

# EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

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## Contents

- 1 **Teaching excellence – student perspectives**  
Peter Hartley
- 5 **Team based approaches to address TEF issues**  
Liz Bennett and Sue Folley
- 10 **Canada's Gary Poole: On educational leadership at home and abroad**  
Gary Poole and Alan Wright
- 12 **Seeking, hearing and acting: Staff perspectives of changes in assessment practice through TESTA**  
Elizabeth Adamson, Brian Webster-Henderson and Mark Carver
- 16 **Interview with Rob Ward – Director Emeritus, Centre for Recording Achievement**  
Steve Outram
- 19 **Developing lecturers to teach and support first year students and students in transition in middle and northern Europe**  
Diane Nutt
- 22 **Implementing and evaluating a Communities of Practice model ...**  
James Wilson, Dawn Johnson, Jianmei Xie and Henk Huijser
- 25 **What role for educational developers in sharing learning about exemplary educational ...**  
Jackie Potter
- 28 **SEDA News**

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## Teaching excellence – student perspectives

Coordinated by **Peter Hartley**, independent educational consultant

### Introduction and context

As every reader of *Educational Developments* will be aware, Higher and Further Education are under pressure to deliver and demonstrate both 'teaching excellence' and 'learning gain'. This pressure and the debates surrounding it inspired the theme for the SEDA Spring 2017 Conference – 'The quest for teaching excellence and learning gain: issues, resolutions and possibilities.'

SEDA is determined to incorporate the student voice in its events and a new initiative, the SEDA Student Bursary, provided a vehicle for this. The incentive of bursaries gave students from SEDA-subscribing institutions the opportunity to contribute without any financial pressure. An impressive range of proposals came in from both FE and HE and this article summarises the successful contributions: Hollie Shaw provides a widening participation student's perspective; Leanne Hunt argues for the importance of rapport; and Rachel Arland demonstrates the impact of an institutional teaching award scheme designed and administered by the Students' Union. Delegate feedback confirmed that this keynote session was one of the highlights of the conference and the process will be repeated at the Spring 2018 conference.

### A widening participation student's perspective of teaching excellence in college-based higher education

**Hollie Shaw**, North Lindsey College

Teaching excellence is hard to define and measure due to the lack of consensus surrounding the issue (Gunn and Fisk, 2013). Feng and Wood (2012) found three main factors influencing a student's perception of a lecturer's teaching: subject knowledge; lessons delivered; and willingness to help students. From my perspective, teaching excellence goes beyond simply educating disciplinary knowledge.

I entered college-based higher education at The University Centre at North Lindsey College in Scunthorpe as a mature student – the first in my family to study in HE and with a young family to care for. During my first year, I was able to excel due to several factors – the recognised levels of flexibility (Gordon, 2014), the institution's systems, the college's open-door policy, access to discipline experts, being given a device to access e-learning platforms (available to all students), the pedagogical approach, and the ontological approach.

The college's student-centred ethos enables student-tutor access both through formal, regular meetings with staff members and a flexible open-door policy. Formal meetings with an academic advocate are scheduled regularly throughout the semester, focusing on the student's feelings about the course. Any issues can be

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highlighted and dealt with promptly, avoiding problems snowballing and having a negative impact on the student's education. Student support does not end there: the open-door policy means a struggling student can approach the module leader to request support. This could be via email or even knocking on the office door – staff are available, they will help there and then or arrange a convenient time to go through anything the student needs. The staff are happy to revisit a topic until the student feels comfortable with the subject.

The pedagogical approach is student focused – tutors try to accommodate student learning styles and circumstances. They listen to and act upon any concerns we raise with them. For example, during my second year, a tutor was not engaging students during lectures. We raised this with the programme leader (PL). The PL approached the tutor concerned and supported their developing a more engaging teaching style. Students benefited in two ways: firstly in enhancing our learning experience, and, equally important, we recognised our opinions as students mattered.

Another positive aspect of the pedagogical approach is the use of learning technologies, which are understood to be an important factor in facilitating flexible learning (Gordon, 2014). Course materials can be adapted to suit the learning needs and preferences of the student. During my first year, we were provided with iPads – I have found this particularly beneficial. The iPads provide access to Moodle and iTunesU, where all the learning resources and lecture slides are uploaded and interactive discussions are held, allowing me access to materials at any time to reinforce my studying. It also allows for flexible engagement between learners and educators. I have been able to really use these resources to meet the third and final factor of flexibility: the ontological (Gordon, 2014), or my own learning style. I have the University at the palm of my hands, meaning I can access anything I need at any time, particularly helpful when I have two young children at home and need to fit my studies around them.

At the University Centre, there are multiple opportunities to exercise and grow my academic skills: for example, as a second year, I hosted peer-to-peer revision sessions for first years. First-year students could relate to me as I had experienced a similar learning curve. I understood the stretch and pressure and could reassure them it was normal to feel this way. This was also beneficial to me in building my confidence and communication skills. I am a firm believer that if you can explain something to someone else then you fully grasp that subject yourself. These revision sessions also gave opportunities for me to revisit areas of the subject that are the baseline to my current studies and refresh myself in the basics.

The combination of the flexible, student-centred approach of the University Centre, the academic opportunities made available to me (like presenting at the SEDA conference and writing this paper!) and the provision of kit to enable me to develop my own learning style, has raised my academic aspirations. Through the University Centre I have gained the knowledge, experience and confidence to know that I will be successful.

Teaching excellence is hard to define and measure due to the lack of consensus surrounding the issue, but for me teaching excellence is teaching that is flexible enough to respond to the students' learning needs and strong enough to inspire ambition and interest in the subject.

### The importance of rapport in teaching excellence and learning gain

**Leanne Hunt**, University of Bradford

Rapport, an interaction with components of friendliness and care (Altman, 1990), is an important concept in the successful establishment of relationships (Smith, 2015). It has gained popularity over the years in various fields such as nursing and mental health, and is now an important factor in education. Vygotsky stated that learning is enhanced through a connection between learner and facilitator. Within this relationship, the learner develops the skill to transform a simple process into a complex design (Clapper, 2015). The interaction and the relationship established are the key features of a student's learning gain and therefore the importance lies in developing them.

It has been theorised that rapport can significantly influence a student's learning and engagement at university (Wilson *et al.*, 2010). In a recent study, when students were asked to provide feedback on effective teaching, the emphasis was primarily aimed at the student-teacher relationship with factors such as care and friendliness being of a higher importance than the actual topic (Lammers *et al.*, 2017).

To explore this issue, a small-scale qualitative study was undertaken. Two focus groups were conducted, with first year students and with second and third year students, all participating in the Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) scheme at the University of Bradford. A thematic analysis highlighted that rapport can have a huge effect on a student's learning gain. Students reported that successful rapport with lecturers can enhance their learning which leads to an increase in their marks. Furthermore, it increases their motivation to attend lectures, confidence, self-esteem and their enjoyment in the subject.

As a student myself, my view has always been that a teacher's ability is assessed by the grades achieved by the student and attendance of their class. From a student perspective, teaching excellence is the ability to build rapport to enhance the learning experience. I personally had higher attendance, higher marks and an increase in topic knowledge and interpersonal skills when rapport was established with the lecturer. And research has shown that this view is also shared by other students.

Lack of rapport can have a negative effect on learning. Students reported that when there is no connection between the lecturer and themselves they do not attend lectures, their marks are lower, and they have feelings of simply just being a number on a piece of paper or a way of gaining research funding. It can impact on their confidence, their ability to approach with any problems affecting their learning, and results in a lack of trust in the establishment. For mature students returning to education after years at home with children or working, it is a daunting experience. For young students, it is a big change from the school environment. Students seek out that connection, they seek out rapport to feel part of the university.

The PAL scheme enables students in second and third years to facilitate learning for first year students and spans across numerous subjects. PAL exists in the wider context of social and active learning and in how individuals/groups can learn from peers and build peer communities (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Jaques and Salmon, 2007). Attendance is optional, therefore rapport is vital to its success. Students reported that successful rapport within this scheme has resulted in higher marks and enhanced interpersonal skills, which has led to the ability to develop rapport to facilitate learning amongst themselves. Leaders have reported that the skill to build rapport was developed from the rapport established with their lecturers and PAL leader from the previous year. The success of this scheme supports much research which suggests that a student's learning gain is enhanced by the impact rapport has on their skills development and facilitation of learning (Krämer *et al.*, 2016; Kuusisaari, 2014; Starcher, 2011).

From a student perspective, rapport is a lecturer knowing your name or something small about you. Building rapport

only takes a little effort to make a connection: sending emails to encourage and support students and reminding them of office hours if they need any help. It is being a little personal and being able to relate, even if that is lecturers reminding students that they were once in their shoes, they were once students at university with the same concerns as them. Having that empathy will encourage the relationship between lecturer and student.

To conclude, from a student perspective, rapport is an important component in a student's learning gain. When successful, it increases engagement with the topic, attendance at the lectures and marks on assignments. Furthermore, it encourages facilitation of learning with peers and enhances the overall university experience, developing vital life skills along the way. Rapport can enhance teaching excellence due to the impact on learning gain. With the increasing pressures on higher education due to students demanding more for their money, all it takes is a little effort to build that rapport. The impact on students can be life-changing. Teaching creates memories and it is the positive ones that make education for students, regardless of age.

## Edge Hill University Student-led Staff Awards: beyond a popularity contest

Rachel Arland, Edge Hill University

For the 2016/17 academic year, I was the Vice-President of Academic Representation (VPAR) at Edge Hill Students' Union (EHSU). I stood before the Spring 2017 SEDA conference, confident and prepared to discuss my presentation, but just a year previously, I wouldn't say boo to a goose. What changed? I entered and flourished in a supportive and encouraging environment that allowed me to develop my confidence and many other skills at my own pace, and creating that environment is what excellence means to me.

As part of my role as VPAR, I hosted the annual Student-led Staff Awards (SLSAs) – where students can nominate any member of staff at Edge Hill for a variety of awards, to celebrate their contribution to students. The SLSAs are an asset for four key reasons. Firstly (most importantly), they *engage* students – students are on the receiving end of everything we do, therefore they're the ones who know it best. Next, they *identify what excellence means to students*, which is really important if we want to develop and improve our own practice. Thirdly, they *recognise and reward excellence*, both key for staff and also for the university itself. This comes in the form of a certificate and a £500 personal development grant presented to the winner at a graduation ceremony in front of their fellow colleagues and students. Finally, all of the *data is captured for dissemination of best practice*, used in places such as SEDA and many other staff development projects and programmes across the UK.

In the project's pilot, EHSU received 166 nominations, which grew quickly to over a thousand within two years. In later years, the number of nominations reduced slightly, a predicted drop due to a change in questions on the nomination form. We introduced ones with more detail, such as 'What is it that they did that went above and beyond?' and 'How did this positively impact your student

experience?’ By using these questions, we felt we were able to define what excellence means to students much more clearly. Although this created a dip, we were more content with higher quality data, and will continue working to raise the number of nominations. Despite receiving positive feedback and hearing which colleagues students valued, we were also concerned that the awards were susceptible to becoming a popularity contest. Therefore, we chose to select winners based on the quality of nominations, not quantity. In doing so, we prevent the circumstance where a colleague who is exposed to hundreds of students each week could have an advantage over one exposed to 50. Also added to the agenda this year were the ‘Above and Beyond’ awards – we already had many other awards such as ‘Inspirational Lecturer of the Year’ and ‘Most Engaging Module’, but within our awards we didn’t feel we were thoroughly recognising and rewarding those who went above and beyond the call of duty, something which many staff at Edge Hill do every day.

My conference presentation included a thematic analysis of the data collected from nominations submitted in 2016. The analysis identified the most common theme, mentioned in 68% of nominations in all awards categories, as the nominee being ‘Supportive’, followed by ‘Encouraging’, mentioned in 34% of nominations. A theme that some may have believed to be commonly mentioned is being ‘Relatable’; however, this was the least-mentioned theme that emerged from the analysis for awards given to lecturers specifically.

From this experience, I have made three recommendations for future improvement:

- *Recommendation 1:* Create an annual awards evening for both staff and students of all years (not just those at graduation) to come together and celebrate not only the winners but the Edge Hill Community as a whole
- *Recommendation 2:* Open nominations throughout the year to allow students to submit nominations as and when staff do award-worthy things
- *Recommendation 3:* Create video interviews with award winners and their nominees, to dig that bit deeper into exactly what it is they did for that student, and also allow them to reflect on their practice.

To conclude, at EHSU we renamed the awards to SLSAs – staff awards instead of teaching awards. I believe we cannot begin to talk about teaching excellence until we have students in the classroom, ready and equipped to learn. Many students shared with us through the SLSAs that the cleaners who pop in each morning are what kept them here when they felt like giving up. Whether it’s through a friendly chat or just a smiling face, *all* staff on campus play a vital role in retention, and subsequently whether or not teaching is delivered at all.

A final quote from one of our nominations:

*‘Last year she took me out of a lecture and realised that something was different, she encouraged me to go see the student counsellor, and took time out of her free time to help me in any way I needed. She encouraged me to carry on university next year, and I believe that if she hadn’t taken the time to personally help me then I would have dropped out of university.’*

## Concluding comments

A number of important themes are reflected to a greater or lesser extent in these three very different perspectives, such as the accessibility of university/college systems. Perhaps most importantly, all three emphasise the importance of staff-student relationships, ranging from the impact of the individual lecturer who makes an effort to recognise student individuality and provide appropriate support in response to queries and requests, through to the teaching award scheme developed by students to recognise staff who ‘go the extra mile’ and which has been integrated into institutional practices, thanks to the active support of educational development staff.

The final point worth emphasising is that this concern about the relationships in which learning, teaching and assessment are embedded is an agenda we can all influence and contribute to.

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# Team based approaches to address TEF issues

Liz Bennett and Sue Folley, University of Huddersfield

Team-based staff development can be really effective at dealing with programme-level issues.

These programme-level issues are those that feature in the Teaching Excellence Framework – retention, employability and student satisfaction. They require programme-level focus to enable the complexity of our curriculum, and the way students experience it, to be considered.

As Ruth Whitfield and Peter Hartley argued in the January 2017 edition of *Educational Developments*, writing in the context of their work on programme-level assessment, there are sadly too many courses that focus only at the level of the module and fail to capitalise on the benefits of considering assessment at the programme level. These benefits they suggest are:

- 1) Demonstrating that course/ programme outcomes have been achieved
- 2) Overcoming the issues associated with modular programmes
- 3) Enhancing both subject/disciplinary achievement and/or employability prospects
- 4) Developing and maintaining cohesive programmes.

To this list we suggest a fifth benefit to taking a programme-based approach, in that it helps us, as educators, to focus on the students' experience of the programme and this leads to improvements in retention too.

We have developed a workshop based on an Appreciative Inquiry approach which helps to address a programme-level topic. We have five different variations of the workshop: active learning, attainment, employability, large group teaching and retention.

In this article we describe these curriculum development workshops, starting with a discussion of Appreciative Inquiry and then provide evidence of how workshop

participants have valued them. We conclude that this approach to educational development in higher education provides a useful structure to enable teams to make an impact on teaching quality, and provides educational developers with a tool for working in a systematic way to address strategic priorities.

## Appreciative Inquiry approach

The Appreciative Inquiry model (Kadi-Hanifi *et al.*, 2014) approach to change management consists of four stages shown in Figure 1:

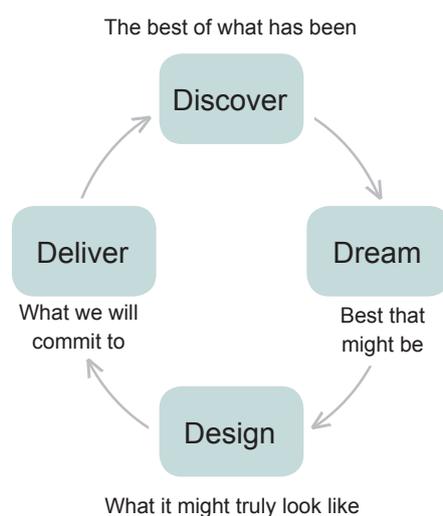


Figure 1 The four stages of Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry takes a positive approach to change by examining what works well, and considering the strengths of the course. This methodology is in contrast to a problem-based approach which, by definition, takes a more negative stance by focusing on the problems or issues or what does not work well, and then trying to come up with solutions to remedy these. People will tend to respond defensively to a problem-based approach to change management which in turn can lead to a negative downward spiral and people feeling unhappy, or worse still, blamed for the problems. In contrast, the Appreciative Inquiry strategy helps

to motivate staff through seeing change as a positive development which acknowledges their course for its strengths, and encourages new ideas to create a vision for the future. Table 1 contrasts the two approaches to change management.

In addition, the way that we apply Appreciative Inquiry helps to foreground the students' experience of the course. At the first stage we invite colleagues to consider their curriculum from their students' point of view, an approach which helps to motivate colleagues and appeals to a core value at the heart of the profession.

Problem focused approach to development	Appreciative approach to development
Identification of problem	Appreciation and valuing the best of 'what is'
Analysis of causes	Envisioning 'what might be'
Analysis of possible solutions	Dialoguing 'what should be'
Action planning to treat problem	Innovating 'what will be'

Table 1 Contrasting features of traditional and appreciative approaches to change management. (source: Compass Project (2003: 16)

## The four stages of the workshops

We have five different variations of the workshop – active learning, attainment, employability, large group teaching and retention – which all follow the same format. Each has four stages (*Discover, Dream, Design and Deliver*), involving practical tasks that build an understanding of the topic and how it can be addressed. These four stages provide the name for the workshops which we call the 'D4 Curriculum Design Workshops' (Bennett and Folley, 2016).

For the first task, the *Discover* stage, the participants reflect on their own experiences in small groups. They discuss positive learning that they have experienced, telling their personal stories, and making notes of the elements of what contributed to those experiences. These elements are then shared with the whole group.

The second task, the *Dream* stage, is about imagining what *can be*: so the small groups identify the attributes, skills and knowledge that they would expect from a first class student graduating from their course. Again the small groups share these with the whole group.

The *Design* stage task is the one that varies the most between the different variations of workshop. It was the most challenging to make this stage work. This is partly because it is hard to do design without first auditing what you already have in place and this can lead to the problem-focused approach that appreciative inquiry is designed

to avoid. The other challenge is how granular to focus the design process. Should it be at the programme level or at the level of a single module or learning activity? In addition, design is not a quick process: it takes time to refine and frequently needs to be revisited. One of our colleagues called it a ‘witches brew’ in which the range of constraints and objectives are mixed together to make a workable approach. It isn’t a pure science but the art of alchemy!

Table 2 details the approach that we take to the *Design* stage which varies for each of the workshops.

As an example, the *Design* stage for the Employability workshop (D4E) consists of three stages: map, audit, analyse:

- 1) Mapping: the course team map their current programme using the A1 mapping sheet
- 2) Audit: the team use D4E Employability cards to identify the

activities (tasks, assessments etc.) that support the development of employability attributes. One of the D4E Employability cards, Professional Awareness, is shown in Figure. 4 (the other cards focus on Communication, Professional Qualities, Leadership and Initiative, Problem Solving, Teamwork). Each card contains a single word on the front to represent an area of employability. They team colour code the activities using coloured stickers which relate to the Employability Cards. Hence a pink dot is used to show activities that relate to Professional Awareness

3) Analyse: the colour-coded mapping provides the team with a visual representation of their curriculum and its strengths in relation to employability features. It enables the team to identify any gaps in provision. The backs of the cards offer suggestions of curriculum approaches for the development of each particular attribute (see Figure 4), so the discussion then leads to how the curriculum can be enhanced to support employability skills more extensively and thus leads into the final *Deliver* stage of the D4 workshop.

The final task, the *Deliver* stage, is to action plan and the group develop a set of actions to take the team’s ideas and discussions forward. The action planning sheet (along with all the workshop resources) is found on the website [ipark.hud.ac.uk/content/training-development](http://ipark.hud.ac.uk/content/training-development).

### The workshop cards

Each of the D4 workshops uses a set of coloured cards to help teams to undertake the *Design* stage. The cards showing in Figures 2 and 3 were designed and developed by Jisc from its ViewPoints project (Jisc, 2012; Jisc, 2014). The cards act as manipulatives (Petty, 2009) and are well liked by participants because they are colourful and tactile and enable complex concepts to be treated in a playful way. We developed similar sets of cards for employability (Figure 4) and retention (Figure 5) that were based on our reading around the topic and, for the Employability cards, developed in consultation with our Careers Service.

Both the D4AL (Active Learning) and D4LG (Large Groups) workshops use the Jisc (2012) ViewPoints Learner Engagement cards – an example of

Workshop	Design stage task	Resources <i>(all resources are available for reuse at <a href="http://ipark.hud.ac.uk/content/training-development">ipark.hud.ac.uk/content/training-development</a>)</i>	
D4AL Active Learning	Design of a learning activity	Jisc Learner Engagement cards (see Figure 2)	
D4A Attainment	Three stage task: Map the assessment across the programme; Sort the cards into piles of what you do well and less well; From the cards that you do less well select the approaches from the back of the cards	Jisc Assessment and feedback cards (see Figure 3)	A1 sized programme mapping sheet
D4E Employability	Map the programme Use the D4E cards to audit the strengths of their programme	D4E cards (see Figure 4)	A1 sized programme mapping sheet
D4LG Large Groups Teaching	Design learning activities suitable for larger groups based on the ideas and discussion from the second task	Jisc Learner Engagement Cards (see Figure 2)	
D4R Retention	Map their learner journey and use the D4R cards to RAG rate the mapping	D4R cards (see Figure 5)	A3 sized Learner Journey Mapping Tool

Table 2 Design stage for the different workshops

the 'Debate' card is shown in Figure 2. The other cards in this set are: Receive, Explore, Meta-Learn, Create, Experiment, Practice and Imitate.

For the D4A (Attainment) we use Jisc ViewPoints Assessment and Feedback cards; see the example of the 'Clarify good performance' card in Figure 3. The other cards in this set are: Deliver

high quality feedback; Encourage time and effort on task; Provide opportunities to act on feedback; Encourage positive motivational beliefs; Encourage interaction and dialogue; Inform and shape your teaching; Develop self-assessment and reflection; Give assessment choice.

The D4E (Employability) workshop

uses cards based on graduate attributes that we have designed in conjunction with the University Careers Service. For an example of one of the cards in this set, 'Professional Awareness', see Figure 4. The other cards in this set are: Communication, Leadership and Initiative, Personal Qualities, Planning and Organising, Teamwork, Problem Solving (Bennett and Folley, 2016).



Figure 2 Example of 'Debate', one of the Jisc ViewPoints Learner Engagement cards used in the Design stage



Figure 3 Example of 'Clarify good performance', one of Jisc Viewpoints Assessment and Feedback cards used in the Design stage

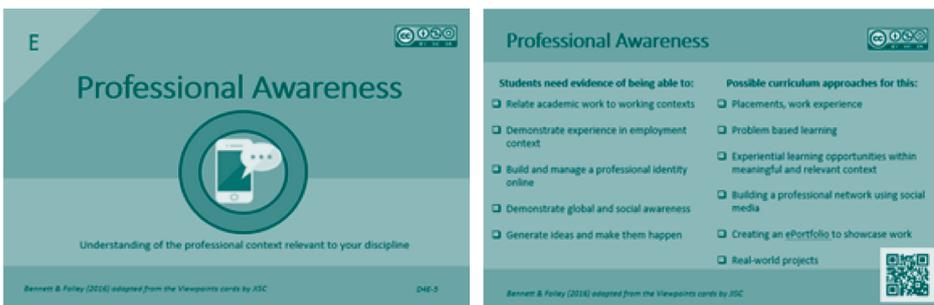


Figure 4 Example of 'Professional Awareness', one of the D4E Employability cards used in the Design stage



Figure 5 Example of 'Learning Community', one of the D4R Retention cards used in the Design stage

The D4R (Retention) workshop uses cards that we have designed. Figure 5 is an example from the set and shows 'Learning Community'. The other cards in this set are: Belonging, Clarity, Motivating, Support, Self/Inclusive environment (Bennett and Folley, 2016).

### Evaluation from the workshops

Over the last two years we have run the workshops around 20 times with 180 people across all the Academic Schools at the University of Huddersfield. Table 3 shows the numbers of teams from across the institution that have participated, to date. We have also delivered it to groups of colleagues who are involved in supporting curriculum change both at Huddersfield and at other institutions.

Session focus	No of sessions	No of people
D4AL Active Learning	7	56
D4A Attainment	5	49
D4R Retention	4	45
D4E Employability	3	18
D4LG Large Groups Teaching	1	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>180</b>

Table 3 Numbers of workshops and numbers of participants

Quotes from the workshop evaluation forms illustrate the value that our participants have found:

*'This was useful to think about how modules could be designed in future, how they could link together and how feedback from previous modules could be used to improve grades.'* (D4A participant, June 2016)

'Very good. It really helped to organise our thinking and encourages us to think "outside the box" beyond our own subjects.' (D4E participant, January 2017)

'Very useful to have time/space to focus on course issues.' (D4R participant, April 2017)

'Excellent. Thought-provoking. Useful to make links from my module to overall course design.' (D4A participant, May 2017)

'It created a space and structure for us to think clearly and practically about how to enhance our curriculum and pedagogy to respond to TEF whilst not losing sight of the intrinsic value of education...It facilitated us to come up with a clear and focused "to do" list...it made us aware that some small changes to teaching delivery could have a big impact if handled well.' (D4E participant, April 2016)

'It was really helpful to think about the complete design in a structured and detailed way.' (Educational Developer participant from another university, September 2016)

'Gave me a slightly different approach to curriculum design which felt a little more informal than normal i.e. learning

outcomes, Bloom's taxonomy, constructive alignment.' (Educational Developer participant from another university, September 2016)

### Conclusion

We have found the D4 Curriculum Design Workshops have been successful at engaging colleagues. Colleagues have valued the time spent together to improve their courses in a way that is positively framed, structured and facilitated.

From our point of view as educational developers, it has been an efficient approach as we can support several teams working in a workshop, and this also offers participants the opportunity to hear from other departments about alternative approaches thus becoming a mechanism for sharing an understanding of other disciplines and the practices which are effective for them.

Through using these workshops, we have been able to help teams to address the key strategic measures that are being foregrounded by the TEF (i.e. retention, employability, student satisfaction (i.e. assessment and feedback), large groups teaching and active learning).

In addition, the D4 Curriculum Design approach (see Figure 6) is versatile, with the potential to help to

address other programme-level issues and we have plans to develop other variations of the workshop to focus on enterprise, sustainability and inclusion.

Perhaps the biggest success of these workshops is that they have been well received by academic colleagues despite their focus on addressing thorny and 'top down' issues. Colleagues appear to rise to the challenge of curriculum design because of the positively framed and structured approach which plays to their expertise and builds on their core values of commitment to students' learning.

### Resources

The resources to run these workshops are available with Creative Commons copyright licence, from the following website:  
<http://ipark.hud.ac.uk/content/training-development>.

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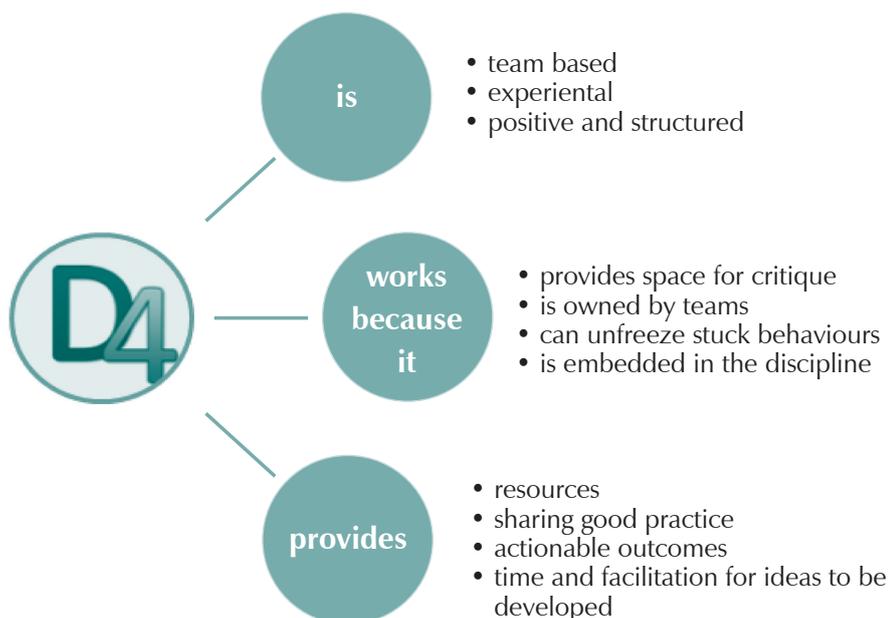


Figure 6 D4 Curriculum Development approach overview

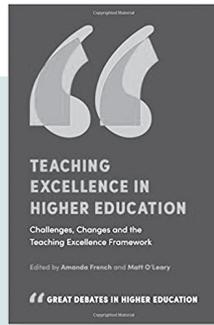
# Book Review

## Teaching Excellence in Higher Education: Challenges, Changes and the Teaching Excellence Framework

Edited by Amanda French and Matt O'Leary

2017 Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited

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The pursuit of excellence in higher education teaching is not new but the launch of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) in the UK has certainly helped to concentrate the mind on this subject. This book was published before the first round of results and by coincidence I began reading the book on the same day that an analysis of the narratives that accompanied each submission was published (Beech, 2017). I recommend that both are read together. It will not take long, because this edited volume is not the tome that I imagined it to be when I agreed to undertake this review. Indeed, it hardly made a noise as it hit my doormat, weighing in at only 140 pages, and (excluding the brief introduction and conclusion) comprising only four chapters, written by different authors.

The book is the better for its brevity because it must have been tempting for the editors to include chapters from a wide range of perspectives. Instead, each of the four authors took on board the work of providing an overview and analysis of those perspectives, at the same time as including their own. The authors do a good job here, covering most of the key points that have been made about TEF and the wider notions of 'teaching' and 'excellence'. The words need to be placed in inverted commas because they also do a good job of explaining why both are highly problematic.

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The first substantial chapter, by Amanda French, covers the policy background to the introduction of TEF, explaining both its perceived need and the controversies surrounding its introduction. I was mildly irritated by the number of typos I came across, not because they prevented me from engaging with the content, which was concise and well argued, but because somebody should have corrected these. That small point aside, the chapter does a great job of explaining the why and the flaws in the Government's desire to use 'big data' as its evidence base in calling HEIs to account. The chapter also spells out why the whole exercise is slippery. For example, in its present iteration, TEF fails to take account of disciplinary differences in interpretations of good teaching, and tries to put students at the heart of the system without adequately dealing with the highly subjective nature of student evaluations.

The next chapter, by Phil Wood, takes us on a fascinating journey around the whole notion of the pursuit of excellence, and what exactly constitutes good, or even excellent, teaching. Using the previous work of authors like Bill Readings, he provides a succinct account of how easily nebulous terms like excellence can become vacuous and tautological – excellent teaching is teaching that is excellent, and so on. Utilising the work of Biesta he also gives short shrift to the idea that students are merely recipients of good teaching, arguing instead that they are an integral part of the higher learning process. Indeed, it quickly becomes clear that the main purpose of the chapter is to suggest that the notions of teaching offered by TEF simply cannot do justice to the highly sophisticated interplay between the variables at work in enhancing learning. Explicit here is also a critique of the notion of the heroic teacher – an individual worthy of merit outside of this complex interplay. He coins the term 'emergent pedagogies' and I particularly liked the idea here of learning in the making, and that the sum is invariably more than the quantity of the inputs. Indeed, that the notion of 'sum' here speaks to a conception of pedagogy very different from one involving a 'quantity of inputs'.

Matt O'Leary picks up the baton here, consolidating Phil Wood's points, in order to look at what it would take to measure effective (or even 'excellent') teaching. I was particularly pleased to see a chapter from this author because of his previous critique of the role of teaching observations in further education and their endorsement by Ofsted. I was not to be disappointed because he makes the point very clearly that although it might seem rather strange that a national attempt to measure the quality of teaching in HE does not include a role for teaching observations, this needs to be understood against a backdrop of another quality agency (Ofsted) coming under constant criticism for overseeing a highly managerial, competency-based model of teacher accountability, which stifled rather than heightened the search for improvement. I became a little concerned at one stage when he seemed to align the United Kingdom Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) with this approach, but I took the general point here that there is a battle to ensure that teaching is not reduced to a simple checklist of competencies that can be assessed by a manager. I also liked his summary comment that we need to become more interested in supporting, not sorting, staff.

The final chapter, by Sue Robson, took a different turn, but led naturally out of the previous one – for it raised the question of what it means to lead rather than simply manage learning and teaching. She emphasises the point that we really do need to choose whether we are more interested in calling institutions to heel, or helping them to enhance. Not

that they are necessarily mutually exclusive, but it is here that the challenge of leading learning and teaching comes to the fore. Naturally, this puts a great deal of pressure on those who will be these leaders, and it is here also that the scholarship of learning and teaching comes to the fore, because this is surely an opportunity for policy to be guided by evidence, not the other way round. And there is an important role for students as partners in this process, not just as people who make judgements about what they have 'received'.

My own related conclusion is that this book presents a case for arguing that TEF (in its present initial iteration, at least) has a similar conception to learning and teaching as the National Student Survey, missing the point that a dissatisfied student may simply be one who hasn't contributed much to the

learning process, or possibly was daunted by their role in this and wanted to remain unchallenged. Taken together, I found this book to be a thorough overview of the issues related to pursuing excellence in teaching. Particularly for those perhaps a little overwhelmed by all the controversies, this will serve as a concise guide through this minefield.

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**John Lea** is Director of the Scholarship Project, a HEFCE-funded Catalyst project aimed at enhancing learning in College Higher Education.



## Canada's Gary Poole: On educational leadership at home and abroad

**Gary Poole**, University of British Columbia, and **Alan Wright**, University of Windsor, Ontario

*Dr Gary Poole, one of Canada's most recognised educational developers, is a professor emeritus in the School of Population and Public Health in the Faculty of Medicine, and Senior Scholar in the Centre for Health Education Scholarship at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Vancouver. For ten years, Gary was director of UBC's Centre for Teaching and Academic Growth and the founding Director of the Institute for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. He is a past-president of the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE) and of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSoTL). Gary has received career achievement prizes from both societies and is a winner of multiple teaching awards, including the prestigious 3M National Teaching Fellowship. He holds degrees from UBC, San Diego State, and Simon Fraser University. Gary coached amateur football (soccer in Canada!) for over 30 years, piloting girls' and women's teams in the Vancouver area.*

*This interview was conducted by Alan Wright, Vice-Provost, Teaching and Learning, at the University of Windsor, Ontario, Canada.*

*AW: What do you see as the international influences on Canadian*

*practices in higher education and in SoTL?*

GP: When I think about the UK and Canadian contexts, it is the role of the central government in really strong policy and mandate on things like accountability in the UK that sets us apart to a certain extent. In the UK, the government's use of higher education as a tool to shape a work force and economic development is key. This is also true in Australia. There is an accountability that comes into play. When we go to the UK, we are often humbled by the work we see. We are struck by the imperative of the work of educational developers. As Canadian educational developers we don't take our work lightly, but we have seen what it is like when the external expectations are strong. Developers in the UK have to target program directions according to external needs. In Canada we hope not to be driven by the external mandates to the extent we see elsewhere.

Because we do not live under the same drive there seems to be a more grass roots development in Canadian teaching and learning circles. For example, something told us, as members of our national professional body (The Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education), to

create the National Teaching Fellows program (sponsored by 3M). We were able to mobilise our Fellows to mount good projects, in part because it was almost entirely intrinsic: no external pressures led to this pan-Canadian initiative. That said, there is a strong need everywhere, but especially in the UK, to emphasise the pragmatic in our work and to heed the externally determined metrics for success.

The lead players in the international development of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) are an interesting phenomenon to observe. It is like a friendly game of tennis. The British are looking across the net at the Americans. The big players have respect for one another, they acknowledge a fine play with 'good shot', but there is still a belief that, in our neighbourhood, we have got it a little better. I saw the strength of the UK players at the international conference on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Liverpool and that of the USA players in Bloomington. The various players from both sides tended to exaggerate the differences. I tried to broker that and break it down a bit. In Canada, we are less of a player in many ways, but it would be hypocritical not to admit we are proud of the ways we do it, sometimes a matter of what

we think of as our 'soft touch'. The tension between being patient and pushing with urgency for educational change remains. One can say patience is a virtue, but in the end we should learn from one another regarding this balance between patience and urgency.

*What happened between 2000 and 2010, particularly in Canada, in the field of educational development in terms of scholarly activity and scholarship of teaching and learning?*

Things did happen. The decade from 2000 until 2010 is an important bracket. It marked the establishment of organised SoTL services and their recognition. At UBC the SoTL Institute, originally proposed as a 'stand-alone' operation, benefited from being set up, as determined by the senior academic administration, as a part of the centre for teaching and learning. This integrated function helped us, as evidence-producers, disseminators, and educational development disseminators worked in concert in a way we are seeing more and more. At the Taylor Institute at the University of Calgary, with its new building dedicated to the task, it is hard to tell where educational development stops and SoTL starts. The impact is palpable.

In some institutions, I am sure, there has been little change in the past decade and it is business as usual.

*In 2006 you said, 'Over the next five years, innovations in teaching will be based less on educated guesses and more on research-based evidence'. Do you see that happening increasingly? How widespread is it? What about dissemination, replication?*

It's happening, maybe not as wide-seeping as I would like, but it is happening. For example, in the Faculty of Science at UBC, the ethos of teaching and learning is about collecting evidence and using it. Course (module) design and activities are explained and justified in terms of current research findings. This is prevalent. Some faculties do not use that language.

Here's the rub. Knowledge translation: there will always be a gap regarding knowledge translation and the reasons are logical. We can always do more, and we need to realise that

'implementation science' is a full-time job.

*When you were awarded a national teaching prize in 1994 you said this: 'I'm a compulsive teacher. I like explaining things to people. I like being around when people get that "aha!" How do you maintain that? How can mid-career teachers maintain their enthusiasm or be revitalised?*

I think both questions are answered with the same concept. My own teaching satisfaction is based much less on the love of explaining things to undergraduates and more on 'aha' moments as I am no longer 'speaking unto them' and that is no longer my source of thrill. What is more, my mind probably overestimated my clarity in providing those explanations when I was lecturing to students.

When you become more learner-centred there is a ton of thrill in that.

How to keep the pedagogical fire burning? Not so much a matter of concentrating on your own delivery and what you are doing, but rather your understanding of how the 'aha' moment works. Never take it for granted.

Also, at mid-career one might say that 'a change is as good as a rest'. But we must not push people into headships and leadership positions 'because it is their turn'. You have to find something that will ignite or re-ignite a spark. An invitation to become a mentor is an example. At UBC, we have had a mentoring circle. Senior mentors have each said that the benefits are as much for us as the mentees, maybe more. Really dedicated people have the potential to burn out, so the importance of the program lies in the nice match: it acknowledges and celebrates the experience and wisdom of the more senior professors, gives them a chance to reflect, and provides the opportunity to work with younger academics who appreciate them. That's their way.

*How can an institutional committee of award-winning teachers impact program, policies, practices, and the culture of teaching at an institution?*

At UBC, the group of national teaching fellows started discussions by asking ourselves 'Who are we anyway?' We first addressed this as a cautionary

note: let us not be obnoxious...we have to think about ways we can quietly but confidently build things. All were comfortable with this starting point. We were neither a high-profile group nor were we a guerrilla movement. We would offer our help and provide help when asked. An example relates to the new career track called 'professor of teaching'. People were having difficulty seeing educational leadership in the context of these positions. Members of our group drafted some language and offered it to the University as the UBC CV template did not lend itself to the recognition of educational leadership by the teaching stream faculty. And on the University's top promotion and tenure committee, the ratio of those with the Professor of Teaching rank continues to increase steadily, up from the original one out of 20 committee members. The committee of award-winning teachers can quietly help.

*How can awards have a positive impact on teaching and learning in higher education?*

I think all awards related to teaching have the potential to elevate credibility in the eyes of colleagues and it is incumbent on award-winners to enhance teaching as broadly as they can. The responsibility comes with the awards. How are you going to use your credibility? It must go beyond the applause at a convocation parade, as the real power is effecting constructive change after the award. But we, as award-winners, vary in taking on this notion of responsibility, and some winners go back to life as usual.

*In 2010 I wrote, in Taking Stock, a chapter called 'Mind the Gap' (Wright 2010) suggesting that the application of what we know about teaching and learning effectiveness and its implementation is lagging, hence the gap. What is the future as scholarly teaching and the practice of the scholarship of teaching and learning spread widely both in Canada and abroad?*

How to jump that gap? It is naive to think reading more literature will bridge that gap. In a Physics department you're not going to reasonably expect all academics to keep on top of the SoTL literature. Twenty-minute summaries of advances in SoTL research to read may be helpful, as is practised in medicine.

<i>Facilitative reviews tend to ...</i>	<i>The 'invested' reviewer</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin with an articulation of strengths</li> <li>• Acknowledge the work expended</li> <li>• Identify concerns and perceived shortcomings</li> <li>• Suggest options</li> <li>• Express optimism</li> <li>• Motivate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraging tone</li> <li>• Voice of mentor</li> <li>• Comments presented as dialogue with writer (e.g., asking questions, seeking clarification or elaboration)</li> <li>• Attention to the process of writing and the manuscript as a draft (next step is revision)</li> <li>• Formative feedback</li> <li>• Substantive, actionable feedback</li> </ul>

Table 1 *Fostering the quality of academic writing*

But the small conversations springing up informally are what count, and we need to increase the passing knowledge of the literature. Maryellen Weimer recently wrote about the importance of these impromptu and informal conversations, pointing out that we are often unprepared for them. We need a critical mass of academics having a reasonable knowledge of SoTL literature so that we have people 'spreading the virus' in their daily encounters.

*Do you see continuous growth in international organisations such as the International Consortium on Educational Development (ICED) and the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSoTL)?*

If there is to be rapid growth of ICED and ISSoTL, it will likely not be in the countries where the organisations

are already well-established, but in places like Southern Africa and through movements such as 'SoTL in the south' to include many new players. While our capacity to grow is limited in countries such as Canada and Australia, there is a potential to burgeon in some areas of the world.

*How do you think small, local networks advance educational change?*

Small networks emerge in any milieu. We all actually engage with our world with manageable size. They happen all over the place and they have the potential to affect what we do. Because there is an unstated influence, in Medicine we talk about the very real potential of harnessing this, and in Lund, Sweden, academics have decided to 'get serious' about harnessing this phenomenon.

*Is there anything from your other life as a football coach that connected with your work as an academic?*

Coaching football for me was a welcome escape from the demands of academic life and my academic development work. At the same time, there were striking similarities between the two pursuits. Most notably, each invited a developmental perspective. For any given player, her best game was the one she was yet to play. I like to think of our work as teachers in the same way.

*In his Keynote speech to the annual conference of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Calgary, Canada, Gary Poole specified the many ways in which reviewers can and should play a positive role in fostering the abilities of academics to submit solid and useful manuscripts to teaching and learning journals (see Table 1).*

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# Seeking, hearing and acting: Staff perspectives of changes in assessment practice through TESTA

**Elizabeth Adamson, Brian Webster-Henderson and Mark Carver**, Edinburgh Napier University

**Assessment and feedback continues to be a key focus of attention within higher education. The TESTA (Transforming the Experience of Students Through Assessment) methodology has been used worldwide across a variety of disciplines, programmes and cultures with encouraging results (Jessop et al., 2011; Jessop et al., 2014a; Jessop et al., 2014b; Boyle and Taylor, 2016).**

This article shares the experience of using TESTA in a School of Health and Social Care within a higher education setting in Scotland to examine assessment practice and capture

the experience of undergraduate nursing and midwifery. The main focus is the examination of the experiences and feedback of academic staff at 10 months and 21 months

post-changes in terms of the TESTA process. It also explores their professed challenges to, as well as their perceived benefits of, the modifications and changes that were introduced to module and programme assessment as a result of the findings from the TESTA audit. We share the findings from staff focus groups as well as some discussion about the staff journey in changing the student experience of assessment and feedback practices. We reflect on the learning from this project and make some recommendations for academic practice.

## What we did

Programme leaders worked with researchers to examine current assessment practice in accordance with the TESTA toolkit, which comprises a document analysis audit, student surveys, and student focus groups. Undergraduate students in their second and third year of study, enrolled on either a nursing or midwifery programme, were asked to share their experiences of assessment and feedback thus far using the Assessment Experience Questionnaire (n= 476) and focus group discussions (n=7, 45 students). Quantitative data gathered as part of the TESTA audit was analysed using SPSS and qualitative data was subjected to thematic analysis.

The findings were in the main found to be similar to those found by other institutions in terms of student dissatisfaction with feedback and confusion in relation to what was required of them in an assessment (Jessop *et al.*, 2014b). Students also expressed lack of understanding as to the purpose and value of engaging in particular types of assessment. The findings showed a greater amount of summative assessment and less formative assessment in all fields of the nursing programmes as well as in the midwifery programme. Application of the TESTA methodology achieved its purpose in that it initiated discussion about assessment amongst staff within the School and acted as a vehicle and catalyst for change. Some academic staff, particularly those already involved in assessment and feedback enhancement activities, became engaged in the TESTA process and its findings eagerly and willingly; however, this did not appear to be the case for all staff and the project team were keen to understand the sense of hesitation towards changing assessment practices.

Feedback of the findings from the TESTA audit to teaching teams proved problematic due to competing priorities and a belief amongst some staff that change was not required. As a result, two away days were planned to provide academic staff with dedicated time to read the programme reports, discuss the findings within their teams, and to question the data and findings that were being presented to them.

From the away days, four priority areas were identified and working groups formed to act on the key findings:

- *Group One* developed guidance on giving feedback to students, aimed at achieving greater consistency across modules and programmes in relation to the student experience. The use of electronic software for marking and feedback was actively encouraged which allowed for greater transparency of practice and offered an opportunity for staff to learn from one another
- *Group Two* explored how clarity around the goals and standards for academic module assessments could be increased, thus supporting students in the expectations required of them as part of the assessment process
- *Group Three* created an evidence-based tool that mapped

assessment type in terms of strengths and weakness to discipline-specific graduate attributes. This tool was used to inform development of the assessment journey within the new undergraduate Bachelor of Nursing and Bachelor of Midwifery programmes

- *Group Four* worked with colleagues based in clinical practice using action research on a project whose aim was to enhance feedback to students whilst on clinical placement.

As part of this project, staff were given the scope and indeed encouraged to make informed and evidence-based changes to their chosen module assessments in response to the findings. Changes included a reduction in the number of summative assessments within each module (previous common practice was two or more per 20-credit module), and a maximum wordage was set for written work within modules and programmes (a general reduction from 5000 words per 20-credit module to 3500 words). In order to ensure consistency and provide evidence for these changes, a benchmarking exercise was undertaken across the sector in relation to the number of summative assessments and word limit per 20-credit module. Subsequently, guidance was developed for academic staff, not just to ensure consistency of approach but to provide a coherent, equitable and comparable student experience in the assessment journey of their programmes.

Module leaders were asked to make specific changes to module assessments such as reducing the number of summative assessments to one and ensuring that a formative assessment approach featured in every module. A further change of practice focused around feedback on draft work of assessments by students. Previous practice was that students were entitled to submit a draft of their module assessments and academic staff would provide them with feedback (usually written) prior to the final required submission date of the summative assessment. A decision was made during the implementation of changes to cease this practice except for students in year one of the programmes, who would continue to receive feedback on individual drafts. It was decided during the away days that group and peer feedback would be introduced as students advanced through their programme of study in years two and three.

Following a period of eight months when a full cohort of students had experienced the changes, summative assessment module failure rates pre- and post-changes were examined within all modules. While one module saw a decrease in achievement of merits, across all 11 modules in the nursing degree programmes there were no statistically significant differences at any level of performance. The changes can therefore be stated to have had no impact, positive or negative, on the proportion of students withdrawing, failing, passing or earning a merit grade, which is encouraging given that the assessment load was reduced by around one-third.

## Learning from the Staff Voice

As identified earlier, the team were keen to gain a greater understanding of staff views, perceptions and engagement with the data and subsequent implementation of the changes made to assessment practices and requirements. Focus groups were run with academic staff (although small in number) prior to the introduction of changes and post-introduction to changes. Although analysed and coded at

the time, the findings from the staff focus groups have been reanalysed to further explore any pivotal issues that we can learn regarding the introduction of change. Some key themes were identified within this data as follows (Table 1).

Staff Focus Group at 12 months post changes	Staff Focus Group at 21 months post changes
A sense of resistance to change	A recognition that change was indeed required
A sense of feeling powerless as an academic	A sense of feeling empowered as an academic
A sense of listening but not hearing	A sense of hearing and acting on the student voice
Anticipated poor student engagement	Problem solving and finding a way
Lack of confidence in skills and ability	Confidence that skills could be developed and training was available

Table 1 Key themes from the Staff Voice

### Pressing on, versus all on-board

The student and programme data generated through TESTA demonstrated that students were over-assessed and that little formative assessment was included despite evidence of the benefit to student learning and the role this plays in clarity about goals and standards. Feedback from staff was collected at two stages. Firstly, at 12 months post-changes and then after 21 months. Signs of an interesting transition were apparent within the data gathered at the two points in the change trajectory.

### After one year

The staff response to changes in assessment practice at this stage was mixed. Not all staff had engaged with the findings, so the ensuing changes appeared to come as a surprise to them. Staff who exhibited reluctance to make changes expressed a belief that students prefer two assessments to ensure that they pass. Others expressed concerns that changes had been imposed with ‘no notification or anything’, that the timing was wrong and should be delayed and there were anxieties about anticipated additional work for staff.

This was interesting since, in addition to evidence that students felt over-burdened by excessive assessment, staff were also weighed down by large marking loads which may in turn have contributed to poor staff engagement with the TESTA results and dialogue around the proposed changes in practice. Others opposed the request to make changes on the basis that current practice was believed to be best. The introduction of formative assessment produced anxiety around anticipated non-engagement and a possible associated increased student failure rate.

In contrast, however, other staff spoke of student delight in reduced summative assessment workload and shared examples of changes in formative feedback practice which were well received:

*‘I changed my feedback to audio this year, for the group feedback. The students loved it, they really did. Again,*

*they said, they felt it was more personal, they felt there was a connection, between formative and summative...’*

Some staff also expressed concerns about being scrutinised and lacking the skills to deliver high quality feedback:

*‘You never really get taught how to give good feedback, and it’s something, if you’re lucky, you learn what works.’*

*‘And I’ve been saying for ages, two years, we need to get together and have a workshop about how we’re using [Turnitin] Grade Mark.’*

### After two years

The data gathered at this point was quite different from that collected the year before. Firstly, staff acknowledged the need to change:

*‘If you look across the continuum that the students were faced with – multiple and too many assessments – I could absolutely rationalise the change.’*

The discussion amongst staff was also more student-centred:

*‘I like to give individualised feedback...I think it’s tailored to the students so therefore it’s more appropriate. I teach individualised care the whole time so how can I not do individualised education?’*

The staff expressed commitment to finding new ways to engage students in assessment. They discussed grappling with innovative ideas and possibilities:

*‘It’s a bit carrot and stick, if you remove the carrot or the stick, then it’s hit or miss whether they’ll get that or not.’*

*‘I think engaged students are always engaged. It’s how you engage students who perhaps don’t see the need of what you’re trying to get them to do. I structure the modules around about some way of ensuring that they’re engaged with the content.’*

There was also a sense of staff taking responsibility for their development which was different from the year before:

*‘To be honest, I feel I’ve been well supported from my colleagues and lots of opportunity to go onto training...’*

### Our reflections of the project

During this project, we have reflected on the many changes that have been made, the interactions with a large group of academic colleagues, our need to respond to the student voice and the findings from the TESTA audit, as well as our own contribution and approach to this project. As a result, we have identified some key learning:

- Identifying a need for the readiness to change – whilst in this project staff came around to the changes and indeed were supportive in their efforts to introduce change, we reflect that some time may have been well invested in preparing staff for the need for change in relation to the student experience of assessment and feedback (Rafferty et al., 2013). This was due in part to an evident tension between the advantages of waiting for all to ‘come on board’, with the urgency to address an unnecessary burden of excessive workload for staff and students. In

hindsight, waiting for greater 'change readiness' may have avoided this sense of imposed change (Rafferty *et al.*, 2013).

A hidden benefit of this reluctance was that discussions about assessment and feedback stayed live, and fuelled ongoing dialogue. This created a groundswell that caused staff on the perimeter to connect with the results and changes in practice (Ford *et al.*, 2008)

- Motivating and encouraging early champions – whilst this is something we did as a way of illuminating change to colleagues, it is our reflection that more support could have been put in place for these enthusiastic leaders. Some resistance to change from academic staff may have been as a result of not being able to see what 'different' could look like for both the staff themselves but, more importantly, for the student
- A stronger approach to student centredness – whilst there was no doubt in the heads of the project teams that we were trying to respond to the student voice, it is our belief that perhaps we could have done more to demonstrate a student-centred approach to our colleagues. Whilst the content of an academic module is created by a member of academic staff, the learning journey is the students'.

There was clear evidence from a range of sources of data that the student learning experience in relation to assessment was not as good as it could be. Yet in the rewriting of module assessment strategies, it is often easy to forget the role of the student or the voice of the student in the construction of assessment design (Hoidn, 2017)

- Unexpected factors – a decision to utilise TESTA was taken with support of the then Head of School. By the time data had been gathered and analysed, this position had changed and the communication of results from TESTA was initiated during a period of interim leadership. As a consequence, it was a time of instability and uncertainty within the School. This could not have been anticipated. Research shows that leadership is important during times of change and has a key role in the creation of a safe environment where staff can try new things (Kavanagh and Ashkanasy, 2006).

## Recommendations for Academic Practice

Learning from this project has led the team to make the following recommendations for others who might be considering a similar process in relation to assessment and feedback:

- 1) TESTA can be a useful mechanism to examine current practice and implement improvements in response to the student voice. At its core, it encourages the academic community to talk to each other about assessment and feedback, which ultimately can lead to enhancements within the curriculum
- 2) Academic staff need to be empowered to make changes within their sphere of contribution to the curriculum so that a collective and collaborative approach to the student experience can be taken. In this experience, it became evident that 'top down'

approaches or methods that were perceived to be imposed were more likely to delay acceptance and, consequently, inhibited progress

- 3) The team was led by an academic within the School who also managed the implementation of the TESTA process. The advantages of this approach were evident in the understanding of the data – its application to all parts of both programmes and having direct experience in working with staff and students.

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# Interview with Rob Ward – Director Emeritus, Centre for Recording Achievement



**Steve Outram**, HE consultant

*SO: Rob, thanks once again for agreeing to be interviewed for Educational Developments. A lot seems to have changed since we first interviewed you in 2005 – yet much has not. At that time, Personal Development Planning was still an important feature of HEFCE and QAA thinking and the CRA was central to providing institutional support for its introduction. What do you think has happened to PDP and where, if anywhere, do you think it is going?*

**RW:** The decade – and more – has flown by! It's important to note, of course, that the processes characterising PDP – of getting students to 'stop and think', of reviewing development and planning future actions – did not begin with Dearing (NCIHE, 1997).

The first incarnation of CRA – as the Recording Achievement and HE Project in 1991 – began as a means of building upon practice in schools and colleges, and there was a range of practice involving such as 'Learning Logs' and 'Personal Journals' associated with the Enterprise in Higher Education Initiative (remember that?). What Recommendation 20 of the Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997) did was to provide a context for a unique sector-led, nationally co-ordinated initiative. As the EEPI review (Gough *et al.*, 2003) into the effectiveness of personal development planning for improving student learning noted, PDP acted as a proxy 'for a number of constructs that attempt to connect and draw benefit from reflection, recording, action-planning and actually doing things that are aligned to the action plan'. And this review did – by the way – conclude that PDP processes can impact positively upon student learning and attainment.

So where are we now? Well, there never have been any 'PDP police', so it's hard to get a perspective across the sector. My sense – for what it's worth – is that while the term PDP may be less in evidence now than a

decade ago, the processes of PDP live on in many guises: within personal tutoring and academic advising, in collecting and assembling the evidence to demonstrate how requirements on programmes with professional recognition are met, and as a means of supporting the effective use of e-portfolios, amongst others. Plus, of course, very many institutions now have means of recognising extra-curricular achievements, and these are underpinned by the 'plan-do-review' methodology that underpinned PDP. So while the term PDP may be a historical one, my sense is that the processes characterising it are alive and well in many locations!

*Also in 2005, the Burgess Group was working hard on alternatives to the degree classification system and engaging with such things as records of achievement (Burgess Group Final Report, 2007). We now know, of course, that this translated into the development of the Higher Education Achievement Report, and the CRA, in partnership with the Higher Education Academy, has taken this initiative forward. How successful do you think we have been with the implementation of HEAR and what advice would you give to an institution still unsure whether to introduce it?*

It's a great question, and again more than a decade of work is hard to shoehorn into a short response, especially as this – like PDP – is an initiative recommended to the sector – so again there are no 'HEAR police'. We are, moreover, in competition for institutional attention with sectoral requirements, the KIS and the TEF, for example, and this presents major challenges given finite resources.

We have a good part of the sector who have implemented or are implementing HEAR, and many HEAR records have been issued. In process terms HEAR has provided a catalyst for institutional debate and discussion

on the nature of student achievement – especially beyond the curriculum – and how/how far this might be recognised within such an institutional document. What we need to do now – in my view – is to emphasise how HEAR can be developed as a formative tool to support student learning and development (aka PDP!), not least because we know that this ensures greater student engagement, how HEAR data can support student employability, and – looking ahead – how HEAR can enable institutions to demonstrate how they are meeting emerging agenda in the sector. Which offers a neat segue into your next question...

*Undoubtedly, the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework is uppermost in people's minds in relation to the current policy agenda. In what ways do you think the work of CRA has aided, and may continue to aid, institutions as they prepare for TEF3?*

To begin with the current situation, as I understand some informal work undertaken by CRA, suggests that having effective personal tutoring and academic advising processes is associated with achieving the Gold level. This does not demonstrate a causal relationship, of course, but it's potentially a very interesting pointer nevertheless, and worthy of further investigation.

Looking ahead, in terms of the TEF, it seems to me that CRA can:

- Help key staff in institutions to make connections between our core agenda and those of the TEF, and – beyond this – to take active roles in linking work on the ground
- Play a part in seeking to develop TEF implementation – which so far has been very justifiably about 'demonstrating for scrutiny' – towards the structured use of TEF data to enhance the quality of

provision. There are two paradigms here, and they are potentially in some conflict. One – presenting yourself in the best possible light in order to achieve the (Gold) prize, needs in my view to be accompanied – or ideally replaced – as soon as practicable with an agenda which says, ‘what can we learn from these data, and other data too, to improve the quality of the student experience in this place’. So PDP for institutions perhaps! I’d include in this, by the way, some fairly serious messages to reinforce the challenges – and joys – of learning, as opposed to a simplistic focus on current TEF indices.

Ironically, the focus upon ‘student as customer’ actually serves students very badly in terms of preparing them for future opportunities – employers and PhD supervisors both seek the qualities that enable individuals to work effectively within less supported environments where knowledge is emergent and solutions require to be mapped out as we go. Arguably, this is a key requisite of much professional practice.

*What else has CRA been up to since 2005?*

It’s been interesting to remind myself of just how broad the Portfolio of activities has been. There have been a range of funded Projects involving CRA member organisations including:

- The National Action Research Network (NARN) on Researching and Evaluating Personal Development Planning and e-Portfolio, funded by the HEA, which centred upon supporting practitioners in becoming effective practitioner researchers. For me, this was a great model which I see as potentially a very powerful approach in helping colleagues both validate their work and provide an evidence-informed context for further development
- A Project funded by HEFCE looking at the potential for electronic portfolios to support work-based learning, something that could well have a new lease of life given the current emphasis on Degree Apprenticeships and the involvement of multiple stakeholders
- A Jisc-funded Project on Digital Patchwork Text Assessment.

We’ve also run more conferences and seminars than I care to remember, including a series of Annual Residential

Seminars planned with members, three international events with a strong research focus (in Oxford, Nottingham and Edinburgh), seminars to support the new Personal Tutoring and Academic Advising Professional Development Award (with SEDA accreditation), and still others in partnership with organisations such as AGCAS. More recently, we have been taking advantage of the technology to offer a range of webinars. Plus of course, we have sought to support members and others in taking forward their practice locally (supported by CRA commitment – ‘ask, and if we can, we will!’).

*One of the most significant changes since 2005 has been the change to publicly-funded agencies such as the Higher Education Academy, the Leadership Foundation and the Equality Challenge Unit, and their requirement to be responsible for the whole of their own funding. At a time when UK universities and colleges are concerned about their spending, what challenges face organisations such as the Centre for Recording Achievement and the Staff and Educational Development Association...and how can they meet them?*

Notwithstanding the current uncertainties brought about by the organisational changes you allude to, I’ve always been a strong advocate of collaborative working, which CRA has practised with AGCAS, Jisc and SEDA amongst others. Given financial pressures, it seems to me that this is the most appropriate approach to enable institutions to get most ‘bang for their buck’ and to ensure more holistic approaches to developing practice involving more than one community within HE. To my mind, smaller organisations have a strong opportunity to demonstrate agility in responding to new demands as these arise. It’s important to recognise that this view is not shared by everyone, some relish competition as a way of enhancing their own positions, but it seems to me that spending energy in this way is a very expensive activity in such times. So I’m a firm believer in developing and implementing such partnership arrangements that respond to need within the sector.

*Rob, there is no doubt that you have made an inestimable contribution to higher education since you became CRA Director in 1991. What for*

*you have been the most memorable achievements?*

In a way that’s for others to judge. For me, the most important theme has been the way in which we have been able to support and facilitate communities to undertake innovative work in the broad field of recording achievement whilst remaining true to our values. We’ve never had any power, so we’ve needed to work alongside colleagues and support and celebrate their achievements as much as anything else. Conversely, we have not switched our focus to reflect the most recent demand(s), rather we have taken our agenda forward through such initiatives.

*We know that you continue to support CRA’s work as Emeritus Director, but as you reflect on what you have done what new goals do you now have for the future?*

They are not all new goals! Some, like strong engagement with employers – and partnerships with students – require continual refreshment. Indeed, without the latter I’m not sure why any of us should be doing what we are doing. But I’m also interested in how we can continue to develop and harness technologies to benefit many academics and students. Again this is about cross-community collaboration within HE, and ensuring we get out of our silos and speak ‘plain English’ to each other. My interests now are still with supporting innovative practice, but I’m also increasingly interested in translating these into ‘just good enough’ solutions that many can make good use of.

And, beyond that, I hope to see a bit more of the world!

*And finally, we can just say a huge thank-you for the contribution you have made to enhancing the lives of people working in universities and colleges and, therefore, to the lives of countless students.*

Actually, my sense is that I sort of stood around and lots of other people did the real work...We should thank all of them, especially given our focus upon recognising and celebrating achievement!

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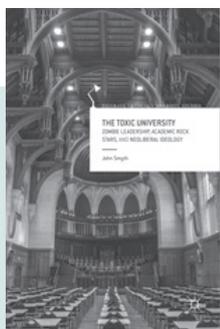
## Book Review

### The Toxic University: Zombie Leadership, Academic Rock Stars and Neoliberal Ideology

by John Smyth

Palgrave MacMillan 2017

ISBN: 978-1-137-54968-6



John Smyth's book wins hand-down my title of the year, and that includes both fiction and non-fiction. Prior to reviewing it, I conducted a straw poll amongst colleagues at my institution in which I invited their reactions to the title. It pricked their curiosity, resonated with some of their ongoing frustrations at life in the academy and above all it made them chuckle. I suspected the chuckling came because here was the prospect of some of the contradictions and pomposities which characterise universities today being exposed and brought to account.

The book pursues two fundamental questions:

- Why have academics been so compliant in going along with the market model and re-packaging of higher education as a commodity?
- If we measure the success of universities using metrics, what is the effect?

These are questions which have been addressed before in other literature and I would suggest Smyth offers little new material here. In my opinion, the strength of this book, and why I would recommend you read it, is because of its insistence that we ask ourselves the question: 'Have universities become toxic places to work?'

So, does the book live up to its promise? Well, yes and no. It is an angry book and whilst there were times when I was reading it I found many of the supporting arguments and examples convincing and compelling, there were equally times when I felt I was being repeatedly bludgeoned over the head with a blunt instrument. It is reductive and simplistic to refer to 'neo-liberal ideology' as the key threat without looking at the influence of other ideologies and wider political, social and economic factors which have brought us to where we are today.

Nor is it helpful or accurate to lump all university managers together in one homogeneous group and continually castigate them for being 'without consciences' and without intelligence. No distinction appears to be made between those on executive boards, middle managers, professional services and those in academic leadership positions. The reality is more complex and nuanced.

I would like to get on my own personal 'hobby horse' and express my disappointment at some sloppy punctuation and proof-reading in this edition. Surely, the title should include a colon and in the contents page we had a new spelling of *zombie* with 'Why zvombie leadership?' for chapter 4, and *get* with 'Gevt off my bus!' for Chapter 9.

John Smyth is a Visiting Professor of Social Justice at the University of Huddersfield as well as holding Emeritus Professor roles in Australia. His forty years of working in universities allow him to compare the university of the past with the university of the present, drawing on a range of examples from Australia, New Zealand and the UK, linking them to philosophical arguments and other scholarly work. He is certainly not viewing the past through rose-tinted glasses but rather he argues that the present situation is unbearable and laments the continued threat to academic life and especially how academics' work is appropriated and controlled by others who don't understand it.

I am not suggesting this is not so and the case studies and examples he draws on are often depressingly familiar. However, I would suggest that his notion of an 'academic life' is often based on an interpretation which sees the critical component of such a life being defined by research activity as opposed to a teaching and scholarship route. Little distinction is made between established, older academics and early career academics – you cannot ask why there is so little resistance amongst the latter group unless you have experienced the precarious nature of short-term employment contracts.

I found the most satisfying chapters in terms of structure and accessibility were Chapter 4, 'Why Zombie Leadership?', and Chapter 5, 'Cultivation of the "Rock Star" Academic Researcher?'. These zing along and take no prisoners yet will leave you feeling somewhat demoralised. So, pick yourself up and dust yourself down, then read Chapter 9, 'Get off my Bus! The reversal of what we have been doing in Universities', where Smyth ends us on an optimistic note encouraging us to act and to challenge organisational stupidity which has become entrenched, e.g. box ticking, superficial rebranding exercises, mission statements with no substance. Don't panic – he is not suggesting an obvious high stakes strategy but rather revolution of a different kind through the logic of the 'small wins' approach which may not immediately seem important but, once accomplished, set up the conditions for another small win then another and then another. It is a shame that more time is not given over to the linked steps and providing examples which characterise this approach, but Smyth is unapologetic and ends by saying that his job was to bring us to this point, *i.e.* things cannot continue like this and now it is down to us to act.

**Carole Davis** is Head of Educational Development at Queen Mary University of London.

# Developing lecturers to teach and support first year students and students in transition in middle and northern Europe

**Diane Nutt**, independent HE consultant

*This article is based on data drawn from a good practice case study project conducted between March 2016 and June 2017, supported by the SEDAs Research and Evaluation Grant scheme.*

## Introduction and background

As chair of the European First Year Experience Network (EFYEN) and its Conference Organising Committee, I have for the last 12 years been involved in supporting individuals, teams, and institutions with approaches to improving experiences of HE for first year students, and helping to identify examples of good practice for supporting HE students in their transitions through HE. I have also been an academic staff developer for many years, most recently working on a number of activities relating to professional recognition for staff teaching and supporting learning. These interests led me to work with other members of the EFYEN to develop a research project examining both professional recognition and staff development relating to first year students and students in transition. This article reports findings in relation to this second area of the project.

There is established good practice across middle and northern European institutions when it comes to support initiatives for first year experience (FYE) and transitions, but it would be acknowledged in the field that we still need further work to establish institutional change (Bonne and Nutt, 2016; Nutt and Calderon, 2009).

Much of the interesting work supporting students in these settings has been either add-on support activity (for example induction events, skills provision, peer learning and peer support), or one-off initiatives by individual academics or programme teams. There are two challenges in this. Firstly, the focus on add-on or one-off initiatives means that they don't necessarily reach all students.

Secondly, that initiatives can be difficult to embed over time if they are not part of an institutional agenda or culture change. While some institutions have explored first year or transition strategies, these have not been substantially established in Europe. There are examples of this kind of work in the US, Australia, New Zealand and more recently South Africa, but few examples in Europe. There has been some discussion around first year experience and transitions in the UK (Harvey *et al.*, 2006; Yorke and Longden, 2006), and some work was done to develop institutional approaches in Scotland as part of a QAA thematic strand (Whittaker, 2008). However, none of these European examples have really explored academic staff development in relation to first year experience or supporting students in transition (some work has been done on this in Australia, see for example Kift's (2009) work on transition pedagogy).

Experience suggests that key ways to embed positive change for all students are through developing academic staff, changing curricula, and working in teaching contexts. In particular, I would argue a culture change is required in universities, to 'normalise' a consideration for first year experience and transitions in curriculum design and development. What we have learned from other areas of activity is that this can be done through institutional drivers and systemic engagement of academic staff and programme teams; for example, this has been effective in embedding employability and retention in a number of settings (Cole and Tibby, 2012; Thomas, 2012). While work on retention overlaps with support for first year students and transition, the advantage of exploring FYE and transition is that it applies to all universities, not only those which have issues with student dropout. Over the years of working with EFYEN, we have

worked with institutions across the continuum between highly elite and complete open access. Thinking about first year experience and transitions has provided a bridge for staff across institutional divides as well as across role responsibilities.

My own view is that by making FYE and transition pedagogy (Kift, 2009) an intrinsic part of staff development in institutions, we can potentially enhance first year student learning experiences more systematically and embed enhanced practice supporting student transitions across institutions in Europe.

This small-scale project set out to explore what types of activity were in place in universities in middle and northern Europe to support academics as teachers of students in transition. The sample of institutions was identified through participation in the European First Year Experience Conference. The idea being that those who had attended the conference were likely to have an interest in FYE, be aware of some of the issues and be able to reflect on whether FYE or transitions were incorporated into staff development.

## Methods and focus

The project included a short quantitative survey, qualitative case study interviews and a review of documentary material from the case study institutions.

While UK participants were welcome to respond to the survey, emphasis was given to identifying representatives from at least five non-UK countries. The survey was designed to be completed by someone in the institution who had an understanding of academic staff development and policy approaches. Survey respondents were invited to take part in case study interviews.

The case study interviews were conducted via Skype, recorded and transcribed. For each identified institution two interviews were conducted, one with a member of academic staff who had participated in some form of staff development, and one educational developer who had knowledge of the staff development offering at the institution. Relevant documentary materials were also provided by the case study respondents.

The project examined several areas, but this article focuses on findings relating to the following two:

- Exploring the development available for staff who teach first year students and students in transition
- Learning from good practice, particularly in relation to developing staff who teach FYE and students in transition.

Survey responses were received from seven countries, and case study interviews were conducted with five: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, and the UK. Different types of institution participated in both elements of the study, e.g. research institutions, applied polytechnic-style universities and specialist institutions. The data was analysed thematically. The themes were drawn from the literature review which took place in the early stages of the project, and from the interviews.

## Findings

Given that this project targeted staff working in, and/or having participated in, educational staff development, it is not surprising that all responding institutions (via survey and case study interview) had established staff development processes and practices for lecturers. However, not all of them required lecturers to attend a 'course'. This differs across countries – with some having national commitment for their HE teachers to be trained to teach, as in Sweden, while others are only beginning to explore this idea and establish formal HE teacher development as a priority. It also differs across types of institution, but not necessarily in the same pattern that has evolved in the UK.

National drivers have played a key role in this area across Europe (Mykelbust, 2016). For example, in the Netherlands, institutions have

responded to the national agenda by developing institution-specific approaches to teaching requirements. The Dutch research university case study in this project has identified 'four competencies' in relation to teaching that 'lecturers must satisfy' (quoted from documentary evidence provided). The institution is now exploring educational development activities in relation to these. One quotation from the document might be related directly to transition; under the competency 'Design and redesign of teaching' they include:

*'Design...in an effective and stimulating way, all bottlenecks resolved and points for improvement realised.'*

There were also some regional differences in some countries (for example, Belgium, where aspects of education are managed locally rather than nationally). The UK is unusual in having an established national focus through Higher Education Academy Fellowships (and, previously, membership of the ILT). However, perhaps partly as a result of debates within the Bologna process, teaching quality and teaching skills have grown in importance across Europe over the last 20 years (Fielden, 1998; Pleschova et al., 2012), and the institutions participating in this project showed

## 'New teachers ask about transition issues: who are the students and what are their skills.'

a variety of examples of ways of exploring teaching development for their academic staff.

There were very few examples of courses that were credit-bearing in an academic sense, so little sign of PGCerts or their equivalent; and where these did exist they were often taken up by only a small percentage of staff. However, there was a growing sense that some universities in some middle and northern European countries were moving in this direction. In Belgium, for example, one developer described designing a new course for academics at the behest of the management of the institution.

Short courses for new lecturers seemed relatively common, but were not necessarily widely accessed. In

a Danish research university (one of the case studies), there was a short course that was not credit-bearing, and a lecturer who participated was asked about whether there had been material relating to teaching first year students or students in transition; she said no, but then added:

*'We were all teaching different levels and were of course discussing the challenges we had... [in] the first year courses it's often lectures for many students, and when the courses progress it's smaller and smaller groups.'* (L5)

The experience for early HE teachers does seem to provide an environment for exploring transitions, and the role of lecturers in first year teaching. As an educational developer from a university college in Belgium pointed out:

*'New teachers ask about transition issues: who are the students and what are their skills.'* (ED3)

Capturing this concern within early professional development for HE lecturers seems a timely way to begin to initiate a conscious sense of FYE and transitions in teaching and curriculum design. Once academics are established and have been teaching for a while, it is easy for them to forget

these early concerns. We all become somewhat institutionalised.

However, given the fact that most universities in the study were not offering formal courses of some length (unlike some examples in the UK), there are probably few opportunities for integrating FYE or transitions as topics into courses. Having said that, the quotations above do suggest that if these courses exist, it is a topic that could be integrated easily and usefully, and be one layer in developing the cultural shift I suggested in the introduction.

Despite the absence of formal courses, there were a range of educational development activities offered to staff, and in some cases required, and some of the examples provided in the survey

and case studies were useful ways of developing lecturers to support first year students. But who is driving the agenda of these development activities can be an important factor. In talking about providing educational development on request as part of annual planning at a university, one developer commented:

*'It very much depends on the interest of different departments, we have suggested a few times that we should put a focus on first years, but it hasn't happened yet.'* (ED5)

Other ways development activities were taking place were more disguised: effectively they were not labelled educational development, or staff development activities, but they did involve educational development staff working with lecturers and programme teams to develop practice, both locally and institutionally. So for example, in one Finnish research university, they did an annual survey on FYE, and the central educational development team worked with departments to learn from the data:

*'[We] try to make departments use the results effectively...We go through the results [with them].'* (ED2)

And in another university:

*'We've just had a process, where there is alignment for the first year through the whole studies, transferable skills...verbal skills, scientific writing...try to restructure the education so it's more connected to the first year.'*

On being asked whether there was staff development for this... 'no', but there were 'working groups set up'. And educational developers are often on these groups, or asked to provide material or guidance for them.

The findings from the research have highlighted some of the challenges of developing lecturers systematically in relation to any topic, but in this instance in relation to FYE and students in transition. However, the findings also identified some examples of good practice, which I want to include here.

### Some examples of good practice

- Bringing in specialist external expertise, for two days of intensive activities, on a staff development

workshop series on teaching students in transition (Sweden).

- Using central support from educational developers working with learning developers to train local teaching champions to support integrated academic writing skills, and to cascade these practices down into the rest of the programme via other staff within the team. This has taken place across an institution, not just in one programme (Belgium).
- Establishing themed communities of practice including themes aligned with FYE and transitions. These communities of practice have been set up within an institution, regionally and nationally by different institutions (Belgium, Finland and Norway).
- Providing a session within an accredited programme for lecturers new to teaching focusing on student transitions and curriculum approaches to supporting students.
- Masters module (on an HE Education MA, run by the educational development team) on student transitions with an assessment task to design a curriculum intervention. This then doesn't just change the individual participant but the curriculum intervention work involves conversations about FYE and transitions with their home programme teams (UK).
- Pedagogical fair or annual themed day event on FYE/transition related themes (Denmark).
- Annual FYE survey, reviewed and accompanied by local discussions and support for development and change with teaching teams. Work is done by educational developers (Finland).

### Summary of findings

A range of support and development activities are provided to help lecturers (particularly those new to teaching) with their HE teaching across the universities in the study. Some countries and some institutions have formal programmes (certificates) or are developing formal programmes for lecturers new to teaching, but this is still relatively new in middle and northern Europe outside the UK.

Optional development activities of a variety of kinds are common across the research sample – annual events, or local conferences are a popular approach, plus workshops and networks.

FYE and supporting student transitions are not specifically included in staff development for lecturers/HE teachers in most settings, but there are some nice examples, which are either focused on this issue or could be adapted for this purpose to support cultural change.

Some development work is done through organisational processes rather than staff development, for example: working groups; allocation to an organising committee; working with faculty or department leads to 'direct' or 'require' change.

Sadly, there is little evidence of the involvement of students in activities designed to develop staff who teach, except in the UK case study, where students were invited to provide their perspective of first year and transition challenges on the credited course. It was also rare to see explicit value given to good practice in teaching, supporting, or working with first year students or students in transition.

### Future – What next and recommendations

To help institutions enhance their approaches to supporting students through the first year and other transitional stages of their programme of study, we need more than add-on support initiatives. A cultural change in HE institutions could potentially be achieved in two ways: strategic approaches and vision, and normalising consideration of FYE and transition in the minds of those who teach and design curricula. To address the latter, taking a diverse approach to academic staff development focused on this issue could be very beneficial.

Given the evidence from the survey and case studies, HE institutions in middle and northern Europe develop academic staff in a number of ways. Therefore, integrating activities and examples relating to FYE and transitions, and highlighting these points of student experience as curricula challenges from the very beginning of academics' teaching careers, may be a fundamental way to create this cultural shift. It is only through working with lecturers that we will shift the focus from additional support approaches to curricula, and thus to embed practice and reach all students.

This study has provided some examples that are transferable for educational development around first year experience, but there are two other areas, which were not discussed significantly in research responses, that I believe are important for future considerations. Firstly, how could we get students involved in staff development to help understanding of FYE and transitions? And secondly, could we, or should we, explore approaches to rewarding lecturers who are supporting FYE and transition? The USA National Resource Center for First Year Experience and Students in Transition has two awards for North Americans committed to FYE: the First Year Student Advocate Award; and the Excellence in Teaching First Year Seminars Award. Perhaps EFYEN should be exploring their own European awards to help motivate individuals and universities to value the role of lecturers, and the educational developers who work with them, in supporting first year experience and students in transition.

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# Implementing and evaluating a Communities of Practice model to align diverse learning and teaching styles in a transnational university

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This article reports on a project that was supported by a SEDAs Research and Evaluation Small Grant, 2016.

In this article, we report on a project that has explored a Communities of Practice approach to engage academic staff in learning and teaching innovation and improvement in a transnational university in China. The setting was Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU), a transnational university whose staff come from all over the world and from highly diverse educational contexts. In addition, and related to having a large cohort of international staff, XJTLU is characterised by high turnover of staff. Furthermore, while around ten per cent of students are international, the majority of XJTLU's student cohort is mainland Chinese, which means they have come from a particular educational background, while at XJTLU they are expected to adjust to a rather different approach to learning and teaching, which

is much more self-directed and active. The aim of this project was to explore ways of effectively aligning diverse learning and teaching styles of both staff and students in a transnational university.

## The context: Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University

XJTLU is a joint venture between Xi'an Jiaotong University in China, and Liverpool University in the UK. XJTLU, as an English Medium of Instruction (EMI) institution in China, is unique in that it offers a degree which is partly UK-designed and needs to comply with UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) requirements, and partly contextualised. As noted, the academic staff at the University are from a wide variety of educational contexts. In terms of learning and teaching, this means that people who come from very different pedagogical backgrounds come together in a higher education institution that strives to be unique, and which needs to strike the right

balance between two educational systems. XJTLU's Academic Enhancement Centre (AEC) occupies a crucial position in achieving this balance. In an effort to achieve a consistent and sustainable impact on learning and teaching across the institution, an attempt was made in early 2016 to implement a Communities of Practice (CoPs) model, and this project has evaluated the implementation of this model.

The aim was to implement seven Communities of Practice across six Faculties (or 'Clusters') and one Language Centre, under the guidance of the AEC's Educational Development team. This approach was chosen because, as a central unit, we wanted to engage with staff at the coalface level, and provide them with a sense of ownership over the implementation of active learning approaches, rather than rely on a top-down regulated approach. Furthermore, it was envisaged that in this process of establishing CoPs, we would identify already existing pockets of informal CoPs around the university.

### Why Communities of Practice at XJTLU?

The concept of Communities of Practice has been around since Lave and Wenger (1991) first conceptualised it, and it has been adopted in a variety of higher education contexts (e.g. Viskovic, 2007; McDonald, 2014) as a model for professional development and lifelong learning. Wenger, *et al.* (2002, cited in McDonald *et al.*, 2012, pp. 4-5) define Communities of Practice as 'groups of people who share a concern...and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis...[As they] accumulate knowledge they become informally bound by the value that they find in learning together. Over time...[they] become a community of practice'. The expectation was that this model would be well suited to the context of XJTLU. Establishing Communities of Practice was expected to firstly develop shared understandings of teaching in a transnational context, and secondly to develop a sense of belonging at XJTLU, thereby potentially increasing the likelihood that staff stay longer at the University.

We explored the role of Communities of Practice in driving the institutional learning and teaching agenda whilst at the same time providing staff with a sense of ownership over that agenda, including the complexities involved in that process, with a specific focus on a transnational and interdisciplinary context in China. Our case study included an analysis of the status of Educational Developers (Huijser *et al.*, 2016), and its impact on their ability to drive learning and teaching strategies via Communities of Practice.

We expect this impact to grow if the Educational Developers are seen as members of a Community of Practice, rather than 'enforcers' of institutional learning and teaching agenda. Similarly, the expectation was that identified, faculty-based, learning and teaching 'champions' would drive the development of Communities of Practice within different faculties, pushing the Educational Developers increasingly towards a background support role, rather than an initial facilitating role. Overall then, the key aim of the implementation of Communities of Practice at XJTLU was to develop a sense of community, identity and belonging.

### Implementing and evaluating Communities of Practice

In this project, we measured the impact of this initiative, and collaboration across the institution was a central focus.

We collaborated both with Faculty Heads of Department and with identified learning and teaching 'champions', who were tasked with driving the development of their respective Communities of Practice. To provide an initial impetus for the CoPs idea at XJTLU, to create awareness around it, and to explore potential implementation issues, Etienne Wenger and Beverly Wenger-Trayner were invited to provide the keynote address and a series of workshops during XJTLU's Annual Learning and Teaching Colloquium in April 2016 (for more about their visit, please visit: <http://tinyurl.com/y8rdt3nw>).

For this project, we initially developed, distributed and promoted a survey to all academic staff (around 400 in total), which was carried out in April and May 2016. The survey data was then collated and analysed during June and July 2016. Based on the observation of the rates of establishment of CoPs in different Faculties, we decided to revise our initial plan, and changed the focus groups into individual interviews with CoP 'leaders' instead. We initially expected that all Faculties (Clusters) would establish a Community of Practice, but this proved difficult, so the overall number of CoPs initially established was three rather than seven. Moreover, informal conversations suggested considerable differences in the way CoPs were implemented in different Faculties, and we decided to explore these different iterations on a case by case basis, rather than in a focus group situation, as the latter would have meant that considerable time would need to be spent on explaining individual contexts to each other. The interviews were conducted and recorded during November and December 2016, and the transcription and analysis of the interview data took place in January and February 2017.

Five interviews in total were conducted, and were digitally recorded with the interviewees' consent. The five interviewees were based in three different departments – Chemistry, Environmental Science, and the Language Centre. Each Cluster (Faculty) at XJTLU consists of a number of different Departments. The initial plan was to establish one (interdisciplinary) CoP per Cluster. However, in practice, some Departments preferred to establish their own CoP, and in the case of the Sciences Cluster, there was a combination of Departmental CoPs, which sometimes come together as an overall Cluster-based CoP. For this reason, we decided for this project to focus largely on Departmental CoPs.

The five interviewees included three male and two female teachers, whose teaching experiences at XJTLU varied, ranging from one year to four years. One interview was planned but was ultimately abandoned due to a lack of progress in the establishment of a CoP in that particular Department. It is clear from the numbers that we have been unable, until now, to establish official CoPs across all Faculties, so we have had to adjust our plans to incorporate those Faculties and Departments where CoPs were successfully established, in particular, the Faculty of Sciences and the Language Centre. Anecdotally, and more informally, we did identify other Departments where various models of CoPs were established, for example the Department of Urban Planning and pockets of the International Business School Suzhou (or 'Faculty of Business'), but these were not structurally and officially implemented as such, and we (as Educational Developers in the AEC) were not directly involved in them.

## Are Communities of Practice useful?

For the survey, we received 122 survey responses (around 30%). The responses were quite positive in terms of the perceived and/or potential 'value' of CoPs. However, there was significant variety in terms of understandings of what CoPs actually are. For those who engage in established CoPs, areas such as 'curriculum design' and 'teaching strategies' were discussed regularly. Interestingly, some respondents objected to the word 'meeting' (as in 'CoP meeting') as being too formal, so there was a perception that the informal nature of CoPs was crucial for them to work. At the same time, a concern was expressed that they could potentially turn into 'moaning meetings' about administrative processes, indicating that they should be carefully managed and facilitated.

The interviews were designed to address three main themes: understandings of CoPs, how specific CoPs were implemented, and perceptions of the roles and effectiveness of CoPs. An additional theme emerged around the difficulties in setting up CoPs at an institutional and departmental level.

### Theme 1 – Understandings of CoPs

Broadly speaking, the interviewees' understandings, or their own definitions, of CoPs seemed to be in line with those in the literature, for example:

*'A group of people get together regularly to reflect on how things are going, to try to brainstorm, trouble shoot together, to try to figure out solutions, share ideas, what's working, what's not working. So basically, a group of people get together regularly to share ideas, and build each other up, and help make the whole community stronger through that, and it has to be a voluntary community...'* (Interview 3)

Some, however, were actually not familiar with the concept:

*'Well, something I never really had, no idea what it was, and then it's a term that you see, and then when I looked at it further, it's one of these terms I realise that we do anyway, so...'* (Interview 4)

In addition, and interestingly, three interviewees asked why we used CoPs instead of other approaches:

*'So what's the intention of the Centre in this?'* (Interview 5)

### 2 – Implementing CoPs in context

Overall, CoPs were implemented in the departments in two ways: formal and informal meetings. Interviewees thought CoPs should be informal rather than formal. On the flip side, however, as Interview 3 noted, initially it was easy for staff to hold CoPs meetings but it became more and more difficult to do so later on, which may be related to the informal nature of such meetings, which become the first to go when workload pressure increases.

There was some variety in formats of CoPs across departments, including a more social approach, such as informal conversations over coffee/lunch and even a beer and pizza, and a more professional approach, e.g. through departmental learning and teaching committee (DLTC) meetings.

In terms of the content of the CoPs meetings, not all the departments set up their meetings to be theme-based, even if one department tried to do so but found it difficult to agree on themes that would be interesting to all. When people did meet up, there was not always a clear distinction between topics about logistical and administrative issues on the one hand, and teaching practice on the other. Moreover, for many academics the discussions were often about research issues rather than teaching practice. Interestingly, interviewees (or perhaps academics at XJTLU in general) were not clear on where to seek support for their discipline/academic learning and teaching practice outside of the CoPs meetings.

### Theme 3 – Role and effectiveness of CoPs

Not all of the interviewees were clear about the advantageous roles a CoP played in their work and departments. For example, one interviewee did not seem convinced about the benefits he may have gained from his Faculty-based CoP until he was asked that question explicitly:

Interviewer: *'Are there any visible benefits that you or somebody else gets from the Community of Practice?'*  
Interview 5: *'They got free food that day...the only thing I can see is that people from different departments can recognise each other, perhaps they are in the same building, like Biology and Chemistry, they might not know each other. We now recognise more faces. Perhaps people might be interested in talking about other things, but you didn't know before. I mean, basically you are immersed in your own work. I mean, the momentum has been gained, and perhaps people now...at least this is on the radar.'*

Thus, networking and gaining momentum are two main benefits that Interview 5 observed. In addition, Interview 3 felt that professional development was actually greatly supported by the University, and CoPs helped him to see his professional foci more clearly.

However, not all the interviewees considered the CoPs in their departments as 'successful' for complex reasons. For example:

*'I don't feel great about it. I think I'm a part of many communities of practice. I don't feel the XXXX one has been successful due to several issues. One is just the general mind-set about what Communities of Practice are supposed to be per se and what professional development is, and so these things seem to be constantly clashing.'* (Interview 2)

This was a different (if not fully contradictory) view from a fellow interviewee in the same Faculty. The interviewees touched upon many challenges throughout their interviews, for example:

- It was difficult for keen people to get support from the institute, i.e. the institutional/departmental leaders
- Management issues
- Heavy workload prevented academics from holding regular CoPs meetings
- Lack of communications between colleagues
- Planning of format and structure of CoPs.

As noted, one additional theme that most interviewees mentioned was that it was perceived to be hard to get CoPs

running efficiently at the institutional and departmental level, despite individual enthusiasm for it.

### Project implications, conclusions, and suggestions

The project created some momentum around the idea of meeting in a relatively informal way to discuss learning and teaching-related issues. This can lead not only to peer support that was previously untapped, but it can also lead to collaborations between peers (and in some cases Educational Developers) on learning and teaching-related scholarship projects. Furthermore, while AEC-based Educational Developers were initially invited to help set up the CoPs, and to provide logistical and conceptual support, some of these CoPs became self-sustaining and independent very quickly after being established, which in our opinion is a positive development.

The key challenge has been to implement CoPs consistently across the whole institution, and then to keep them functioning in a sustainable manner. This relates to a number of factors, including support and buy-in (or lack thereof) from Heads of Department. In those Departments where CoPs were successfully established, the Heads of Department were both supportive and actively involved. In other Departments where this was not the case, identified 'champions' struggled to get a CoP off the ground, and in some cases failed altogether.

Ironically, high staff turnover rates, which were one of the things that we hoped CoPs would diminish (through developing a community and sense of belonging), were also a factor that often got in the way of building momentum. In other words, once some of the enthusiastic staff members leave the institution, it is often a challenge to find someone who will assume their role.

Some suggestions for future implementation and sustainability at XJTLU include the following:

- Treat CoPs as one element of a suite of professional development opportunities that include a structured workshop programme, the CPS programme, the Learning and Teaching Colloquium, etc.

- Reinforce and increase high-level support for CoPs (including resourcing)
- Locate new pockets of functioning CoPs and offer support and create visibility of their achievements
- Involve current 'champions' and CoPs 'leaders' in planning and events, such as the Learning and Teaching Colloquium
- Consider Wenger's Evaluation Framework to reinforce and make explicit the added value of CoPs, which in turn can help build momentum and help to gather support from senior administrators (accessible at: <http://wenger-trayner.com/resources/publications/evaluation-framework/>)
- Introduce and advocate the CoPs model and our experience of implementing it in the Induction Week in each new semester to new staff and/or students.

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# What role for educational developers in sharing learning about exemplary educational practices from teaching award schemes?

Jackie Potter, Keele University

Teaching excellence award schemes are widespread in Higher Education as a mechanism to identify and reward

effective and exemplary teaching practices. Land and Gordon (2015) undertook a piece of desktop research

on behalf of the Higher Education Academy to explore initiatives and strategies for fostering, recognising

and rewarding excellent practice in teaching and learning in Higher Education worldwide. They describe awards to recognise the excellent teacher (rather than excellent teaching) based on ratings by stakeholders of exceptional work as particularly common. In those schemes based in institutions, student nominations of teachers are encouraged and sometimes comments are welcome from alumni and staff peers. In the UK, following the embedding of many teaching award schemes in institutions during the 1990s, there has been a second wave of developments in universities as the National Union of Students has encouraged student-led teaching award schemes. Despite the widespread adoption of teaching award schemes, there is very little published work exploring their impacts and, discouragingly, Skelton (2009) asserts that ‘teaching award schemes do little to raise overall performance’ (of teaching). In this short article I want to share three practical ways that educational developers might work with to better share learning from teaching excellence schemes for the wider benefit of colleagues, based on ideas we are implementing at Keele University.

### 1) Explore and widely share your students’ comments on excellent education

Teaching award schemes collect a good deal of data about students’ conceptions of teaching excellence. At Keele, we routinely received about 400 nominations per year and in 2015, we explored what, if anything, they could tell us about students’ conceptions of teaching excellence. We were alert to the idea (from Gibbs, 2008) that the data would be skewed to privilege conceptions such as exhibiting certain teaching behaviours in a skilful way, implementing a student focus effectively or nurturing the development of individual students, rather than valuing conceptions such as engaging in the scholarship of teaching, innovating in teaching or developing the teaching of others. I explored, in a pilot study, to see what could be learned about assessment and feedback practices. A look across the small literature of work exploring students’ memories and experiences of teaching (Moore and Kuol, 2007; Bradley *et al.*, 2015) showed that constraining analysis of these data to a detailed exploration of specific aspects of teaching activity

had not been done before. I was aware that assessment and feedback is an area of activity where other, commonplace feedback mechanisms in universities, such as taught course evaluation questionnaires and student liaison committees, are less commonly in use or deemed effective. My analysis of students’ conceptions of exemplary assessment and feedback practices suggested the proposal of five student-rated behaviours that could be recommended to staff to adopt (see Table 1). The nomination statements had provided evidence that these tutor activities had led to changed behaviours and positive outcomes for students. Sharing this locally meaningful data along with other, more rigorous, recent research on assessment (Winstone *et al.*, 2017; Pitt and Norton, 2016), with ideas that speak of the importance of shared responsibilities for assessment feedback dialogue (Nash and Winstone, 2017) and on communicative competence of award-winning teachers (Worley *et al.*, 2007), will allow further conversation about assessment and feedback that has, at its heart, the lived experiences of our own students and the practices of exemplary practitioners.

Focus on what is expected and what is important to meet particular standards  
 Focus on how students can improve  
 Acknowledge effort and hard work  
 Be honest and accurate (specific)  
 Be constructive: phrase feedback ‘kindly’

*Table 1 Five new foci for assessment feedback based on students’ conceptions of positive, impactful teaching practices*

### 2) Create practical ways that award winners can contribute to the development of others

Winning an institutional award for teaching excellence provides reward and recognition for past work but, unless linked to subsequent activity to promote and encourage the dissemination of exemplary or effective practices, it may never have wider implications for the work of other staff or the experiences of more students. Awards vary widely in what they recognise. It cannot be necessarily inferred that a teaching award winner

will be an all-round expert (although work has conflated the two concepts, such as Dunkin and Prescians, 1992). Schemes exist, like the one at Keele, that reward early career colleagues, and many student-led teaching award schemes single out particular areas of practice for recognition, for example personal tutoring or the use of technology. Notwithstanding the variation in what is rewarded and what, if any, characteristics award winners may share, if educational developers consider their work complete once the award has been won, we are open to the critique of Skelton (2009) that our schemes do not have the wider impact that could be achieved. The National Teaching Fellowship Scheme in the UK has an active and lively association of members with links and support from the Higher Education Academy to support interest groups and an annual symposium. Within our institutions the smaller proportion of staff who hold an award could be encouraged to create their own community of practice. However, the nature of celebrating individual difference and contribution to teaching excellence may often mean that the only glue that could hold the community together is the rather weak link of each member having received institutional recognition, often for quite different approaches, values and skills as an educator.

At Keele, we have chosen instead to try and encourage each award winner to be involved with the enhancement work of the educational development centre in different ways and based on their known interests, strengths or wishes to contribute to any wider institutional or thematic agenda. Examples of the type of work that have been encouraged include leading and contributing to fixed-life working groups and research projects, developing resources on topics associated with their interests and expertise, acting as expert reviewers for projects and resources developed by the centre, providing one-to-one expert support for the professional development of other colleagues, and contributing to the development of the institutional postgraduate certificate programme for new teaching staff. Based on the variation in the forms and extent of engagement by award winners with the learning and development centre, it seems that collaboration has been most fruitful when it has worked with the unique features of the individual award

winners and the contemporary needs and priorities for enhancement in the university.

### 3) Provide support for individuals and teams who enter awards competitions but do not win

Inevitably, any competition has winners and losers. At Keele, we recognise 4-5 members or teams of staff each year with an award but many more enter the competition. Providing a clear path of encouragement and support for those that do not win a prize is an important part of ensuring that the scheme not only recognises excellence but also supports anyone who wishes to invest time and energy writing and reflecting on their work as an educator for the purposes of the excellence awards scheme. It can take courage and conviction to craft a statement to describe and promote one's teaching practices and share this with peers and students who comprise the assessment panel. It is important that those who do not win are offered not only feedback on the competition process and standard of applications from winners, but also on the strengths of their own application and the encouragement to further develop and invest in their own teaching practices.

At Keele, each application is scored by all eight panel members and written comments from each are collated anonymously. These comments inform the debate at the final assessment panel where all applications are considered. All staff panellists' names are shared with those who do not win and those applicants are invited to contact any of those panellists

to seek specific feedback on the strengths and areas for development of their application – with only rare exceptions, applicants contact a panellist and are encouraged to consider how their teaching practice and any future application might be developed. The letter informing the applicants that they have not won also encourages those that have not already done so to consider working with a mentor as part of the CPD scheme towards Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy, to reflect on and create an action plan for the further development of their teaching practices. Such guided approaches to developing teaching (see Hannon and Silver, 2000) may scaffold and further support individuals to consider their approaches as part of a more collective endeavour to improve student learning, outcomes and experience. In these ways, we aim to ensure that anyone who takes part in the process of applying for an award has a positive experience, is encouraged in their teaching practice and recognises the value that the organisation places on striving to improve, innovate and enhance teaching and the student experience.

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## Book Review

### Why Students Resist Learning: A Practical Model for Understanding and Helping Students

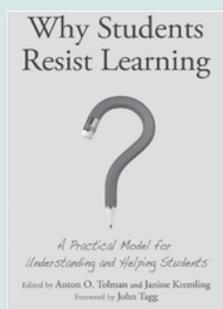
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This is an intriguing and challenging book. It demands something more of teachers than a subject knowledge and transmission of that knowledge. Whilst the *Educational Developments* readership is likely to be beside with this, the contents of this book provide much material for use within academic development and PGCEs in higher education. The book is grounded in Tolman's background in psychology and in the prologue he outlines how the model presented stems from his work in student readiness to change and 'the development of metacognitive instruments to help students better understand their own approaches to learning and their readiness to become more effective learners' (pp. xvii-xviii). In the first chapter, the authors then define and present an integrated model of 'student resistance'. The model then provides a structure for the book chapters: defining and understanding, student voices, obstacles, societal and environmental influences, motivation, negative classroom

experiences, promoting metacognition, and finally campus climate.

A problem is that the title seems to suggest that all students resist learning and that the resistance appears to be active rather than a passive learning ambivalence. However, it is worth noting that a two by two resistance matrix (asserting autonomy/preserving self is set against active/passive resistance) is presented (p. 6). This table could be used to trigger a PGCE discussion around how different forms of resistance might be resolved. The sub-title 'a practical model' is also a little strange and a 'practical guide in seeking to overcome' might be more appropriate. Regardless of this quibble, the model suggested and discussed hinges on student cognitive and metacognitive abilities alongside their self-beliefs. Develop these and resistance is overcome (I so wanted to write 'is futile').

There are some gems within 'graduates who felt "supported" by professors [it is an American book] who cared...are twice as likely to be engaging in productive work and thriving in their well-being' (p. 192). '[Obstacles] make it difficult to recognise resistance for what it is: a form of communication, a message that something has gone wrong in the learning process' (p. 51). In addition this book introduced me to *equity pedagogy* and *stereotype threat*.

The key contribution, I feel, is in the reporting of how a transtheoretical model of change (TTM) can be applied:

'It [TTM] describes the interactive roles of self-efficacy beliefs (beliefs that one is capable of change) and the way these influence a person's readiness to change' (p. 177). The book also points out that education is change and therefore it is surprising, the authors claim, that TTM has not been more widely applied in an educational (and indeed an academic development) context. A further survey instrument is outlined (the learning strategies self-assessment – LSSA) that investigates students' reporting of their behaviour in relation to 'a set of established and effective learning strategies'. This section of the book concludes with four strategies that instructors might adopt: talking about mindsets directly, promotion of self-reflection regarding learning strategies, teaching the benefits of failure and normalising struggles, and the use of productive criticism. The reader can clearly see a link back to the original model and the emphasis on student metacognition and cognitive development.

This book provides some material for discussion, is easy to read and presents a coherent argument for the need to teach students about how to learn.

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## SEDA News

### SEDA Fellowships

Many congratulations to our new Senior Fellowship holders:

**Fiona Campbell**

**Vicky Davies**, Ulster University

**John Lea**, Association of Colleges

**Jayne Richards**, Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance

**Vikki Smith**, Kaplan International Colleges

**Ruth Whitfield**, University of Bradford

**Paul Yates**, Newman University

### SEDA Research and Evaluation

#### Small Grants 2018

These grants are intended to support research and evaluation in staff and educational development with the goal of continued improvement in the quality and understanding of educational development practices. For 2018 we will be offering five grants of £1000 each for research into educational development practices.

See [www.seda.ac.uk](http://www.seda.ac.uk) for further details including an application form. The closing date for applications is **12 noon on 29 January 2018**.

#### Courses

SEDA's Online Introduction to Educational Change four-week online workshop will be running from **19 February-16 March 2018**.

For further details, see: <https://www.seda.ac.uk/onlineintroduction-educational-change>.

### SEDA Professional Development Framework (PDF)

Congratulations are due to the University of the South Pacific and the University of Wolverhampton who have been recognised to provide SEDA-PDF accredited programmes.

### International Consortium for Educational Development (ICED) Conference

*Institutional Change: Voices, Identities, Power and Outcomes*

**5-8 June 2018**

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

The call for proposals is now open – see [www.iced2018.com](http://www.iced2018.com) for further details.

### Partnerships for Enhanced and Blended Learning (PEBL)

SEDA is a partner in this recently launched Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) led project designed to address the critical staff shortages facing universities in East Africa, while improving outcomes for students. SEDA's role will be to deliver pedagogical and tutoring support.