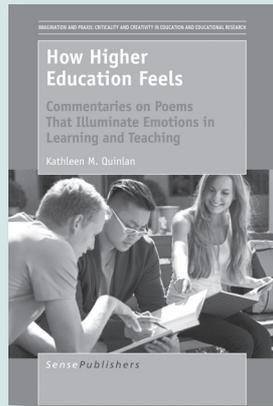
# Book Review

## How Higher Education Feels: Commentaries on Poems That Illuminate Emotions in Learning and Teaching

Kathleen M. Quinlan  
Paperback: 288 pages

Publisher: Sense Publishers  
(27 July 2016)

ISBN-10: 9463006346



### How does it feel?

In an odd confluence of things we (Carole and I - Peter) both requested to review Kathleen Quinlan's book 'How Higher Education Feels: Commentaries on poems that illuminate emotions in learning and teaching'. I have also been reading about how emotional regulation and training, alongside other practices, can aid in focus, awareness, compassion, general well-being, engagement, creativity, critical thinking, decision making and so on (a list that sounds rather like a wish list of things employers would like to see 'fully-developed' in university graduates).

So rather than a straightforward book review we present here our discussion of the book and how it has resonated with us as academic developers.

Before considering this, a few words of preamble about emotion to 'set the scene'. Scherer (2005) outlines that **emotion** is a set of synchronised changes in five subsystems in response to and external on internal stimulus. Within emotion subjective **feeling** is a part of a person's monitoring of their internal state, his or her emotional experience.

We know that emotion regulates and controls learning and that sensory information received is positive / negative / neutral and for learning to be enhanced (rather than inhibited) the information needs to be 'seen' as positive. In addition, emotion attenuates or strengthens attention and the subsequent processing of information.

It makes sense then, to consider Kathleen Quinlan's book in general and in specific, that is as academic developers and teachers of our HE colleagues. Indeed, we can also consider our own emotional responses to the book.

*I (Carole) love this book more than I can say and indeed would suggest that it should be on the book shelf of every educational developer. This is not to say that it is without flaws and shortcomings but rather that parts of it were as quick as a punch and left me reeling. Nothing that I have read recently has felt so simultaneously challenging and uplifting.*

*I have a background in palliative care nursing and my academic disciplines are rooted in education and sociology so I need little persuading that a holistic approach to teaching in higher education is essential. By holistic I mean one that allows equal weighting to the cognitive, the social and the emotional dimensions of learning. The book uses poetry as a form for capturing the experiences of both students and teachers, a medium that is largely successful. I have long been a fan of using autobiography as a way of exploring emotions around teaching and learning, writing extensively about the impact of failing my 11 plus and being the first person in my family to stay on at school beyond the age of 14. These poems give us another way in with their range of styles, voices and subjects.*

*Some of the poems are accompanied by a commentary from the poet who provides a context for the poem and expands on the emotions the experience evoked. This means of allowing hitherto silent voices to be heard is both compelling and unsettling, challenging academics and those who support learning to do more to understand the role of emotions in higher education, and consequently our own practices in handling situations which cause us discomfort.*

*The sections address different stages in the student life-cycle ranging from transition to higher education - in search of belonging, remaking self-in-world and through taking care of students and ourselves. These earlier sections seem to work better than the later sections which explore emotions within specific subject disciplines which seem less focused and cohesive.*

*All sections are accompanied by what is referred to as an 'expert commentary' where the themes in the poems are linked to theory, policy and practice in rich and convincing ways. I am interested in their coining the term 'expert commentary' which might at first suggest a superior view when in fact these commentaries are respectful and add additional layers of interpretation.*

The book's structure separates it into four sections, an introduction followed by a chapter on stances on emotion in education, four further chapters that tackle what might be called general aspects of emotion in HE (for example: transition to HE – in search of belonging), three chapters that relate to broad discipline areas (for example: for the love of science) and three further chapters that return to broader HE these (for example: success and failure).

Like Carole I had an unusually positive response to this book, although I did not relate fully to the chapters that did not resonate with my own disciplinary background. In an attempt to overcome my lack of poetry awareness I have occasionally been dipping into 'Poems that make men cry' (there is a version that claims the same for women) only to be singularly unmoved. My 'love' of poetry extends to and stops at Gray's Elegy (and this only because Rick Wakeman set a version, read by Robert Powell, to music). However,

some of the poems within this book are fabulous. One in the transitions section that a teacher wrote in relation to a Japanese student trying to learn English is fantastic. Perhaps it 'spoke' to me because it is one of the more literal poems in the book, but the section in which the poet is trying to empathise with the learner's confusion over words is just brilliant. Others too are gems – here is a line from one in the 'taking care of students and ourselves' in which a teacher is reflecting upon their work "to lose yourself in what you do in hopes of finding yourself." This reminded me of the work of one of my colleagues, Kirsten Jack, at MMU who teaches health professionals. She curates a website called 'caring words: poetry for health professionals' (<http://www.caringwords.mmu.ac.uk/>). The site details how poetry might be used in the education of nurses and contains examples of poems that students have written about their experiences.

*Poems have a way of capturing those inward moments that poetry is so good at, which is why I recommend that you beg, borrow or steal a copy of this book. This book manages to capture through poetry the value of transformational learning but also more modest moments, teaching us to trust in feelings. Educational development work is often deeply emotional work and it would be inconsistent to claim that emotions are intrinsic to the student experience whilst ignoring or suppressing our own feelings as educators and change agents.*

*Look to the last chapter which is titled 'Where we've been, where we're going' which includes poems which relate memories of higher education but also concerns about where higher education is going. I challenge you to read 'Convocation' and 'Requiem for the Liberal Arts' and not feel anger. So it is vital then that the final poem by Amy Antongiovanni 'A Poet-Teacher's Manifest' retains energy and optimism as she reminds all us fellow teachers: 'teaching is a moment to moment exercise/in awareness and presence....Be still and notice...Look around you..'*

*So we feel but then what might we do with those feelings? I urge you to consider the useful and thoughtful appendix at the end with a discussion guide for university teachers, with instructions and questions. Using the poems as a springboard enables the exploration of theoretical stances to interpret (and re-interpret) emotionally-laid classroom episodes suggesting alternative courses of action and their implications as well as encouraging individual teachers to clarify their own educational philosophy. Educational developers are well placed to integrate such work in their taught programmes and interactions with academic colleagues and staff supporting learning. Let's do it.*

Scherer, K. (2005) What are emotions? And how can they be measured? *Social Science Information* 44(4), 695-729.

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## SEDA News

### Forthcoming events

#### SEDA Spring Teaching Learning and Assessment Conference 2017

*The quest for teaching excellence and learning gain: issues, resolutions and possibilities*

11th – 12th May 2017

Marriott Victoria and Albert Hotel, Manchester  
Bookings currently open at [www.seda.ac.uk](http://www.seda.ac.uk)

#### SEDA Annual Conference 2017

*Developing teaching excellence: supporting and developing the work of groups and teams*

16th – 17th November 2017

St David's Hotel, Cardiff

Call for proposals currently open, see: [www.seda.ac.uk](http://www.seda.ac.uk)

### SEDA-PDF

Congratulations to the University of Birmingham who have recently been recognised to provide SEDA-PDF accredited programmes.

### SEDA on Social Media

SEDA's presence on social media has been growing and you can now follow us through a variety of channels including:

- Twitter: [https://twitter.com/Seda\\_UK](https://twitter.com/Seda_UK)
- LinkedIn: [https://www.linkedin.com/company/staff-and-educational-development-association?trk=top\\_nav\\_home](https://www.linkedin.com/company/staff-and-educational-development-association?trk=top_nav_home)
- Blog: <https://thesedablog.wordpress.com/>
- Slideshare: [https://www.slideshare.net/seda\\_uk](https://www.slideshare.net/seda_uk)

## Welcome to a new member of the Educational Developments Committee

**Amy Barlow** is Head of Academic Professional Development at the University of Winchester. She leads the Masters programme 'Learning and Teaching in Higher Education' and runs the Higher Education CPD scheme for the institution. Prior to this Amy was Head of Technology Enhanced Learning at Winchester, working on the JISC-funded project, Feedback and Assessment with Technology (FASTECH), which developed a model of student engagement to assist programme teams with the effective use of technology. Amy has previously worked as a Senior Educational Developer at Portsmouth University and has been a Research Associate at the University of Western Sydney, in Australia. Her research areas include teacher development in Higher Education, technology-enhanced learning, feedback and assessment and student engagement. Amy has worked as a consultant for the HEA, Innovate UK, UCISA and JISC.

