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Making Progress on Progress Files

John Brennan, Open University

It is strange how some higher education policies seem to generate enormous amounts of fuss - top-up fees, research selectivity, virtually anything to do with quality assurance all come to mind - while other policies are quietly introduced and implemented without anyone seeming to notice or care very much. One such policy currently being implemented may, in the eyes of some, mark something of a revolution in how higher education is experienced and recognised in future.

One of the recommendations of the 1997 Dearing Report was that all institutions of higher education should introduce Higher Education Progress Files. These would comprise two elements: 'a transcript recording student achievement which should follow a common format devised by institutions collectively through their representative bodies;' and 'a means by which students can monitor, build and reflect upon their personal development (or Personal Development Planning/Recording)'.

Following substantial dialogue and consultation on what this might mean, the representative bodies of the universities and colleges and the Quality Assurance Agency issued a policy statement on Progress Files in May 2000 and this was followed up by the publication of guidelines in February, 2001. The academic year 2003/04 was set for the full implementation of the policy on transcripts and 2005/6 for personal development planning (PDP). The 2003 white paper confirmed the government's commitment to these policies and the Department for Education and Skills requested that a survey be undertaken on the progress being made in implementing them. A report based on the results of this survey - undertaken by CHERI (the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information) - has now been published by UUK and SCOP.

It is worth making the point that this is the first national policy to mandate a particular form of learning in higher education and the first teaching and learning-related policy to cover the whole education system - so it is pretty unusual.

As getting on for 50% of the population comes to pass through some form of higher education and achieves some kind of higher education qualification, understanding what the varied qualifications, courses and institutions mean and represent becomes an increasingly complex task - for students, for employers, even for those within higher education. In particular, as more people obtain degrees, what this signifies becomes less obvious unless accompanied by additional information about the individual's achievements. Currently, the main kinds of additional information are the classification of the degree and the reputation of the institution that awarded it. Progress Files aim to provide much more information. But Progress Files promise to do more than that. The PDP element of the policy is described as 'a structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning, performance and/or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and career

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development'. It is intended to help students to become 'more effective, independent and confident self-directed learners' and to 'understand how they are learning and relate their learning to a wider context'.

Are these empty 'feel-good' words that signify little and can be largely ignored by hard-pressed teachers and students? The recent survey indicated that they are rather more than that. How much more, only time will tell.

"A waste of time. We've no time for this sort of thing here". "This is fundamental to what higher education is all about." "We've always done this." "It would be revolutionary to do this."

Contrasting and contradictory perspectives to say the least. These were the sorts of comments made to us when we talked to people in universities and colleges who are responsible for implementing Progress Files. They were made almost exclusively about the PDP element of the policy. Transcripts seemed less problematic. They increased workloads on administrators, sure enough, but they did not require academic teachers to change their ways nor did they pose new questions about what was being learned and how it was being learned. Most institutions will have implemented the transcripts part of the policy on time and in the main according to the guidelines set. This means that amongst other things all students graduating this year will leave their university or college armed not just with the '2.1' or '2.2' or other honours classification but with a transcript containing over thirty separate fields of information about themselves and their learning. It will be interesting to see what currency the transcripts achieve, whether employers start routinely expecting them when recruiting graduates, whether they lead in any way to a modification of the magic attached to the name of a 'top university' or a 1st or 2.1. Perhaps not, but maybe it is not too much to hope that the provision of a greater amount of relevant information about graduates will lessen the attention given to non-relevant information about them such as their age, their social class, their gender or their ethnicity.

Personal development planning is more challenging, as the above quotes indicate. Nearly half the institutions we surveyed had introduced formal policies on PDP and most were able to report some related activity. The nature of the activity varied. In some places, it was almost exclusively about CV preparation and getting a job. In some places, it focused mainly on the academic experiences of students while in others a wide range of experience could be taken into account. In some places, it seemed to be a largely independent activity for students, perhaps supplemented by web-based materials, while in other places it was accompanied by a significant amount of tutorial support provided by academic staff.

It is the potential implications of PDP for teaching staff that is one of its most interesting features. PDP is essentially about personal development, about raising self-awareness and confidence in the learner. Those who say they 'have always been doing this' surely have a point. Writers about British higher education since Newman have emphasised the 'development of personality' as one of the distinctive features of the British approach to higher education. And, indeed, in a recent European study of graduates, British graduates - unlike their continental counterparts - saw the main benefits of their higher education to lie in the development of their personalities. So nothing new?

The point of course is that many other traditions in British higher education are changing. Modular degrees have largely replaced specialist single honours programmes. More than 50% of students have regular term-time employment alongside their studies. More than 30% of students study part-time anyway. There is a heightened emphasis on enhancing employability, likely to increase with the growth of Foundation Degrees. What all of these changes imply for the student experience is a greater instrumentalism and, for some, a

greater isolation from their peers.

And teaching staff are teaching more hours and are under pressure from research assessment to devote more time to research. Is there time available to help students to 'articulate their personal goals and evaluate progress towards their achievement' and to help them to 'encourage a positive attitude to learning throughout life'?

Nobody we spoke to would want to disown such noble motives but many would be sceptical about how realistic they were in today's pressurised higher education learning environment. A few saw their potential implications. Implications for the job of the teacher - changing from 'imparting knowledge and information' to providing 'guidance and support and encouraging self-reflection', of helping the student to link their academic studies to knowledge gained from other life experiences. (Some staff doubted their abilities to do such things.) Implications for the curriculum as wider sources of knowledge were drawn upon, sources over which the teacher might have no direct authority or influence. Implications for society and employment as graduates emerged from higher education with a new and confident awareness about who they were, what they knew and what they could do - the absence of which is a common complaint made by employers about new graduates, especially those from non-traditional backgrounds. One enthusiastic professor at an old university saw PDP as a lifelong commitment for the individual, commenced in higher education but enabling the person to steer and control their futures to a far greater extent than could otherwise be expected for the rest of their lives.

Not all shared such enthusiasms or saw such a large picture. Some took a narrower view of what PDP was all about, linking it entirely to the formal curriculum. Others saw no relevance at all. But one English professor who 'was too busy for all of that' recalled setting a second year class an assignment to 'write about a job you've been doing in the style of George Orwell's 'Down and Out in Paris and London'. As someone once said, we might all find ourselves speaking prose without knowing it!

Perhaps the reason for the apparently contradictory attitudes towards personal development planning is uncertainty about whether it is about doing better what higher education is already doing or whether it is about higher education doing some radically new things or doing both of these things!

For educational developers, the introduction of PDP represents a significant extension of the agenda. As indicated above, at least in some interpretations, PDP could imply a fundamental re-definition of the role of the academic teacher. But a re-defined role for which many teachers will feel that they have neither time nor aptitude. Will supporting PDP be a responsibility of all teachers, some teachers, central services staff or can it be done adequately electronically? Indeed, do students need any support for PDP at all? These are questions that educational development units will not be able to answer on their own but the developer's sense of what is currently feasible in their institution and what training and support will need to be put in place will be essential elements in the successful implementation of PDP.

Progress Files

Further information can be found at the following sites:

www.eds.napier.ac.uk/PDP/index.htm
Personal Development Planning in Higher Education (Scotland)

www.qaa.ac.uk/crntwork/progfileHE/contents.htm
Progress files in Higher Education (Quality Assurance Agency)

www.ltsn.ac.uk/genericcentre/
Personal Development Planning section of the Generic Centre

www.recordingachievement.org/
The Centre for Recording Achievement

www.keele.ac.uk/depts/aa/landt/links/progressfiles.htm
Resources on Recording Achievement (Keele University)

John Brennan is Professor of Higher Education Research at the Open University and Director of the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information. He is author, with Tarla Shah, of a Report on the Implementation of Progress Files published by Universities UK and the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP) at www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/progressfiles/.

With **Ruth Williams**, he has also recently prepared a "Guide to Good Practice in Student Feedback" for the LTSN Generic Centre (forthcoming) resulting from the Hefce project "Collecting and using student feedback on quality and standards of learning and teaching in HE", which is available at www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rdreports/2003/rd08_03/

Book Reviews

Personal Development Planning SEDA Paper 115

Dr David Gosling

ISBN: 1 902435 192

The sector-agreed date of 2005/6 for the implementation of Personal Development Planning is now concentrating minds in many institutions. As the recent review by CHERI noted, however, progress is uneven and there is still much work to do. In this context, the publication of key texts is to be welcomed, and this recent SEDA publication certainly draws together a good range of early practice. The division into two sections, dealing with principles and practice (via case studies of practice) will also be helpful for the new reader. The first of these, dealing with principles and development, should offer a healthy antidote to anyone seeking simply to import practice from outside their institution in order to demonstrate compliance.

In the introduction, David Gosling, as editor - offers a critical overview of developments which is intended to stimulate thinking – and disagreement. Inevitably in a short piece, justice cannot be done to the complexity of some positions. The view that student employability is related to an instrumentalist view would for example be challenged by the Enhancing Student Employability Student Co-ordination Team of which David is himself a member! This chapter however stands on its own as an important stimulus for thinking. Conversely, it does not seek to set a context for later chapters and this is perhaps an important omission.

The collection of papers which follows reflects work that was highly important in its day, and which in many ways remains so. Much of this material may already be known to PDP enthusiasts, however, while those new to the field would perhaps have benefited from a stronger narrative to hold the collection together. The papers on Principles, for example, while not presented chronologically, span ten years or more and use terms such as profiling, Recording Achievement and Personal Development Planning. An account of 'the journey' which these papers reflect would have been most useful in helping practitioners not only to see trends and connections but also in re-assuring them about the range of PDP-congruent practice which may already exist within their institutions and organisations. In similar vein, the later focus upon practice allows the reader to view a good range of innovation at departmental/subject and institutional level, much of which has been of considerable significance. Helpful evidence is presented, e.g. in relation to evaluation in the chapter by McDowell and Marples, and in respect of Guiding Principles in respect of the LUSID system at Liverpool (Strivens and Grant). These papers are invariably about the start-up phase; and would perhaps have been strengthened if fuller attention had been placed in bringing them up-to–date, perhaps via the form of a reflective statement by the writers which would have helped to answer such questions as 'how is the change management process supported when Project funding ceases? or 'how do we move practice beyond Project champions into near mass HE practice?" Such an approach would also have enabled 'reflection upon experience' to itself have been reflected within the document. Greater attention might also have been given to issues of staff development beyond the paper by O'Connell, Coe and Anderson.

In bringing this collection of papers together David – and SEDA – have provided an important service. Many, particularly those who know the territory, will welcome it. Others, particularly those new to PDP, may find themselves using it to make further enquiries of the writers to inform their plans and actions as 2005/6 approaches.

Rob Ward
Centre for Recording Achievement

Beyond all Reason: Living with Ideology in the University

Ronald Barnett

Open University/SHRE Buckingham, 2003 £19.990
ISBN 0 335 20893 2

"Is the university possible?". With this question Ronald Barnett continues his interrogation of the notion of the university within modern society that began with 'The Idea of the University' in 1994 and was most recently explored in 'Realizing the University in an Age of Supercomplexity' in 2000. Barnett's premise in this new book is that the ideal of the university as a site of reason is a supposition that cannot go unchallenged in the twenty first century.

Reason, Barnett argues, is an impossibility in an age of "supercomplexity". The pervasive ideologies of competition, entrepreneurialism, quality, management, research and even the "academic community" have usurped the ideal of reason on campus and have transformed the modern university into a site of uncompromising non-rationality. Ideologies have become so deeply embedded in the meaning of the university that they cannot be eliminated and these ideologies have gone a long way to close down the possibility of reason within the university.

Yet ideologies are implicitly agents of change and, Barnett urges, can be virtuous as well as pernicious. If the virtuous ideologies - those that can move the university towards the real possibility of a generous and mutual engagement with the wider society - are seized upon, then the pernicious ideologies that presently dominate can be quietened. Ideology has already made the university beyond all reason, but Barnett suggests, if reason is taken up by both academics and managers as a virtuous ideology - or "ide-alogy" - then the project of the university can be furthered.

Barnett demonstrates that the pernicious ideologies identified in entrepreneurialism, competition and quality threaten the ideal of reason because they fundamentally undermine the communicative function of the university. In prioritising success over understanding, these prevailing ideologies inhibit the necessary discursiveness of the pedagogical ideals of reason. What makes Barnett's argument even more compelling, however, is that whilst academic staff may accuse the "management" for the rule of corrosive ideologies across the modern campus, the "academic community" can be complicit in furthering equally corrosive ideologies. Unreasoned resistance to the ideologies of entrepreneurialism, competition and quality, a resistance that refuses to recognise the possibility that these pernicious ideologies may also have virtuous outcomes, is, Barnett claims, an inflexible ideology in its own right - an "academic ideology" - that equally threatens the activities of the university.

The final part of Barnett's argument is an examination of the more hopeful ideologies that promise a future for universities and for reason. If entrepreneurialism, competition, quality and the "academic community" are predominantly pernicious ideologies in the contemporary university, the ideologies of values, engagement and the unity of research and teaching are "idealogies" that engage in moving the university forward. It is these "idealogies" that will reconstruct the meaning of the university in the future. The university, Barnett concludes, in answer to his question at the beginning of this book, is a possibility. The university is still possible at a time when ideologies question the certainties of free and open communication because, in doing so, they provide new opportunities for these ideals to be truly realised.

Barnett's Beyond All Reason is one of that select number of books that feel immediately indispensable for understanding the current direction of the sector. The complexity and compactness of the thesis, the sense that this argument is already known and understood even as it is provocative and challenging, make this book vital reading for academics, administrators and senior management, indeed for anyone who engages with the university in our society. The temptation to yield to the overwhelming sway of pernicious ideologies is never greater for many working in universities, myself included. Barnett's argument is one that demonstrates his optimism in the sector. It is finally his convincing belief that universities can lead to better understanding, openness and academic freedom - in the true sense - within the wider community that must recommend this book to even the most jaded of professional colleagues.

Dr Saranne Weller
University of Surrey

The Scholarship of Academic Development

Eggins, H. and. Macdonald, R

SHRE / Open University Press
2003, ISBN 0 335 211038

The scholarship of Academic Development is a very timely contribution to the current debate on whether Academic Development constitutes a discipline in its own right or whether it constitutes merely a 'set of tools' with which faculty can 'improve' upon current scholarly practice relating to the student learning experience in higher education.

This is an excellent book with every chapter exploring a new angle relating to the breadth and depth of academic development and in total providing such a robust analysis of the subject area as to make it almost impossible to deny the status of the discipline.

The book is divided into two major sections, the first focussing on the conceptualization of academic development and the second exploring the research and scholarship of academic development. While it is no exaggeration to say that all chapters provide the reader with new insights, one or two chapters can be singled out for special mention. In the first section, the chapters by David Gosling and Sarah Mann stand out as particularly challenging. Gosling in his chapter 'Philosophical Approaches to Academic Development', explores two key concepts which are currently very much in vogue. The first of these concepts is that of the Scholarship of Teaching. Gosling takes to task the spurious notion that teaching in higher education is not a bona fide subject for scholarly research, and often exists 'in a social world almost entirely devoid of intellectual enquiry'. Given this view of teaching, it can be no surprise that the importance and relevance of academic development is often dismissed. What Gosling does is to apply a philosophical approach to unpacking the 'fuzzy', undefined, qualitative nature of academic development, linking this with the second of his stated in vogue concepts, that of 'evidence-based practice'. 'Evidence-based practice' proponents appear only to value an empirical, quantitative research aradigm, whereas, the very nature of 'learning' will defy this paradigm. The language which has developed around the concept of learning in essence has become part of the problem in clearly defining academic development, with terms like 'active learning', 'effective learning', 'reflective practice', etc coming into common usage without any intellectual analysis of their meaning. Sarah Mann in her chapter 'Alternative Perspectives on Professional Practice in Academic Development' takes Gosling's premise even further by questioning the potential issues which would be raised if academic development is required to have a definitive discourse, a definitive body of knowledge. Surely to insist on this would be to negate completely the very concept of development and the legitimacy of the practice of the developers who, simply because of their different personal traits, will take a different approach to

supporting and enabling academic staff to enhance the quality of their practice and hence the quality of the student learning experience.

These two chapters highlight the complexity of academic development and go a long way towards explaining the difficulties which have been inherent in claiming Academic Development as a discipline in its own right. These chapters are not plucked out randomly for special mention. They fit extremely well around many of the other chapters which critique elements of and approaches to the practice of academic developers. Ray Land's chapter on 'Orientation to Academic Development' affirms many of the arguments put forward by Sarah Mann. A chapter by Mick Healey and Alan Jenkins explains the growing necessity for partnership between disciplinary based academics and academic developers.

The list of excellent chapters could go on and on. There is no chapter in the book which does not challenge the reader to reflect on their own views and approaches to academic development. This book will be talked about for a long time and should surely stimulate further debate on the future of the Scholarship of Academic Development.

Professor Lorraine Stefani
Director of Professional Development,
The University of Auckland

SEDA Awards 2003: Furthering the Scholarship of Educational Development

Ranald Macdonald FSEDA, Chair, SEDA Research Committee

For some years SEDA has promoted the scholarship of educational development believing that there is a need to submit our own practice to the same rigorous scrutiny and research as that which is applied to the practice of many other professional groups. The setting up of the SEDA Research Committee has provided a focus for developments in this area, including taking responsibility for the SEDA Awards.

SEDA Awards are made to support the costs of development-related scholarly activity. In making applications, proposers were asked to focus on questions such as:

- What evidence and principles underpin our practice?
- How can we build the intellectual substance of educational development?
- What is the nature of research in educational development and how can research capacity be enhanced?
- How can educational development practices be made more scholarly?

Awards are made up to £500 and, whilst the sum may seem rather small, experience in the past has been that recipients have welcomed the recognition for the activity they want to carry out. They have also seen the money as being of a seed corn nature to allow them to engage in scholarly activities. Recipients have also made a commitment to disseminating the outcomes of their awards through Educational Developments and at a future SEDA Conference.

From the applications made the Research Committee agreed at its meeting on 3 November 2003 to make awards to the following three proposals, with details from their bids. Our congratulations go to them all as well as our thanks to those who were unsuccessful on this occasion.

1. Shirley Earl and Mark Huxham, Educational Development, Napier University

Comparing methods of obtaining module feedback

This project will conduct action research on methods of obtaining module feedback. We will compare the consistency, utility and costs of five different methods of evaluation. Most HE institutions rely on quantitative questionnaires. These are resource intensive, and may not be as useful in informing teaching practice as other methods. Alternative approaches vary in the resources needed to run them, and in the philosophies that underpin them. By comparing the results obtained with the same modules using different methods with information from the standard questionnaires, we aim to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each method.

The project will address the following questions in particular:

- Do evaluation methods varying in philosophy, sample size and cost produce similar feedback to that obtained using questionnaires?
- Can evaluation methodologies that may have advantages over questionnaires, because they provide 'richer' information or because they are less structured or faster to administer, also provide the key information required by managers?

- What are the costs involved and expertise required in using different evaluation methods?

2. Alison Holmes, University of Derby

Developing a research based teaching culture

Lecturers teaching in higher education are primarily employed because of their subject area expertise. Teaching capability, although equally relevant, tends to be a secondary consideration. In many institutions, staff developers are responsible for supporting these lecturers (subject experts) to develop their teaching practice. Finding ways to integrate research based subject expertise with research based teaching practices is an ongoing challenge. In order to increase teaching based research capability and capacity, staff developers need to encourage lecturers to build on the research skills they use in their subject areas and apply these to their teaching.

This project, which will be conducted within a constructivist framework and underpinned by the principles of collaboration, conversation, context and construction of knowledge, uses an eight-stage teaching and research based development model, designed by project co-leaders Maxine Alterio and Alison Holmes to develop a research based teaching culture. Participants will form reading groups, engage with existing teaching based research, participate in reflective conversations, devise and implement teaching interventions, evaluate their effectiveness, write up findings in collaborative partnerships and submit articles to academic journals. Lecturers from Otago Polytechnic, New Zealand, and the University of Derby, United Kingdom, will be involved."

This is the introduction to a bid to the New Zealand Council for Education and Research for funding under their new Teaching and Learning Research Initiative. Unfortunately no money can be allocated outside New Zealand. Therefore this bid is for money to support the UK participants.

3. Helen King, LTSN-GEES, University of Plymouth

A study to investigate how discipline-based practitioners engage with the scholarship of Learning and Teaching

Scholarship of teaching has had an increasingly higher focus in higher education generally and within specific disciplines (e.g. Healey, 2000). Included within this concept is the need for academics to keep abreast of developments in the theory and practice of teaching, particularly in their own discipline. However, anecdotal evidence has suggested that most practitioners don't actually engage with learning and teaching literature (e.g. Silver, 2003). "Academics are not in the habit of reading about teaching and learning: thus when a problem turns up, they are more likely to ask advice from an old friend or colleague than to go to the library for help" (Huber, 1999). If this is the case in reality, then it holds serious implications for the dissemination and implementation of pedagogic resources and, hence, for educational development and the enhancement of scholarship of teaching in general.

Some research on practitioner engagement with pedagogic resources is already planned at institutional levels (e.g. at Oxford and Cambridge, Prof Liz Elvidge, pers comm). This needs to be complemented with investigations within discipline-based communities of practice. Research has been undertaken with social policy lecturers (Pat Young, LTSN-SWAP, pers comm), but none has involved scientists. Experience of working with Geoscientists has shown that they tend to be more sceptical of pedagogic research methodologies and, hence, also of the outcomes reported (Cousin et al, 2002; King & Bradbeer, 2003). Therefore, it is likely that their engagement with pedagogic resources will be different to those in the social policy field.

This study will use a structured questionnaire to investigate how UK HE Geoscientists engage with pedagogic resources. The questionnaire will be distributed to UK Geoscience departments using known contacts. A proportion of the respondents will be followed up with telephone interviews to drill down for further information on why they behave as they do. An independent consultant will conduct the telephone interviews in order to reduce any bias in the questioning or answers.

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Foundation Degree Forward

Derek Longhurst, Director of Foundation Degree Forward

Introduction

The creation of a new national body to support the development of high quality Foundation Degrees, *Foundation Degree Forward*, was announced in the Government's White Paper, *The Future of Higher Education*, published in January 2003:

"Many further education colleges (FECs) are working effectively with partner universities which formally award the Foundation Degrees they offer. In the best partnerships, these universities actively support the programmes and offer a real guarantee of quality to the student. However, not all further education colleges have local universities in the position to develop degree programmes with them in such a close and supportive way. To address this and to widen the choice for further education colleges, and other colleges without degree awarding powers, we will establish a new national network of universities - 'Foundation Degree Forward' - to offer a dedicated validation service for Foundation Degrees. It will act as a national centre for expertise, liaising with Sector Skills Councils and professional bodies to draw up frameworks for Foundation Degrees covering a wide range of skills needs." (5.23)

There are a number of issues here that require some comment. Firstly, many FECs, especially perhaps those with substantial directly - funded HE provision, would trace in this analysis the assumption that quality is best guaranteed through partnership with an HEI. This derives from a prejudice that 'HE in FE' is generally of lower quality than 'HE in HE', a view often associated with the (then) Minister of State. As Peter Williams in his capacity as Chief Executive of QAA recently stated at the 'Higher Education Further' conference, this is a 'myth' and the evidential basis of QAA's review procedures confirm that this is so and that the prejudice is unwarranted.

Secondly, however, the White Paper does indicate a particular model of HE/FE collaboration that is of some significance. There are many examples of good practice in collaborative partnerships that manifest the 'close and supportive' model registered in the White Paper. Equally, there are some examples of poor practice: inconsistent and unclear charges for validation and quality assurance services; lack of continuity in HEI policy towards regional collaboration; HEIs viewing HE provision in local FECs as competitive and, therefore, creating barriers to validation. Add to this the fact that not all HEIs, unlike FECs, currently see the new Foundation Degree qualification as central to their mission and strategy and the rationale for the creation of *'Foundation Degree Forward' (FDF)* becomes clear.

The context outlined above, however, does mean that *FDF* is viewed with suspicion in some quarters; some HEIs fear that any validation service may be 'competitive' and disrupt existing partnership arrangements while at least some in the FE sector may believe that *FDF* will be HE-led because of the model of partnership to which it is committed. These are anxieties that FDF will have to allay in the coming months. It can also be argued that there has been too much focus upon the validation and quality assurance service at the expense of the broader remit of *FDF* as an organisation.

FDF Strategy

Of at least equal importance to *FDF* is the creation of a 'centre of expertise' or, in a re-interpretation of the white paper, a network of expertise throughout the regions in which FDs are offered and which supports sharing of good practice. To begin with, it has been necessary to create an administrative and research centre at Lichfield, chosen because it provides a centre that is co-owned and developed by FE and HE partners as well as hosting a Business Village and LearnDirect. From January 2004 this will be fully functioning to provide information and consultancy to institutions and organisations concerned with FD development. An FDF web site is under construction to provide a primary source of information and data to its users. We have been mindful of previous examples of overly-complex and difficult-to-navigate sites and will be seeking to ensure that the FDF web site is accessible and, through a content management system, easily updated and maintained. Currently there are twenty-three web sites carrying information relevant to FDs and we will seek to provide links to these and to the Regional Development Agency web sites as necessary in order to 'signpost' searches. The web site will offer users:

- Home page
- News, events, publications
- Details of existing FDs by Joint Academic Coding System subject codes
- New Developments
- Case Studies of Good Practice
- Information about Sector Skills Councils and FD Sector Frameworks
- Regional Development Agency information
- Examples of Employer involvement
- Validation and Quality Assurance issues
- Funding issues

Through this web site FD practitioners will be able to share their experience of the 'transferability projects' funded by HEFCE, offer models for engaging employers in FD design and delivery, disseminate any examples of innovation and good practice (e.g. in work-based learning) cited through QAA reviews for example and to advertise details of FD conferences, seminars, workshops and regional networks.

The next stage is to enhance *FDF* involvement in supporting existing

regional networks or establishing them where they are weaker or non-existent. The approach here will be inclusive of all institutions and organisations committed to the development of Foundation Degrees and will be mindful of distinctive local, regional and sub-regional needs. The primary focus for *FDF* is to support practitioners in the development, design and delivery of high quality Foundation Degrees and to remove unnecessary obstacles to the provision of educational opportunities for students. Consequently the strategy is informed by one of the challenges outlined in the government white paper, *21st Century Skills: Realising our Potential* published in July; this is

"...to create a coherent policy framework which supports frontline delivery and develops an education and training system which is focused on the needs of employers and learners. Isolated individual initiatives will not be enough, since such endeavours have not had sufficient impact in the past. We need to draw together all the major partners. We need also to connect the many existing programmes and activities, so that they form a shared, sustained and determined programme for change." (1.11)

Both regionally and nationally there is a plethora of initiatives around Foundation Degrees and *FDF* will seek to play a role in co-ordinating activities, building collaborations (including with employers) and in promoting 'joined-up' planning and strategy. At a national level the *FDF* Management Board includes representatives from all of the major agencies and organisations that impact upon Foundation Degree provision or upon qualifications that can provide entry points of progression to Foundation Degrees.

A further key area of *FDF* strategy is to work with the emerging Sector Skills Councils and with the *Skills for Business* network in support of the development of Foundation Degree frameworks. These will be important initiatives to support providing institutions by offering clear guidance about employer demands and skills needs at a national level. Many Foundation Degree development teams have often struggled to identify employer skills demands and it will be the role of the Sector Skills Councils to undertake such analysis. There will, of course, be regional dimensions to be taken into account and *FDF* will also ensure that providing institutions can access relevant information concerning RDA Frameworks for Regional Employment Skills Action (FRESAs). It will be important that future Foundation Degree provision is informed by these frameworks and that they, in turn, reference where necessary the existing QAA Subject Benchmark Statements. The Foundation Degree offers the opportunity - and challenge - to get away from the tired old dichotomy of the vocational versus the academic and it will be important to bear in mind the issue signalled in the QAA Overview Report following the recent review of Foundation Degrees. This concerns the design of a programme of study that integrates work-based learning in such a way as to provide a balance between the inculcation of vocationally relevant skills and the stimulation of lifelong learning capacities associated with critical and analytical abilities.

Foundation Degree Forward, then, is much more than a validation and quality assurance support service. In brokering partnerships, however, between degree-awarding institutions and other organisations it will seek to influence good practice more widely. Information about costing for services will be transparent and agreed between all parties involved and we will build upon existing relationships wherever possible. There would be nothing to be gained by *FDF* operating in any way that would impact negatively upon good partnerships where these currently exist; there is everything to be gained by fostering strategic and enduring partnerships between HE and FE that enhance educational opportunities for students. This will be the principle that will guide *FDF* as an organisation. In January the *FDF* Management Board will consider proposals for establishing the network of participating degree-awarding institutions that will support the implementation of this principle and it is intended that the process will be open as well as encouraging institutional collaboration in delivering the service to institutions and organisations that need it. Moreover, while it will be necessary to ensure that the service follows best practice in validation and quality assurance it will be designed to build upon existing systems rather than adding further administrative burdens for the institutions and organisations involved.

There are still many colleagues who are unfamiliar with the Foundation Degree or who are unclear about its distinctiveness as a qualification. This seems to be well defined in the QAA Qualification Benchmark Statement:

*"The distinctiveness of the Foundation Degree can be found in the **integration** of the following characteristics: accessibility; articulation and progression; employer involvement; flexibility; and partnership. While none of these attributes are unique to Foundation Degrees, their clear and planned integration within a single award **underpinned by work-based learning** makes the award highly distinctive." (Paragraph 13; emphases added)*

While this is currently in 'final draft' form to be revisited in the light of the recent QAA review of practice, it constitutes the challenge for us all in designing the qualification in innovative and creative ways. It will be *FDF's* role to support employers, Professional Bodies and providing institutions in this project. Hence, it will seek to create widespread ownership for the organisation rather than being considered as yet another 'top-down' national organisation that operates in a regulatory way or creates further administrative burdens. Indeed, one of the objectives will be to conserve already constrained resources by reducing duplication of effort or reinvention of the wheel and by fostering a widespread culture of sharing practice and solutions to undoubtedly complex problems. Engaging directly with such difficulties and not underestimating the issues faced in practice will be more important than exhortation and

rhetoric. Consequently, *FDF* seek to create mutually supportive partnerships with institutions, organisations and agencies around the development of the new qualification.

Professor Derek Longhurst is the Director of Foundation Degree Forward, and can be contacted at The Lichfield Centre, The Friary, Lichfield WS13 6QG (01543 30 11 50) or d.longhurst@fdf.ac.uk. Foundation Degree Forward web site is www.fdf.ac.uk.

Towards Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs)

Helen Gale, University of Wolverhampton

On the 22nd January 2003 the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, Charles Clarke, announced publication of the White Paper "The Future of Higher Education", which set out the Government's plans for radical reform and investment in universities and HE colleges. Amongst the proposals in this paper were suggestions for the development of Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs).

In July 2003, having taken feedback on the White Paper, the response document stated:
'The Government has considered carefully the views expressed on Centres of Excellence, and agrees that the scheme should be made more flexible, to provide better opportunities for excellent teaching and learning to be recognised through Centre status. The revised proposal is that there should be a range of funding available for individual Centres (from £200K to a maximum of £500K; plus capital between £800K and £2m) and that centres can be a single subject-based department, or cut across subject, departmental, faculty or institutional boundaries. These changes should ensure that a wider range of excellent practice is recognised and rewarded.'

The HEFCE consultation document July 2003/36 states that the vision is 'to create vibrant, dynamic centres for excellence that draw attention to effective methods of teaching and learning, celebrate good practice and encourage sharing with others.'
(www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2003/03-06.htm)

In September 2003, HEFCE hosted consultation events which raised more questions than they answered and manifested both a basic unease with some of the underlying propositions upon which the concept of Centres for Excellence seemed to be based, as well as an enthusiasm that substantial amounts of money seemed to be directed towards learning and teaching.

The LTSN response document articulated a concern voiced by a significant number of delegates that "this policy will communicate the message that excellence in learning and teaching is located in a few pockets in some institutions with many institutions (perhaps more than 50%) not having any excellent provision."

By the time this article reaches print, the criteria for these centres will already be public and therefore at the time of writing it is only politic to discuss the general ideas behind such a move rather than the specifics of any bidding or operational issues

At the TQEF Annual Conference 2003, Professor Graham Gibbs gave a presentation entitled, "What has the TQEF achieved and what would be useful next?" With all our criticisms of the way in which this funding has been distributed and used, it is useful to be reminded of the barrenness of the learning and teaching landscape prior to these initiatives. In the presentation, Graham Gibbs pointed out that prior to the TQEF - in its national, institutional and individual strands - there was no national funding, there were no large projects, small projects were rarely written up and there was little sharing across institutions. Before the LTSNs were established, there was very little discipline based pedagogical development. Add to this the fact that educational development had little national presence and that there were very low levels of institutional funding for any institutional or departmental initiatives in learning and teaching, and it is possible to see that we have travelled a significant distance in the last 10 years.

However, Graham Gibbs went on to point out what was still missing in initiatives such as TLTP. In particular, he cited examples of product focus rather than implementation focus, a lack of cost-effectiveness, inept project management and importantly, a lack of embedding. The lack of mechanisms to spread and embed positive practice within and across institutions has meant that large investments in learning and teaching products and practices have not necessarily seen proportional increases in student retention, student achievement, student use of technology supported learning, student employability or other measurable performance indicators. Allowing for the fact that any direct relationship between input and output in these terms is almost impossible to measure, (given reasons for which educational developers are only too aware) Professor Gibbs went on to state other inadequacies in recent funding methodologies. In particular he stated the absence of significant

research into impact which had resulted in relatively little theoretical underpinning of practice which could be applied with confidence across the sector. In a point which will gain a great deal of sympathy from those working in educational development, he instanced the lack of understanding of infrastructure blockages.

So will the proposed Centres for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CETLs) be able to build on the strength of previous initiatives, whilst avoiding all the shortcomings mentioned above?

The Positives

The fact that the proposals for CETLs give a significant level of resource to support learning and teaching at a time when it seems likely that the dedicated HEFCE money for institutional learning and teaching strategies is likely to come to an end is to be welcomed.

The statement that any bids to be a CETL should fit with the strategic mission of the university, in particular with the human resource strategy, is also to be applauded. This has been a direction in which we have been moving for the last two learning and teaching strategies and is a welcome move to ensure some kind of institutional synergy. In many universities this gives a very positive direction to the connection between the development of excellent teaching and the rewards for excellent teachers.

The time frame of 5 years gives support for long term planning.

The importance placed on liaison with the subject centres and the generic centre of the Learning and Teaching Support Network means that the excellent work based in these centres is guaranteed to continue. Indeed the expertise gained over the last few years will be used and further developed within and across CETLs.

There is strength in the encouragement of networking both within and across universities. The narrowness of the original view of single centres seemingly subject based has expanded to a vision of a Centre which would link across departments, faculties or schools and institutions.

This is new money for both capital and recurrent expenditure, which can be used to build on ongoing expertise and innovation, but which also encourages investment for the future. The basis of any bid is encouraged not just to emphasise past success, but to state how this expertise will be developed and disseminated.

The designation of particular moneys for capital expenditure shows recognition that the educational environment is a significant contributor to and force for change in both thought and practice and will serve to focus those members of an institution whose role is to deliver the circumambience of the future.

The current suggested models emphasise the importance of learning and teaching research by allowing for the funding of researchers to underpin the growth of a CETL. The examples of potential CETLs given in the pre-bidding literature stress modern, innovative ideas within learning and teaching, encouraging consideration of a whole community of academic staff, support staff, employers and students - all of whose views and roles should be articulated.

The Negatives

Many of the initial comments at the consultation events were about the underlying premise of selective centres. To return to the concern articulated above by the LTSN, many institutions resent the idea of competitive bidding for a process which is at the centre of what all universities should stand for. The idea that the award of these centres will replicate some of the inherent unfairness in any 'league table' system, and give no credit to small pockets of superb learning and teaching which exist in all institutions, mean that many institutions have a marked reluctance to 'play the game' but recognise that the substantial sums being offered make it impossible not to take part in the bidding procedure.

The objective which is "to identify 'beacons' of good teaching practice so that the benefits are delivered more widely" (HEFCE 2003/36, p1) is not necessarily logical. Nor is it logical that encouraging 'collaboration and sharing of good practice' will automatically 'enhance the standard of teaching throughout the sector'. To follow Graham Gibbs' arguments above, there are many such 'beacons' which are built upon specific cultural and institutional support factors which can not necessarily be replicated, no matter how much money is given. There are many FDTL, TLTP and local learning and teaching projects that have died without trace even though they have held all the requisite dissemination events and produced all the newsletters, reports and web sites articulated in the original bids.

Many universities have put a great deal of time and effort into developing their institutional learning and teaching strategies and would have welcomed a further commitment to funding for a whole institution, rather than being forced to select parts of the provision in a way which could easily undermine some of the collaborative work which has resulted in significant achievements for student learning outcomes over the last 5 years.

The fact that this proposal for CETLs exists means that undoubtedly a great deal of time and energy will go into bidding - possibly at the expense of current promotion of actual learning and teaching. It is also likely that unsuccessful bidders will feel demotivated and the result may be a retreat from innovative practice, in the same way as has happened to some unsuccessful NTFS or LTSN nominees.

The potential competition with the LTSNs - just when they were really getting going and building up their own networks - will be disappointing to many working within those centres.

The Unknowns

Surely there are other factors which will be brought into play which are not transparent at present? As one participant at the consultation pointed out, it seems unlikely that all the CETLs awarded will be in the West

Country or that they will all be awarded for science teaching. The consultation document mentions 'an appropriate spread of CETLs' (HEFCE 2003/36 p9). It therefore seems likely that the assessment panel will have to exercise some 'meta-criteria' which at the moment are not articulated.

The current proposals seem to limit potential success to those institutions which have already got an established record. There are many pockets of good practice which are just at the beginning of a developmental cycle. In the same way in which the NTFS scheme has been expanded to include 'rising stars', it is to be hoped that there will be some parallel recognition of raw, but potentially exciting initiatives. Are the CETLs really going to be a one-off investment?

And what of sanctions for non-delivery? Higher Education has always been rather weak on this, as it doesn't really fit in with the H.E. philosophy or the reality of so many unpredictable factors in achieving educational outcomes, but it is important. No-one would wish European layers of paper, weighed down by spreadsheets, where calculators often seem more important than common sense, but there must be a strong level of external monitoring and evaluation. Would this involve continued use of the original assessment panel?

The questions and suggestions at the consultation events certainly covered many flip chart sheets, which will be mirrored by the number of draft bidding documents within each institution.

Whilst not being entirely convinced by the amount of energy which will be generated by the bidding procedures, we should all welcome the chance for such a public debate about learning and teaching within and across our institutions.

By the time you read this, the invitation to bid for CETLs should have been published, although this is no indication that all the questions will have been answered.

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Is an eLearning Strategy Enough?

Mark Stiles, Staffordshire University

At the time of writing this article, the Higher Education sector is involved in a plethora of local, regional and national consultations on e-Learning strategy. These are, in the case of the author and his own institution, focussed on the DfES "Towards a Unified e-Learning Strategy" activity and the HEFCE consultation exercise on its eLearning strategy. Similar activities are taking place in other parts of the UK. Clearly, these exercises will have a significant impact on institutional strategies as colleagues struggle to fit their local plans into this wider context.

The author has recently been involved, along with a number of colleagues drawn from across both the HE and FE sectors, in the production and editing for a major resource on "Managed Learning Environment Development" for the JISC to aid institutions in forming the business, educational and technical environment needed to support their eLearning plans. For his part, the author has contributed to, and edited, a section on "embedding".

Both the DfES and HEFCE consultation documents list a range of action areas, the table below shows these alongside the JISC Infokit section headings:

The DfES document, as presented, would require all organisations and sectors to switch to a fundamentally "learner-centred" approach if the goals associated with lifelong learning are to be achieved. This change would include not just changes in approaches to teaching and learning, but changes in the whole way that the organisation and administration of learning is carried out. For example, the current work on a Unique Learner Number carries with it the question "who owns all the information associated with this number?" In the case of personal development plans, records and "e-Portfolios" this must be the learner - who will want to choose where this information resides at any one time. The document also raises all sorts of questions about the nature and formation of curriculum and the need for this to be focussed on the needs of the individual learner. Reading the document with all references to "e" removed presents one with a still valid call for the transformation of learning!

Why eLearning?

Two recent parallel "landscape studies" conducted on behalf of the JISC and UCISA reveal some interesting anomalies. The JISC study, focussed on the wider "MLE" commented that institutions saw the main advantages gained from development as being: "open & wider access to learning, greater efficiency in administration and integration of data across the institution" with the longer term benefits being "higher retention & achievement, improved standards and improved recruitment". However the study also concluded that "...there is a suspicion that, because everyone else is going down this road, institutions must follow or be left behind" and "What is not broadly apparent is any real sense that the MLE is as yet fully embedded in the institutions' strategic and operational frameworks". This resonates very strongly with the view formed by the author a year earlier when examining reasons for choices of eLearning technologies: "the emphasis on 'ease of use by staff' might hide an underlying approach of 'we must get into this elearning or they'll all have left us behind'".

The UCISA study, which focussed on the Virtual Learning Environment component of an MLE, noted that enhancement of teaching and learning was the main reason for adoption, but noted of implementation strategies that "the most common

JISC MLE Info Kit Sections	DfES	HEFCE
• Why MLE? • Understanding your Organisation • Gathering Requirements • Technology Options • MLE Design • Implementation • Embedding	• Leading sustainable eLearning • Supporting innovation in teaching and learning • Developing the education workforce • Unifying learner support • Aligning assessment • Building a better eLearning market • Assuring the technical and quality standards	• Research evaluation and strategic review • Strategic and change management and funding for sustainabiliy • Curriculum design, development and pedagogy, and human resources • Collaboration, progression and student support • Quality • Infrastructure and standards

target was 100% of courses; it is noted that setting such a target does not necessarily allow for appropriate use of VLEs and may reflect possible bulk registration of courses".Clearly institutions must examine their distinctive reasons for the use and adoption of eLearning as well as following a perceived national drive. The evidence of lack of clarity in institutional strategic thinking in the area of eLearning is worrying.

Understanding Your Organisation and Gathering Requirements

Clearly understanding where you are starting from is as important as understanding where you want to get to. Expanding the use of eLearning in an institution requires a clear and honest analysis and the organisation in terms of its strengths and weaknesses viewed against its strategic goals. A most important aspect of this will be recognition of the "culture change mountain" the organisation will have to climb. This will impact on all parts of the organisation and the professional practice of teaching staff will be an area where this slope is particularly steep.

The need to address the impact of eLearning on the way that courses are designed, facilitated, managed and monitored will impact on nearly all aspects of daily working life of academic staff. The changes required, however, will be to a considerable extent distinctive to the institution and must be aligned to its strategic goals, and dealing with them must form an intrinsic part for the strategy and its operationalisation. These issues are discussed further under "embedding"

The Technology and its Implementation

Choosing technologies to support eLearning is difficult and will be coloured by the state of institutional thinking. There is evidence that choices are often made with the need to "get staff on board" being a, if not the, paramount consideration at the possible expense of both the organisational business processes, and the quality of the learning experience. There is much evidence for a "safety in numbers" approach to selection - this has certain merits, but one is concerned that, given the newness of the field and the fact that the quantity of good quality research on what does and doesn't work is low, perhaps reflecting on the "safety in numbers" of a lemming might be wise!

The probable key to safety in technological choice lies in "interoperability". Technologies and vendors with demonstrable commitment to the emerging standards and specifications relating to getting all the various components (including the non-technological ones) of the institutional learning environment (MIS systems, VLEs, PDP systems, eLibraries etc) working together offer an institution the long term ability to "bail out" of any particular component in the face of changing technologies or institutional needs or goals. From a teaching and learning viewpoint, it is worth reflecting on the question "can a single system deliver the diversity of approaches to enabling learning which are used (or should be) in a university?"

Of particular concern to this readership should be those "standards" relating to the design and delivery of learning and activities and their associated resources. Much progress has been made on the packaging, reuse and repurposing of content, but standards allowing the reuse and repurposing of learning experiences are as yet in their infancy - this will prove to be an important aspect of the future of eLearning.

The author will not dwell on the issues of implementing the technologies in technical terms other than to stress that the resourcing and planning of the infrastructure and its technical support is ignored at extreme peril...

Implementation, Embedding and Sustainability

Few HE institutions are starting from scratch in terms of eLearning. Most have at least a VLE in place and many have begun to integrate this with at least their students systems and libraries. However, most would benefit from returning to the start and reflecting where they have actually got to. The overwhelming major use of eLearning is still at the "lets put our notes in BlackCT" stage and pedagogically mirrors traditional lecture based courses. Innovation in both pedagogy and assessment in eLearning (perhaps reflecting mainstream teaching and learning) is still the exception rather than the rule.

Staff development in eLearning tends very much to concentrate on the technology at the expense of learning and teaching, possibly because a) confronting the culture change required is difficult and possibly unpopular and b) there is a shortage of the right sort of learning technologist who can address both the pedagogic challenges and their implementation.

The author has become very aware of the fact that culture change requires institutional change to make it "stick". Embedding eLearning requires an understanding of how it fits into organisational strategy and in turn into departmental and other operational plans. Alongside this, a shared understanding of how eLearning forms part of the learning and teaching experience is equally important. This means that all staff must view that eLearning as part of normal practice. The cultural changes required to achieve this impinge on teaching, support, administrative and management staff and also require recognition of the fact that "culture" and "policy and procedure" are inextricably bound together. Staff development in eLearning too often takes place in the context of "strategy" without making it an intrinsic part of the "production process" and linking this to the parallel processes of changing policy and procedure. By doing this, changes in roles and responsibilities should become embedded culturally as well as operationally. All of this requires senior management commitment to real change at strategic AND operational levels.

This poses some interesting questions about overall strategic approach. An effective eLearning strategy cannot be operationalised unless it forms

part of an overall corporate vision of the institutions future which addresses, also in a strategic manner, its overall education and business practices. eLearning is merely a tool, and an eLearning strategy which is not part of an overall cultural change is likely to result, at best, in the embedding of eLearning into traditional practice - the author would contend that this would be unlikely to result in significant benefit to either the learner or the institution.

The Strategy

Where does this leave us? Firstly any eLearning strategy should be embedded into all of the various strategies of the institution and should form part of a plan to achieve its overall goals. However, universities are much less good at operationalising strategies than they are at writing them and any eLearning strategy needs to address how it affects all of the institutional educational and business policies and procedures and how these will need to be changed to embed eLearning into practice. Embedding staff development into these changes should enable an organisation to make eLearning part of its normal "production process". In particular staff development aimed at changing the learning experience will be dependent on effective and supportive change of the context in which it takes place.

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The Leadership Foundation

The Leadership Foundation for Higher Education has appointed **Ewart Wooldridge** as the first Chief Executive.

In the words of Universities UK press releases, Ewart, who is 56, is particularly well-qualified to take forward this challenge. He is currently Chief Executive of the Government's Centre for Management and Policy Studies (CMPS) - formerly the Civil Service College - the largest public sector leadership and management college in the country.

While at CMPS he developed strong links with other leadership institutions in the public sector, including Higher Education. He has worked with UK universities in developing CMPS's e-learning systems, and in commissioning research from universities into leadership, change management and employment relationships.

Ewart's leadership experience extends across a number of sectors including television, the arts and local government, and he regularly speaks on leadership and management issues at European and international level.

The Leadership Foundation for Higher Education is a ground-breaking international initiative backed by Universities UK and the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP). Its aim is to develop talent and leadership in higher education and to become a centre of excellence, identifying best practice and commissioning tailor-made training for current and future higher education leaders.

The Chief Executive will take forward this vision, develop the Foundation's business strategy and have overall responsibility for its operation, promoting equality and diversity in higher education to the highest standard.

The four UK higher education funding bodies have committed £10 million funding during the first three years of the Leadership Foundation's operation.

The Chair of the new Leadership Foundation for Higher Education is **James Ross**, Deputy Chairman of National Grid Transco. James Ross became Deputy Chairman and senior independent director of National Grid Transco on completion of the merger of National Grid and Lattice in October 2002. Formerly Chairman of National Grid from 1999 to 2002, of Littlewoods from 1996 until 2002, and Chief Executive of Cable and Wireless from 1992 to 1995, his early career spanned 30 years with the British Petroleum Company, with his final appointments as a Managing Director and Chairman and CEO of BP America.

The newly-appointed Board members are:

Mr David Allen, Registrar and Secretary, University of Exeter, Chair Elect, Association of Heads of University Administration (AHUA) and Chair Elect, Higher Education Senior Managers Forum (HESMF)

Professor Raman Bedi, Chief Dental Officer, England, Department of Health

Professor Antony Chapman, Vice-Chancellor and Principal, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff and Chair, Higher Education Wales

Professor Ivor Crewe, Vice-Chancellor, University of Essex and President, Universities UK

Professor Tariq Durrani OBE, Deputy Principal, University of Strathclyde

Professor Roderick Floud, Vice-Chancellor, London Metropolitan University and Chair, Universities UK New Members Group

Professor Diana Green, Vice-Chancellor, Sheffield Hallam University

Mr Ron Haylock, President of Council, University of Nottingham, and Chair, CUC

Ms Sara Parkin OBE, Founding Programme Director, Forum for the Future and Council Member, Natural Environment Research Council

Professor Katharine Perera, Senior Pro Vice-Chancellor, University of Manchester, Member, National Educational Research Forum and recently Member, HESDA Steering Committee for Top Management Programme (TMP)

Professor Joan Stringer CBE, Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Napier University, recently Commissioner, Equal Opportunities Commission and recently Vice-Convenor, Universities Scotland

Professor Pam Taylor Principal, Newman College of Higher Education, Member of Council of Management, SCOP, Member of Board, HESDA

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor

I was delighted to read Lewis Elton's typically assertive article on Scholarship in the last edition of Educational Developments. I would want to endorse everything he wrote.

However I think Lewis could have gone further than just suggesting an extra 'scholarship of assessment and evaluation' as well as an extra 'scholarship of management and administration', both of which are both desirable and necessary, and both of which need more explicit recognition. What though about a specific 'scholarship of staff and educational development', a scholarship which I judge to be both necessary and desirable for the full professionalisation of our sometimes under-valued trade?

I have attempted at various times to sketch out what such a scholarship might look like. For example I wrote a paper entitled 'Towards a scholarship of staff development' which was published as Chapter 10 in Peter Knight's SEDA Paper 83, May 1994. My paper entitled 'Educational development in the managerial university' (Journal of Education through Partnership, 1,1, 1996: 53-69) argues that university staff and educational development centres should be the places where the practice of, and scholarship in, teaching and learning in higher education should be taken seriously and should take us away from the position where many academics simply regard staff development, in Ian McNay's cruel phrase, as 'management propaganda'. More recently I published a paper entitled 'Towards a pragmatic scholarship of academic development' (Quality Assurance in Education, 9,3, 2001: 162-170) which espoused an eclectic model of educational development that encourages scholarly inquiry into, and continuous conversation (indeed contestations) about, our problems and our practices with the objective of producing useful, although perhaps tentative, suggestions for action.

All of this indicates I think a further explicit extension of Lewis Elton's fruitful paper towards an active scholarship of staff and educational development.

Professor Graham Bradley Emeritus Professor of Educational Development, Anglia Polytechnic University

Information for Contributors

The Editorial Committee of Educational Developments welcomes contributions on any aspect of staff and educational development likely to be of interest to readers.

Submission of an article to Educational Developments implies that it has not been published elsewhere and that it is not currently being considered by any other publisher or editor.

For more information please contact the SEDA office on: 0121 415 6801 or via email: office@seda.ac.uk

The Power of Action Learning Groups to Develop the HE Organisation and its Managers

Colin Evans, Formerly Birkbeck College

Goals

'Action learning' offers an effective and efficient way of developing managers and organisations. In my experience it is better than any other single method at achieving the following goals:

- Providing *structured peer support* for managers, particularly new managers and those envisaging increased responsibilities
- Enhancing fundamental *people-management skills*: - empathy, active listening, rephrasing, analysing complex and ambiguous situations, challenging, seeing new perspectives, role flexibility, assessing when to reveal or withhold information, communication in general... These are all skills which underlie activities such as interviewing, appraising, participating in meetings, running planning or project groups
- Demonstrating, in action and by experience, the value of taking time out for strategic thinking
- Enabling members of one sub-group of an organisation to *better understand the other sub-groups.* As this understanding is passed on, it means the organization learns to know itself better at all levels. This knowledge of the bigger picture is one of the core features of a well-managed organisation.

It seems to me that when action learning is discussed and practised the emphasis is usually on the first aspect - peer support. However, my experience of running action learning groups in Birkbeck College has led me to an awareness of the other items - the fourth especially. This is the experience I intend to describe in this article.

Method

First a brief description of the method for those who are not familiar with it.

It was invented by Reg Revans (b. 1907). There are various useful books[1] but, like all powerful methods, the principle and the process are very simple and serve to direct the energy and expertise of the participants:

- It is a process of disciplined small group discussion
- The group is no smaller than 4, no larger than 7
- Group members share a specific context; typically they come from the same organisation
- The material is always 'live' and highly relevant to all concerned
- Action learning is learning from experience
- The group agrees to meet over a period of time - in Birkbeck it is six months Four to six weeks is a typical frequency
- The length of a session depends on the group size: in Birkbeck it is 3 to 4 hours
- The key aspects of the process are that a) each group member gets a period of strictly bounded time to present, uninterrupted, his or her specific issue b) the focus is on action - what he or she has done and will do - together with reflection on the action c) other group members, when they are not presenters, act as 'consultants', using the options listed above - empathy, listening, challenging, etc. They are not 'advisers' since the focus is on the presenter taking responsibility for action: 'If I were in your shoes...' is not a good response because you never are. Members are also discouraged from responding (competitively?) with experiences of their own
- The group has a 'facilitator' whose role is to manage the time boundaries, negotiate and maintain the contract (timing, confidentiality etc). The role differs from that of a committee chair, seminar leader, supervisor or mentor.

In Birkbeck I have followed the 'classic' process quite closely. What follows is an account of the experience and a reflection on it (in true action learning style). My hope is that the account will encourage others to attempt this action.

Origins

The origins of the action learning initiative lie in my growing awareness, as staff development adviser at Birkbeck and as someone with experience of Group Relations conferences[2], of a series of interconnected aspects of the organisation

- The organisation has its own unique culture but also consists of a number of groups with their own cultures
- These groups do not know each other well but, as always, the tendency is to not simply acknowledge this fact but to *imagine* what goes on
- The groups in Birkbeck consist of the administrative sections and of academic schools
- Each of these groups consists of sub-groups which are homologues of the whole Birkbeck group: so the Web

team in Central Computer Services are not necessarily fully aware of the issues of the Systems group (though they share the IT culture) and so on. The problem usually only surfaces when the two sub-groups have to collaborate for some reason, but it is always present.

- The key to understanding the organisation (and to managing it) lies, in my view, in the relatedness of administration and academic schools. What is frequently called a 'communication problem' usually comes down to the differences (in culture, power, values, working patterns...) between these two tribes.

My first attempt to work on this with Birkbeck staff involved a series of 'dialogues'. This process derived from the Group Relations 'inter-group event', but I worked largely without the risky 'here and now' aspects[3]. We also held team-building days for the administrative departments: after these they said that the team-building was valuable (particularly the Belbin idea of team roles) but that the problem of their relating to other sections had not been addressed. There was also the sense that, while all had a good time, change and action might prove elusive.

The action learning initiative came from a sense that the method was less threatening and less complex than other options. It was also easier to recruit to. It was with some delight that I realised just how many objectives could be realised simultaneously and synergistically.

The Groups

Four groups have been run so far - all in the academic year 2002-3

1

A group for 'Deputies'.[4] The criterion I used was that the group members should all be on the same level of seniority (no-one should have their line-manager in the group). I contacted one member of each of the administrative sections and invited him or her to join an action learning group. They confirmed with their Director that this was appropriate staff development for them. All eight accepted, we fixed a series of dates and the introductory session took place. After the introductory session one member withdrew, citing difficulties with dates; another attended only one more session. The six members who remained kept scrupulously to the contract[5] with regards to attendance and punctuality - with the exception of inevitable crises e.g. a problem with the new payroll system threatening non-payment of that month's salaries! Six was in fact a much more manageable group though I created the role of observer when we were eight. After the fifth meeting (a review) the group agreed to meet again in five months, which it did. I devised a detailed evaluation questionnaire, which everyone completed.

2

I used the very positive results from the evaluation to invite the Directors of the Administrative sections to form a group. These are some of the busiest people in the University. One courteously declined; another agreed but so reluctantly that I didn't persist. The other five accepted readily. One Director had only been in post a month and saw this as a splendid opportunity for induction - which indeed it proved to be. We again held an introductory session; there was some regret expressed at two departments not being represented, but the discussion showed that this was in no way a sine qua non, as it might be in a decision-taking meeting. The fact that it shortened the session by an hour was also appreciated. This time there were no withdrawals, though external factors did impact one meeting.

3

Another group was formed - again by 'deputies'. There was one withdrawal after the introductory meeting - 'pressure of work'. The four remaining members kept to the contract.

4

A women's group was announced, to be facilitated by an outside (female) consultant. Here I sent out a general invitation by email. After some accepting and withdrawing and problems over dates, a group of three was formed and though this was riskily small it met six times. Noticeably absent from these groups are academic managers: one of my reasons for preferring the action learning method to the dialogue is that it does not depend to the same extent on academic participation. My idea was that the Heads of School (all of them or just new ones) would form an action learning group or that there could be a mixed group of academic and administrative managers (this would be better still, since they would learn together and from each other). In the event I was not able to persuade more than two Heads of School, and we postponed this.

Reflections on the Process

- The persuading/recruiting/date-fixing phase is the hardest. It involves convincing overloaded, practical people that they should give up 3 or 4 hours a month to a process without any guarantees and it asks them to change gear, to be more reflective. In the event, this seems to be the major learning point they all take from the action learning: 'I have to make more time for reflection, for strategic thinking' - 'I'm fire-fighting all the time'. It's a kind of meta-learning - beyond all the skills practice and the action planning is the experience of time out to think and the experience of thinking collaboratively in a non-threatening, non-competitive setting with firm boundaries. It is an experience of trust, trusting yourself to use the time well, to learn, and trusting others to help. The personal invitation works better than the blanket one. Academics, as is often the case, are more reluctant. Learning in this way is a bigger step for them. This is regrettable but does not diminish the benefits to the administrative group except insofar as the academic/administrator inter-group aspect is not addressed. Some may not be at ease learning in this way and some may decide (without necessarily saying so) that they do not want to be in a group with X; but, after the (indispensable) initial training session it does seem a method which suits the majority better than the alternatives.

- The facilitator role. The issue for the facilitator, I find, is how and when to intervene. Most of the work has to be

done by the participants: on the other hand, where I had a concept or a pulling-together of themes which I thought helpful I didn't hold back. Often it took the form of a three minute (maximum) summary of something from people I've learned from - Adair, Hampden-Turner or Belbin - often with a diagram: because the concept came after the discussion, it was helpful. I kept monitoring this to check that the group members thought I was getting it about right. There are advantages and disadvantages in the facilitator belonging to the same culture. It is harder to stay in role if you are from that culture - you want to be a consultant: in this role you can make a useful contribution but possibly at the risk of weakening the facilitator role. It proved helpful to display a list of possible actions for presenters and consultants:

PRESENTERS: Action since last time; current situation; reflection
CONSULTANTS; Seek clarification; empathy; rephrasing/summarising; challenge; new perspectives; action for next time.

I also displayed the precise timings. A good way to start was to ask each member to say what things were like in X department (not their own). The main part of the role is keeping secure boundaries of time and place. We met in a room in a different building from the one where members worked.

Learning

The learning is different according to the level of the participants: the 'deputies' significantly developed the manager role while the Directors seemed to be developing their strategic thinking and a greater awareness of their collective power to influence, a sense that they are pro-active. The women's group were less concerned about learning about the organisation.

These are just some of the (more easily summarised) themes which emerged

- The general issue of confidentiality - what you say to whom, when; what you withhold. Withholding information can be appropriate or inappropriate and managers have to choose

- Taking up the manager role: the 'Loss and Change' idea[6]: there is no change without loss and becoming a manager means giving up ('being weaned' off) the satisfactions of doing certain things which you are good at; it also means introducing formality into relations with colleagues: *'It's a struggle with my personality', 'I'm not naturally a supervisor'*

- Problems of senior administrators dealing with academics. The 'Yes Minister' syndrome. How senior administrators can be silenced by academics. What 'being in attendance' can mean psychologically. How academics can fail to recognise professional expertise. The problem for administrators, used to line- management, of 'dotted-line' relationships with academics

- The committee structure and its uncertainties - where are decisions taken? The sense in the committee of losing ownership of something you have put together

- The 'deputy' role. What do you need to know? What does your Director need to tell you?

- Relations with College Governors

- The way newcomers start with the intention of changing things but, after a while, feel that they are losing that urge and merely following long-established routines

- Project management is often inter-group management

Evaluation

There is a wealth of interesting detail in the evaluation sheets (and also in the 'Hopes and Fears' exercise used in the introductory session) but it is not appropriate to give that detail here. However, anyone contemplating using this method and attempting to persuade others on the basis of the Birkbeck experience may find some statistics useful. They indicate a very high level of belief in the value of the activity on the part of all groups:

[On a scale 1-7 (1 = strongly agree)]

Question A - (*This was an appropriate use of my time*) The average response of all members (excluding the three who withdrew) was 1.9 with no response higher than 3 and no significant differences between the groups.
Question G (*I would recommend to a colleague*) - average 1.6.
Question H (*I was helped with my issue*) - average 1.5.

The detailed questions about learning show very few entries in the 'No change' column.

The highest scores ('considerable enhancement') were for 'understanding the organisation' and 'empathy'.

Two quotes:

- *This non-threatening environment meant I could accept the need to change myself and my way of working whereas if a manager or anyone else had told me or given me a directive, I would have bridled*

- *What I appreciated most was the opportunity to learn how other sections work from the point of view of a person at roughly the same level and [see]how that person perceived my section. I was astonished at how much help I received from others in dealing with my own personal problem.*

I have emphasised in this account what I see as the less familiar merits of action learning - organisational, inter-group understanding and management skills: it is appropriate perhaps to end with this affirmation of the classical virtues of the method, the way it can offer substantial support to staff who have heavy responsibilities and who are under a great deal of pressure, the way it can challenge them to change without provoking defensive reactions. Organisations only change if people change and we all find it very difficult to change in significant ways. Action learning has the potential to enable real change to take place.

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Further details, including an example of a contract negotiated and the questionnaire used for evaluation can

be obtained from the author who would be interested in hearing from any colleagues considering using the method. E-mail to evans.colinhuw@freeuk.com

1 Revans, R (1983) **The ABC of Action Learning**, Chartwell Brent; McGill, I and Beaty, L (1992) **Action Learning, A Practitioner's Guide**, Kogan Page.

2 The Tavistock and the Grubb Institute. The 'application group' in a Group Relations conference is similar to action learning.

3 See reports on these events at www.bbk.ac.uk/sd/dialogue/index.html. Also UCoSDA Briefing Paper 69 **'Promoting Understanding in Organisations: The Group Dialogue**, C. Evans.

4 Not always their job title but the Section Head was always their line manager.

5 For an example of the contract see the Birkbeck web-site www.bbk.ac.uk/sd/

6 Marris, P (1974) **Loss and Change,** RKP

SEDA and the Higher Education Academy

Dr Kristine Mason O'Connor, Co-Chair SEDA

SEDA warmly welcomes Professor Paul Ramsden's appointment as Chief Executive Officer of the Higher Education Academy. Professor Ramsden's outstanding international reputation in the scholarship, policy and practice of teaching and learning and educational development will undoubtedly ensure excellent leadership of the Academy.

On the day the appointment was being made SEDA held an event at the Institute of Education 'SEDA and the Academy - A Vision for Staff and Educational Development'. Participants came from a range of organisations including the ILTHE, LTSN, HEFCE, Colleges and Universities.

The event commenced with a presentation outlining the development agenda set out a year ago in the Government White Paper The Future of Higher Education, and in HEFCE's Strategic Plan 2003-08. Addressing the agenda (widening access and participation, meeting the needs of students for new modes of study and delivery, and excelling in teaching and learning) clearly demands the engagement and expertise of staff and educational developers. The presentation emphasised the growing number of staff and educational developers who are providing an increasingly wide range of professional services and consultancy within their institutions and the sector. SEDA has a ten year history of supporting, developing and advocating such work both institutionally and nationally. Over the past year SEDA has been actively committed to establishing links with the Academy to optimise SEDA's mission to 'improve all aspects of learning, teaching and training in higher education through staff and educational development.'

The event focussed on two distinctive areas of SEDA's activity, SEDA Fellowships and the SEDA Professional Development Framework. John Sweet (University of Wales College of Medicine) shared his experience of being awarded a SEDA Fellowship in terms of the development opportunities and the professional recognition it confers. Participants were then invited to consider a draft 'position paper' outlining SEDA's thinking about working with the Academy to promote the Professional Development Framework. Professor Anthony Brand (Chair, PDF Committee) outlined the PDF Scheme under the title "The Time is Right". The title aptly reflects SEDA's desire to collaborate with the Academy in relation to the PDF to promote high quality continuing professional development across the sector. As well as supporting individuals the PDF enables institutions to devise and demonstrate an integrated approach to development.

During the ensuing lively group discussions and plenary, participants stressed that the Academy would be greatly strengthened by forming strategic alliances with established networks and that SEDA has considerable experience and expertise to offer the Academy. Cautionary points were made about the need for clarity of function and purpose among quality enhancement bodies, particularly in relation to accreditation, and the imperative to avoid unnecessary duplication and overlap. SEDA was cautioned against losing any of its creative capacities as it seeks to work closely with a much larger organisation. Participants pointed out that whilst increasing numbers of staff are involved in staff and educational development they do not use the terms to denote their role; this might result in their needs not being appropriately recognised and addressed through the Academy. The questions were then raised, 'who develops the developers?' and 'who is qualified to do so?' One answer of course is SEDA.

SEDA very much appreciated the issues raised by participants and, with the news of his appointment, looks forward to discussions with Professor Ramsden.

Kristine Mason O'Connor
SEDA Co-Chair.

Developing Critical Skills for First Year Students: Resources and Guidelines

Lyn Greaves and Mike Mortimer, Thames Valley University

Introduction

This article is offered as a resource, and presents an account of what we have developed as a package of learning interactions with first year students. Our focus is on developing skills - and in particular the skill of critical thinking and its deployment. We see this as at the heart of the student's successful educational experience.

Interestingly, many texts and resources which address the development of study skills (e.g. Cameron S, The Business Students' Handbook, 2002) do not directly address this, although a range of activities are clearly aimed at fostering the skill - often through the vehicle of problem solving. Our listed activities take a different approach, using tasks directly linked to the module assessment as a natural vehicle for engaging with the curriculum while laying the foundations for higher level skills of critical thinking, and providing a structured formative environment.

Our experience points to some basic "givens" about developing skills:

- If students are engaged early on in their course in activities linked to assessments they are more likely to develop and retain good study habits throughout their course
- students value skills development only when linked to their assessments (usually)
- we cannot assume that students are able to engage effectively with sources and apply basic skills when they arrive at university

Background

Like many of the post-1992 universities, Thames Valley University has spent many years seeking out ways in which to support their non-traditional learners. The strategies used over the last ten years have ranged from embedding skill development within the curriculum across the three years of study to stand-alone skills modules supported by specialist tutors (Vincent J, Educational Developments, 2001). The collected knowledge derived from our experiences has given us some helpful insights on how we can best help students be successful in their long-term learning, whilst at the same time minimising dependency on the tutor and maximising student independence.

The way in which skills are structured, delivered and assessed is part of a cultural heritage. We can't isolate the skills experience for the student from the skills experience of the tutor and any new practitioner will be joining an existing view and approach to skills within the team or department in which they find themselves working.

As educational and curriculum developers it has often been our task to assist teams in embedding skills within their course and we have accumulated a number of observations:

- Tutors are keen to engage the students in their curriculum early on
- They don't mind making changes to seminar activities to incorporate skills
- They don't mind changing the assessment (and the assessment criteria) to include assessment of skills

We started with a model for the basic skills that all students require to be able to engage with critical thinking and the research process. This was derived from work by Chris Atton (1994) and Sonia Bodi (1998) which suggests a "stages" model. We synthesised and expanded the work to produce one with seven stages.

A Strategy for Developing Critical Thinking

1	Problem Analysis	Identify questions Focus on issues Decide on core elements	
2	Action Plan	Define information need Formalise questions Determine Strategy	
3	Information Retrieval	Where it is? In what format? What skills are needed?	
4	Evaluation	(a) Of information Is it objective? Distinguish fact from opinion	(b) Of sources Is it authoritative ? Examine origins
5	Reflection	Is this what I need? Is my problem solved? Is my research complete?	
6	Research record	Whose ideas are these? What should I record? Bibliographic Reference	
7	Apply Information	How do I use the ideas? Organise the data? Create new information?	

Week No.	Stage(s) from Strategy for Developing Critical Thinking	Tutor-led Activity In-session	Associated Skill Development Post-session (Student)
1	Problem Analysis Action Planning Information Retrieval	Ice breaking; Group formation Explaining the activity (handout)	Peer interaction Library search activity Information selection Presentation preparation
2	Evaluation Reflection	Peer Presentation Leading discussion: students giving and receiving constructive criticism on quality of information and sources	Library search activity Information selection Students précis chosen theory - written work (reading, critical review, peer feedback, informal groups)
3	Research Record	Structured technique for analysis of work Explication of: Engaging with academic community (Literature) - depth and breadth. Academic Referencing, Plagiarism	Library search activity Information selection Students précis chosen theory - written work (reading, critical review, peer feedback, informal groups)
4	(Evaluation Reflection Research Record) Apply Information	Structured Technique for analysis of argument development. Explication of: Engaging with academic Community (Literature) - depth and breadth Academic Referencing, Plagiarism	Group work on case study (Informal) Library search activity, Information selection Students explore case study vs theory - presentations (reading, critical review peer feedback, informal groups)
5	Stages 1-6	Facilitating critical discussion of group presentations. Realte discussion to stages of strategy for developing Critical Thinking	Individual work on live assessment. Cumulative reading, critical review, peer feedback
6	Stages 1-6	Self, peer and tutor review of student progress	Prepare draft assignment
7	All Stages	Self, peer and tutor review of student progress and effective application of the stages	Continue with assignment preparation
8	All stages	Reflection and Action Planning	Student undertakes actions from action plan

A number of projects lay between the original concept of the model and its current application. These included an LTSN-funded project looking at skills in the curriculum (Greaves and Mortimer 2002), an on-going TQEF-supported project looking at the application of this model in an evidence-based practice setting (Greaves, Mortimer and Tressider, 2004), and a reflective exercise arising from an ILT regional forum (Greaves and Mortimer, 2003).

Using this model as a basis we constructed an approach whereby students engage with relevant curriculum through activities that focus on essential skill development. Rather than teaching them how to "do" certain skills we place them in a tutor-supported structured framework of experiential learning. The "tutor" here is the module tutor.

The framework supports linked activities. None of the activities count toward any assessment grade. However, to ensure students participate, the assessment is modified so that submission of the assessment is dependent upon successful completion of the activities. The tutor is not grading them or passing a judgement on quality. The tutor simply confirms that the student has successfully completed each activity. This simple qualifying mechanism for submission ensures that even if a session is missed, the student still has to complete the activity in order to be 'allowed' to submit their assessment.

We now describe the activities for a series of one hour seminars with a group of 25 students - first in summary form, and then in more detail.

Week one activity:

Students are introduced to each other and are asked to self-select into groups. The tutor explains that all the seminar activities for the next seven weeks are designed to contribute to their assessment. They are not given the assessment but know that they will have virtually completed the assessment if they participate in all the activities. They are given a customised handout that sets out a series of tasks to undertake before the next seminar. These tasks involve them going into the library or LRC and seeking out information on a particular aspect of the curriculum. Let's take as our example a group of first year business students taking an introductory HR module.

They would be asked to carry out a literature search on a particular topic such as motivation. They wouldn't be directed to an author, simply the topic area, and asked to return with a presentation of how they went about their search and what they now know about the LRC, correct academic referencing and sources available there.

Week two activity:

All groups are handed a sheet for grading their peers' presentations. The focus is on the quality and relevance of the sources that they have identified for the topic of motivation and the effectiveness of the presentation (Do they use ohps? Are they clear etc?) Each group is asked to make a brief presentation and all non-presenting groups are asked to comment and provide helpful feedback. The tutor makes appropriate educational interventions in terms of the peer feedback, the quality of the literature searching that has been undertaken, the quality and relevance of the sources selected.

They are then given a new task sheet that requires them to select one of the theorists from their search and write a 500 word précis (review) of the author's theory. They should work independently and are to bring in their work the following week.

Week three activity:

This week the students bring in their work and are asked to exchange it with a peer, someone with whom they haven't yet worked. Each student is handed a yellow highlighter and asked to highlight every time an author's name is used within the work. They are also asked to check that a correct academic referencing system has been used. Usually students have not made use of the author's name or included references. They are not allowed to 'explain' their work to the reader, since if it was a tutor marking it they wouldn't be able to explain it to them, the message being that all academic work must stand in its right. This is an intensely visual practical activity that really shows students how they should be working. The tutor draws their attention to issues around correct academic referencing, plagiarism and how making use of sources effectively sends messages to the reader about how effectively they have engaged with the body of academic literature pertinent to their subject.

They are sent off to repeat the task, again working independently, but with another theorist related to the curriculum of the week. They are asked to bring in their written work the following week. The tutor collects the work and is able to identify all students who are in difficulties with use of English, theory identification, writing deficits and other common problems. These students can be made aware of their learning needs and make attempts to rectify them or seek appropriate help from appropriate sources within the institution.

Week four activity:

The same process as the previous week takes place, in that students exchange their work with a peer and they quickly undertake the exercise with the yellow highlighter. By this week very few students are not attempting to identify sources and reference their work correctly. You encourage the students to examine the written pieces of work that are correct. You then hand out blue highlighter pens and ask the students to highlight all words or phrases that indicate an argument being developed, such as 'on the other hand', 'if we consider', 'as argued by' and so forth. Rarely are there many to be identified. The tutor engages the group in a discussion that highlights the role of these words in a written piece of work and what they are evidence of in terms of the students' engagement and critical understanding of the body of academic work within their subject area. An extended list of such words and phrases may be drawn up with the students.

For the following week they are asked, working in self-selected groups, to identify a case-study and describe their understanding of the difference between a case-study

and a theory and the role that each plays in the field of academic work.

Week five activity:

Group presentations are made and non-presenting groups are asked to offer supportive feedback to the group that is presenting. The tutor makes educational interventions to correct misconceptions and misunderstandings until they are sure that the whole group has a clear understanding of the significant differences between theories and case-studies.

This week the assessment is handed out. This will be focused on extending the practice on the above areas, for instance it may require our Business HR students to analyse a situation in an organisation that involves motivation and other curriculum topics that have been covered in the class. There should be three weeks until the submission date.

At this point the students have covered all the basic requirements to undertake the assessment with some degree of confidence. You ask them to return the following week with a breakdown of the assessment and what is required, a completed literature search and appropriate sources identified and the start of reviews of sources that they might be using to undertake the assessment.

Week six activity:

Students share their work in progress in an informal way, guided by peers and the tutor in confirming their plan and selections or making appropriate suggestions for alternatives.

They are asked to bring in a draft of their written assessment for the following week.

Week seven activity:

The students are asked to exchange papers and carryout first the yellow highlighter exercise and then the blue one. It is often most illuminating how many have failed to make correct use of referencing and to attempt to develop an argument. No comment should be made about possible grades or the quality of the work as a submission for the assessment, the focus must remain on the application of the narrow skills that the group has been working on for the last six weeks. It must be viewed as another opportunity for the tutor to allow the students to develop their written skills in a formative setting.

Today the tutor signs the final section agreeing that the student has completed all the formative aspects of their assessment. The students are given no task for the following week, simply to complete their assessment on time.

Week eight activity:

This is a tutor led session that reviews all aspects of the skills that the group has been working on. Students are asked to complete a reflective statement of where they think they are in terms of the skills that the tutor has outlined. They should construct an action plan.

Concluding Comments

The activities described form a linked set of skill development activities. Our experience suggests that they are most effective linked as a pre-planned package. However, by matching activities to the seven stages of the Strategy model we have a theoretical framework underpinning skill development - and it makes it easy to see where gaps occur.

Suggested Further Reading:

Atton, Chris (1994), *Using Critical Thinking as a basis for library user education*, Journal of Academic Librarianship, vol 20 pp 310 - 313

Bodi, Sonia (1988), *Critical Thinking and bibliographic instruction: the relationship*, Journal of Academic Librarianship, vol14 pp 150 - 153

Cameron, Sheila, (2002), Business Student's Handbook (2nd edtition), Prentice Hall, London

Greaves L and Mortimer M, (2003) *Viewed through a glass darkly? Analysing Research Data from an LTSN project on embedding intellectual and transferable skills in Tourism, Hospitality and Leisure*, ILTHE Members' Resource Area, October 2003

Greaves L and Mortimer M (2002), *Embedding Intellectual and Transferable Skills into a degree scheme: Tourism, Hospitality and Leisure*, Pedagogic Projects, www.hlst.ltsn.ac.uk

Greaves L, Mortimer M and Tressider M, (2004) *Embedding Critical Thinking in an evidence based practice course in Health and Human Sciences*, (forthcoming)

Vincent J (2001), *Foundation degrees - some staff development issues*, Educational Developments, Issue 2.4

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