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Developing Pedagogic Research

David Baume FSEDA and Liz Beaty FSEDA

Introduction

We suggest and illustrate seven approaches to pedagogic research; propose three fruitful questions to aid the development of pedagogic research in your institution; describe HEFCE's broad approach to pedagogic research, including through the RAE; and offer a list of journals which publish papers on pedagogic research. We do not describe methodologies for pedagogic research – that would be another article entirely! We thus provide some elements for a toolkit for developing pedagogic research in an institution.

Approaches to Pedagogic Research

We are conscious that our immediate audience for this article is academic developers. Accordingly we have chosen articles to illustrate these approaches to pedagogic research mostly from the literature on academic development. In taking this work forward, you may want to use illustrations of particular interest to your institution (e.g. on research-informed teaching or widening participation) and to the particular disciplines with which you work. In doing so you may find approaches to pedagogic research additional to those suggested here.

The approaches offered here are not entirely discrete. Indeed, the places where these different approaches meet and overlap may provide particularly fruitful areas for pedagogic research.

1. Use existing data

For example, data on:

- Student performance and assessment
- Student feedback
- Course documents and resources
- Policy and strategy documents and data on their implementation
- On-line learning and teaching.

Advantage: No need to collect fresh data.

Disadvantages: Data may not always be in the most usable form.

Research benefits from questions and hypotheses as well as from data.

Example: Baume and Yorke (2002)

Abstract: Portfolios are widely used to document and assess professional development. They are used to assess University teachers on courses run by the UK Open University. These portfolios are assessed twice, by trained assessors, against a detailed set of requirements which include learning outcomes and underpinning values. A detailed analysis was undertaken of the assessment judgements involved in the assessment of 53 such portfolios. Inter-rater reliability data are reported. These results are compared with those of other studies on portfolio assessment. Consideration is given to appropriate measures of the reliability of assessment, and to some effects of the structure of assessment and of the rules for combining scores on the reliability of assessment. Some implications for practice are explored.

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2. Undertake investigations prompted by questions or concerns

This offers perhaps the widest field for pedagogic research.

Advantage: Such research may be closer to familiar non-pedagogical research than some of the other approaches suggested here, and use familiar research methods.

Disadvantages: Those of conventional research.
The added difficulties of researching local practice.

Example: Rust (1998)

Abstract: Workshops are common practice as a staff and educational development tool in higher education around the world, yet while it is common to seek participants' immediate reactions there has been little attempt made to measure their impact. This paper reviews the available literature on the effectiveness of workshops and reports the findings of a study into the effectiveness of 33 workshops delivered by the Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development over a four-month period. The study used questionnaires at the end of the workshops and four months later, and these were followed up by telephone interviews with a sample of participants. The study demonstrates that workshops can lead to changes in practice, and that these changes are themselves deemed to be successful by those involved. In addition, where at the end of a workshop participants report that they are likely to make changes this can be used as a reasonably accurate predictor of subsequent change. The features of workshops identified in end-of-workshop questionnaires which are linked with likelihood of subsequent change are also reported.

3. Link research to policy

There are at least three possible links here:

- Research to establish what the policy should be
- Research to identify how policy should be implemented
- Research to see if and how policy is working, is achieving what it is intended to achieve.

Advantages: Resources may be available.
The research will clearly be institutionally/nationally relevant.

Disadvantage: May become political. (For some, this may be another advantage!)

Example: Gibbs and Habeshaw (2003)

Executive Summary (Extract): 7. There has been considerable development of mechanisms to recognise teaching excellence in ways that do not involve permanent promotion, including:

- Temporary, fixed term, promotions
- Teaching awards and prizes. Institutions have for example developed their own local version of the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme and select their national nomination from amongst their internal Fellowship holders
- Additional pay and/or increments, awarded in ways that take teaching achievements into account, sometimes linked to annual appraisal that focuses on teaching achievements
- Publicity and events that showcase excellence
- Additional titles, such as 'Teaching Fellow' and 'Teaching Co-ordinator' that ascribe status and recognition, with or without any changes in pay or terms and conditions
- Encouragement, financial support and practical support to achieve ILT membership as recognition of teaching competence
- ILT membership may be required for probation or even for all promotions, right up to professorships.

4. Link research to quality enhancement/development

There is substantial funding available for various forms of quality enhancement. Some of these HEFCE sources are described in a later section of this article.

But, however funded, we suggest that quality enhancement should be undertaken in at least a scholarly way, making selective use of ideas from the relevant literature. Sometimes, quality enhancement work can require or involve research, leading in turn to publication.

Advantages: Funding may be available for development work.
Research results can be applied, or at any rate applicable.

Disadvantage: Pressure for quality enhancement results may squeeze out research time.

Example: Schreurs, Robertson, *et al.* (1999)
Abstract: This paper describes a project which aimed to develop a programme for the entire teaching staff of a faculty of health sciences who had received initial teacher training earlier in their career. The programme was developed according to sound educational principles and was supported by the faculty board. Departments also received financial compensation for participation in the workshops. During the first two years of this programme almost 60% of the tenured teachers participated in at least one workshop. Reasons for participation and non-participation are discussed.

5. Link research to evaluation

There is increasing recognition that evaluation and research can fit comfortably together, especially if one function of evaluation is seen as seeking to know, to understand, to make sense of, what is being evaluated (Chelimsky 1997, Baume 2003).

Advantages: Every large development venture is probably evaluated.
 Some evaluation resources can legitimately be applied to research to inform the evaluation.

Disadvantage: Some projects or funders may not be keen about the publication of an evaluation-informed research paper for a wider audience.

Example: Cannon (2001)
Abstract: This paper sets out to understand the impact that training and education programmes have had on institutions and on individuals in Indonesia and to identify theoretical and practical approaches that appear to be effective in bringing about planned change. An analysis was made of evaluation and research studies that included significant components of training and education. The evidence of longer-term impacts does not support the belief that development and change will automatically follow from training. The studies show that the absence of systemic and institutional commitment and the absence of sustainable links in a complex chain of institutional arrangements are impediments to the goals of development. For trainees, the outcomes derived from overseas training are a complex mix of professional, affective, cultural and career advantages mediated by the nature of the work environment. Although most graduates believe in the advantages of overseas training there are also important disadvantages, such as difficulties with re-entry, work relationships, and the development of appropriate professional networks. The studies identify several input and contextual factors that have had a significant influence on longer-term change.

Discussion of the links between research and evaluation (adapted from Baume (2003))

Extract (summary): three purposes [for evaluation] / are to **account**, to **improve** and to **understand**.

To account (another term would be audit). This means to

assure those who funded the project that the project has done and achieved what was intended to be done and achieved, and done these things to an appropriate standard and in an appropriate way.

To improve. 'Evaluation can be a form of consultancy and, as such, do a lot for enhancing the thinking and work of those being evaluated' (Knight 2003). This suggests the evaluator as critical friend, as someone who is at once a part of and apart from the project team, supportive of the broad purposes of the project but all the time looking out for possible inconsistencies in thinking and practice, for mis-steps about to be made or opportunities about to be missed, for productive questions to ask and productive suggestions to make.

To understand. It is essential to understand what is working and what isn't, and how, and above all why, in order to make proposals to improve the activity being evaluated. But, beyond that, 'understanding' is surely a valid aim for the evaluation of any staff or educational development activity? Seeking to understand, almost whatever understand means to the evaluator, evaluand and their clients, is a properly scholarly and academic aim. I have discussed the crossing from evaluation to research in more detail elsewhere (Baume 2002). The concept of evaluation as seeking to understand also necessarily puts research back into development projects. How valuable to be able to say, for example, 'The project worked in these respects, and here are our explanations for why...'?

6. Review practice

Standing back from current practice, and asking what is done, and how, and why, and perhaps to what effect, can be a very valuable form of research; holding a large mirror up to practice, so that practitioners can see themselves and their peers.

Advantages: Will command considerable interest.
 Provides a basis for further research and for the development of policy and practice.

Disadvantages: Data collection may require considerable effort.
 The definitions and categorisations of data will be problematic and contestable.

Example: Jarvis *et al.* (2005)
Abstract: This work summarises results from three studies of the current state of higher education faculty development in Russia. Positive aspects include its support for societal change, content focus, regularity, systematic nature, governmental support, established tradition, encouragement of graduate work, career-long continuity, institutional control, and development of lecture skills. Problematic aspects currently include an over emphasis on memorisation, severe under-funding, uneven quality of faculty development programs, and lack of attention to student involvement, faculty research, and ethics. International exchange programs appear important for Russian faculty development, but language facility is the main factor limiting participation in exchanges, study abroad, and Internet usage. Recommendations are made for further research and for the policies of international non-profit organisations, government agencies, and professional faculty development organisations.

7. Critique and advance theory, including literature review

Such papers form a significant part of the pedagogic research literature. They need to be well rooted in the literature, as in the example below. They often include a major literature review. Lewin (1951:269) provides both a justification and a test for such papers – ‘Nothing is as practical as a good theory’.

Advantages: No empirical work needed, although such a paper will be the better for being informed by considerations from practice. If done well, can frame and influence future research and practice.

Disadvantage: Requires extensive knowledge of the literature and current debates (again, may be experienced as an advantage).

Example: Smyth (2003)
Abstract: Achieving change at any level of educational activity is not easy. In terms of teaching practice, developing a positive capacity for continuous improvement may involve deep change with the potential to threaten the core values and personal belief systems of staff and the students whom they teach. Recent theorising and discussion concerning conceptions of teaching and learning is an acknowledgement that the task of achieving change and the role of change supporters is not just a pragmatic one. This paper considers some of the issues faced by academic staff developers attempting to transform teaching practice. The author draws upon late twentieth-century philosophy and extensive theorising about educational and organisational change with a view to suggesting this literature’s potential to support the work of change supporters, such as academic staff developers.

Questions about Pedagogic Research

1. What might we mean by ‘Research’?

Brew (2001: 21) offers a range of definitions:

- Research is finding out something and making it public
- Research provides the means of generating, testing and validating knowledge
- Research is a systematic process of investigation, the general purpose of which is to contribute to the body of knowledge that shapes and guides academic and /or practice disciplines
- Research is about advancing knowledge and understanding.

Brew goes on to say ‘There is no one thing, not even a set of things, that research *is*.’ (*ibid.*) “‘Research’ for the purpose of the RAE is to be understood as original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding.’ (RAE 2005)

Conversations about the nature, meaning and boundaries of ‘research’, particularly in relation to different disciplines, may be a prerequisite for talking about pedagogic research. One important function of such conversations is to surface often tacit but strongly-held, often discipline-based, views of the nature of research.

It may be useful for those new to research to explore the relationship between research and other forms of

investigation. Ashwin and Trigwell (2004: 122) offer a useful account. (To their account we have added a further column, on the right of the table, which suggests how each form of investigation may relate to the existing literature.)

Level	Purpose of investigation:	Evidence gathering methods and conclusions will be:	Investigation results in:	(Relations to the literature)
1	To inform oneself	Verified by self	Personal knowledge	(May or may not include ideas from the literature. Would generally benefit from doing so.)
2	To inform a group within a shared context	Verified by those within the same context	Local knowledge	(Will probably refer to University and discipline sources. Should refer to some research ideas and sources).
3	To inform a wider audience	Verified by those outside of that context	Public knowledge	(Must make appropriate critical use of the relevant research literature).

Only investigation at Level 3, they suggest, is research: they see external verification as a vital element of research. (We add the suggestion that research must be located in the wider context of published knowledge.)

It is productive to see these three levels as a continuum rather than as three boxes, and also as a developmental sequence for those who would be researchers, pedagogic or within their original discipline.

2. What might we mean by ‘Pedagogic Research’?

The RAE definition (RAE 2005 Annex C):

‘57. *Pedagogic research in HE will be assessed where it meets the “Definition for Research for the RAE”. It is research which enhances theoretical and/or conceptual understanding of:*

- *teaching and learning processes in HE*
- *teacher and learner experiences in HE*
- *the environment or contexts in which teaching and learning in HE take place*
- *teaching and learning outcomes in HE*
- *the relationships between these processes, outcomes and contexts.*

Reports of studies providing descriptive and anecdotal accounts of teaching developments and evaluations do not constitute pedagogic research. Pedagogic research is firmly situated in its relevant literature, and high quality pedagogic research makes a substantial contribution to that literature.’

Healey (2005) suggests that the RAE’s account of pedagogic research is perhaps rather narrow, being significantly more limited than the definition of Research for the RAE, which states it is ‘original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding’ (Appendix C). Healey further comments that ‘no mention is made of “applied and practice-based research” or “action research”, all of which are explicitly recognized as acceptable by, for example, UoA 45 Education (paras. 3, 18 and 48).’

But it is useful to explore what ‘Pedagogic Research’ can mean for each institution and then each potential pedagogic

researcher. Pedagogic Research is undertaken for other reasons than the RAE – including to inform the improvement of teaching and learning.

3. Other useful questions for the development of Pedagogic Research in an institution include:

- 1) What Pedagogic Research is currently undertaken here? Where? By whom?
- 2) To what extent is there a community of Pedagogic Researchers, across the institution and in sub-sections?
- 3) How is Pedagogic Research currently valued here? What factors act for and against Pedagogic Research? What are indicators of this?
- 4) What are the links between Pedagogic Research and other kinds of research here? And between Pedagogic Research and the quality enhancement/educational development function?
- 5) Would attempts to advance Pedagogic Research here be likely to succeed?
- 6) If so, what should be done next, at the level of institutional and local strategy, policy, resourcing, infrastructure, dissemination, staff development?

You and colleagues could use answers to these questions to drive the development of policy, strategy and practice for pedagogic research.

HEFCE's broad approach to pedagogic research

1. RAE and pedagogic research

The RAE funds are for *all* categories of research that reach a certain assessed quality threshold. This includes educational research, some of which will be pedagogic research. Such research may go to any of the RAE panels as well as to Education. Any RAE panel can get help in assessing research on pedagogy that they feel an educationalist should comment on as part of the assessment process.

The Roberts 'Review of research assessment' (available via <http://www.ra-review.ac.uk/reports/roberts.asp>) notes that:

'There is significant support for a broader definition of research within research assessment, to encompass in particular applied research, research of relevance and utility, training of research students, and research that directly informs teaching.' (Annexes, p. 85)

Elaborating on this, the review says:

'Interface with teaching

18. *Roughly a quarter of HEIs, subject bodies and stakeholders support broadening the parameters to embrace research that develops either the pedagogy or teaching subject matter in any given discipline. These respondents argue that the RAE has:*
 - a. *Neglected, and thus devalued, pedagogical research by "hiving" it off to the Education panel for consideration, rather than assessing it within its parent subject panel.*
 - b. *Encouraged more academics to focus on research at the expense of teaching quality (and the production of textbooks), by operating a rewards-based research assessment process in the absence of a parallel process for teaching.*

This is perceived to have driven wedges between teaching

and research, jeopardising the fulfillment of government policies in both areas.' (Annexes, p. 86)

How has this recommendation been enacted? The relevant section is quoted here in full:

2. Assessment of pedagogic research

'58. Submission of pedagogic research is encouraged where it meets the definition of research for the RAE at Annex 3. Pedagogic research pertaining to sectors other than higher education (for example, pre-school, compulsory education, or lifelong learning) falls squarely within the remit of UOA 45 (Education). We anticipate that submissions substantially comprising research on pedagogy in these sectors would normally be submitted to UOA 45, but see also paragraph 61 below. Higher education pedagogic research is also within the remit of UOA 45. However, in view of the arrangements described in paragraph 61, HEIs need not artificially disaggregate relatively small bodies of subject-specific higher education pedagogic research from their submissions to other UOAs.

59. The RAE team has consulted the Higher Education Academy to provide a more descriptive account of higher education pedagogic research that HEIs may find helpful in preparing submissions (see paragraph 60).

60. Pedagogic research in HE will be assessed where it meets the definition of research for the RAE. It is research which enhances theoretical and/or conceptual understanding of:

- *teaching and learning processes in HE*
- *teacher and learner experiences in HE*
- *the environment or contexts in which teaching and learning in HE take place*
- *teaching and learning outcomes in HE*
- *the relationships between these processes, outcomes and contexts.*

Reports of studies providing descriptive and anecdotal accounts of teaching developments and evaluations do not constitute pedagogic research. Pedagogic research is firmly situated in its relevant literature, and high quality pedagogic research makes a substantial contribution to that literature.

61. In all cases pedagogic research will be assessed by experienced and expert reviewers. Some panels have appointed as panel members one or more experts in higher education pedagogy; others consider research in higher education pedagogy to be within the collective expertise of their membership. In some main panel areas, for example engineering (Main Panel C) and in the medical and related panels (Main Panels A and B), pedagogic research will be cross-referred to a specific member or members of one of the sub-panels. However, as with any other body of research where it considers that seeking external advice will enhance the assessment process, a sub-panel may also refer some pedagogic material to specialist advisers or to the Education sub-panel for advice. We expect that panel members and specialist advisers involved in the assessment of pedagogic research will co-ordinate their activity to ensure consistency of approach in its treatment.'

(From <http://www.rae.ac.uk/pubs/2006/01/>)

In summary, pedagogic research is admissible to the RAE, and will be judged by the same standards as disciplinary research.

3. TLRP

HEFCE is supporting educational research through TLRP, managed by ESRC – particularly, in the new round, on research into widening participation. HEFCE has funded the Higher Education Academy for e-learning research, with Manchester and Southampton Universities. This funding should help the Higher Education Academy to support educational research of relevance to HE sector – mainly through dissemination of what is already known through good practice guidance, and also via new research projects that they commission.

TLRP projects are large - see

<http://www.tlrp.org/proj/Higher.html> for current projects.

4. CETLs

HEFCE expects the CETLs to evaluate their progress, and to collect research evidence over their five-year funding span. HEFCE Guidance Notes for Stage Two Bids (para. 5) say: 'We would like to see business plans at stage two show how the CETL will acquire and utilise a capacity to draw in pedagogic research and evaluation and to undertake research into its own practice.'

For general information on CETLs see

<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/tinits/cetl/>.

5. NTFS (administered by the Higher Education Academy for HEFCE)

For 2006, in addition to the individual strand (50 awards each of £10,000), the 2006 NTFS scheme invites teams to bid for development funds of up to £200,000. Each team must include at least one NTF. The Higher Education Academy's four institutional themes, one or more of which bids are expected to address, are innovations in the curriculum and student support, quality management, student assessment and academic leadership.

HEFCE expects some current and future NTFS projects to yield Pedagogic Research outcomes.

See <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/NTFS.htm>.

6. Learning and Teaching Strategies

Learning and teaching strategy funding will include new funding to support research-informed teaching. Some of this funding will be subject based, for curriculum update, and some might be pedagogic - both are necessary to enhance learning.

7. HEFCE research and evaluation

HEFCE commissions and supports a research and evaluation programme. Some of this is about student experience and pedagogy - for example, reviews of workplace learning.

HEFCE also expects the QAA to publish composite information following audits that supports pedagogic research.

Overall, HEFCE policy and approach on pedagogic research is multifaceted. HEFCE wants to encourage pedagogic research - they see it as one aspect of University research, and also crucially as supporting the development of higher education teaching and learning. Research and development in learning and teaching are both very important.

Journals

Some journals which publish articles about learning, teaching and pedagogic research are listed below (adapted from Tight 2003).

1. *Active Learning in Higher Education* (ALHE)
2. *Association for Learning Technology Journal* (ALT-J)
3. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* (AEHE)
4. *European Journal of Education* (EJE)
5. *Higher Education* (HE)
6. *Higher Education in Europe* (HEE)
7. *Higher Education Management* (HEM)
8. *Higher Education Policy* (HEP)
9. *Higher Education Quarterly* (HEQ)
10. *Higher Education Research and Development* (HERD)
11. *Higher Education Review* (HER)
12. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* (IETI)
13. *International Journal for Academic Development* (IJAD)
14. *Journal of Further and Higher Education* (JFHE)
15. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* (JGHE)
16. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* (JHEPM)
17. *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher in Education* (P:PPHE)
18. *Quality in Higher Education* (QHE)
19. *Studies in Higher Education* (SHE)
20. *Teaching in Higher Education* (THE)
21. *Tertiary Education and Management* (TEAM)

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Opinion: Academics - employees from hell?

Graham Badley, Anglia Ruskin University

They most certainly are if we believe a recent polemic in that bastion of truth and rectitude called the *Financial Times*. At first sight the problem of running universities is that the academics themselves are clearly unmanageable. This is especially so at times when change in higher education is deemed (by whom and for what purposes?) necessary. Academics are always capable of resisting or even subverting whatever may be proposed.

The trouble is that academics are 'employees from hell' who lack the abilities and dispositions that would equip them to be 'components in a modern, flexible organisation' (Kellaway, 2006: 9). They are totally unsuitable for being managed because:

- They are clever and believe they can think for themselves
- They lack emotional intelligence and often become childish and petty
- They are often introverts and poor team players and see their colleagues mainly as rivals
- They are so critical that they question and often reject new initiatives
- They reject authority and fail to suck up to or brown-nose their bosses so that disagreement prevails

- They are complacent and believe in the status quo which has given them secure jobs and pensions
- They are also insecure and bitchy since few others understand the research upon which their status depends (summarised from Kellaway, 2006).

So academics are unmanageable employees from hell because their cleverness makes them childish, their introversions make them competitive, their criticality makes them destructive, their disrespectfulness makes them reject authority, their complacency makes them reject change and their arcane, unread research makes them insecure. And, given the view that 'the grander the university the bigger the egos', so the management problems in Harvard and Oxford are that much greater than in, say, the humble University of Poppleton.

However there are those who actually try to manage the unmanageable. They come in various guises and hierarchies – vice-chancellors, presidents, principals, and deans. They get to run the universities by rising to the top on the basis of their own arcane research and their own determined networking. But they 'may have little notion of how to manage

things' (Kellaway, 2006). They also possess all the above shortcomings as exemplified by the recently resigned President of Harvard who has been described as 'brilliant, infantile and insensitive' with an emotional quotient close to zero. Increasingly, universities are run by people who try to use what they see as modern management techniques: 'This can be catastrophic. They import third-rate management fads that the private sector has already junked and implement them badly' (Kellaway, 2006).

But isn't all of this simply caricature? Are all academics as hellish as described? Is Kellaway really suggesting that we all think that we are too clever to be properly managed? Are we all emotionally stunted? Does she want us to put our critical faculties to sleep every time the managerialists in charge try to adopt yet another fad – Management by Objectives, Total Quality Management, Benchmarking or whatever? Does she really want us to become dehumanised 'components' in our modern and so inflexible academic organisations where our lack of human features might make 'sucking up to' our bosses just a little bit difficult?

At least Kellaway recognises that, for the most part, 'universities function

adequately enough when everyone is left to their own devices'. Unfortunately this simple yet important truth has yet to be grasped by government, by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, by those who impose stupidities such as the Research Assessment Exercise upon us, by university managers who insist on their right to manage in top-down, power-coercive ways, by those who destroy what little collegiality is left in higher education, by those who are complicit in the whole managerialist conspiracy, and by those who wouldn't trust their academic colleagues to teach a class without filling in a module reference sheet and assess a student without being double-checked.

Kellaway thinks, however, that 'incompetent management seems not to matter, the ship goes on sailing. The trouble comes when drastic change is

needed'. But incompetent, over-heavy, bureaucratised, non-collegial, management does matter since the people who suffer most are those academics (and other staff and students) who are badgered, bossed and bullied from semester to semester until they do their masters' bidding. They still see themselves as bossed about even if the messengers who deliver the corporate instructions appear themselves to be pleasant people. All members of the academy - if academy it still is rather than a business corporation - would like to have some say in what might be meant by the claim that 'drastic change is needed'. 'Drastic' according to whose analysis, based on whose academic or, even, democratic values? Academic freedom is one such value that has to be jealously protected and safeguarded even by those increasingly beleaguered colleagues from hell.

Perhaps it is not the academics who are unfit subjects to be managed, but rather the managers themselves who are unfit to do the managing. Indeed we academics don't want to be *subjects* at all, let alone *cogs* or *components*. Academics may be awkward but we are not bits of engines or parts of machines. Academics, as both teachers and researchers, are engaged in what Bruner calls 'human events'. The managerialists, with their fads and their systems, forget that at their peril.

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Defining excellence in learning and teaching

Penny Burden, University of Surrey, and **Chris Bond** and **Julie Hall**, Roehampton University

The term 'excellence' denotes something that is superior, outstanding, and of exceptional quality; but colloquially speaking, excellence signifies that one has surpassed those who are comparable. However, although the dictionary may be able to supply us with generic definitions of 'excellence', once submerged within a particular field or discipline, this clarity deteriorates. Higher Education (HE) is one such field.

With tuition fees set to triple, an increasingly diverse range of students continuing into further and higher education, and emphasis on public accountability, today's UK University has an increasingly mechanistic ethos. In a climate in which traditional pedagogic philosophy and vocabulary is being replaced by a more business-orientated discourse, students are increasingly seen as 'consumers' (Wojtas, 2001) and their tutors as 'transmitters of information' so that an end product (degree/position on a league table) can be acquired. The current move to unitisation of the HE curriculum (Yorke, 2003) in order to support the complexities of widening student diversity seems to contradict the humanistic considerations of the Government's Green Paper (DfEE, 1998), which aims to 'foster love of learning' (Bachkirova, 2000). Within this climate, many within Universities are being called upon to claim or strive for 'excellence'. We felt that it was essential that we attempt to unravel the components of 'excellence' in learning and teaching in HE and we gained project funding to provide workshops to do



Julie Hall, Chris Bond and Penny Burden leading a workshop on this subject at the SEDA Conference, November 2005.

this with both staff and students across two UK universities during 2005. This paper discusses our findings in terms of how excellence is defined by academic staff and students and describes a possible process for investigating conceptions of excellence.

Activities and intended outcomes

The project began with commissioning a literature review which highlighted the debate around use of the term 'excellence' in teaching and learning, noting that 'excellence' seems to be one of those buzz words that is often utilised, yet rarely fully understood. The review concluded that universities should be utilising their academic staff as well as their students in order to define and develop understandings of the concept of 'excellence' and to use the results of these discussions to inform practice and policy - which was the purpose of the Knowledge Cafés.

Knowledge Cafés

In October 2004, Chairs of Teaching and Learning Committees in both institutions circulated details of the project to members of academic staff who were asked to submit expressions of interest. We were looking for four members of staff from each University who, in return for their time, would receive £300 to contribute towards their own professional development. We were initially over-subscribed so numbers were whittled down on a basis of mix of disciplines and varying levels of experience so as to include probationary lecturers as well as more established academics. The following disciplines were represented: Computing, Law, Management, Nursing, Literature, Early Years' Education, Dance and Music Therapy.

The first Knowledge Café (December 2004)

The first Knowledge Café yielded a rich and complex discussion which highlighted different emphases and priorities. The group problematised the term 'excellence' which raised many aspects, categorised under the following headings:

- Subject knowledge and teaching expertise
- Research and teaching (want to do both)
- Student view of excellent teaching
- Relationship between excellence and competence
- Traits of excellent teachers
- Situational aspects
- Discipline
- Vocational/academic tensions.

Conclusions

Conclusions from the first Knowledge Café could be summarised as:

- 'Spending an afternoon analysing how we value and evaluate our teaching was excellent staff development' 'You get a year for a research sabbatical – but are lucky to get an afternoon to think about teaching'
- Overall, there was enthusiasm for an emphasis on 'supporting excellence' rather than measuring it
- It was agreed that some thought should be given as to how to cascade this process. A possible route would be to take the same process of questions and discussion back to participants' own departments
- That the priority should be an output which satisfies participants and is then considered for the use which can be made of it internally. This reflected the participants'

concern that the staff development aspect of considering definitions of excellence was valuable, but they were concerned about the possible managerial uses to which the outcomes could be put

- That elements of the discussion could provide a pragmatic and useful resource for colleagues
- That an outcome from the overall Knowledge Café process should be a series of recommendations for HEIs.

The second Knowledge Café (May 2005)

At this event aspects from the first Knowledge Café were discussed further. This event was enhanced by the presence of six students.

Issues/observations arising included:

- The need to understand excellence from the learner's perspective
- Context - is excellence context specific? Does excellence vary across levels (1/2/3/M/D)? Does excellence vary across subjects? One example was based on the Management lecturer who takes a slick 'management consultant' approach to lecturing. This may be expected and appreciated in the context of Management degrees and regarded as 'excellent' but may not be so highly regarded in the context of another discipline
- Other contexts include the institutional context and the student context. Institutions can create a reputation of excellence quite easily. Would students define excellence differently? How do they choose which university to attend? Are they influenced by league tables?
- Two specific areas were highlighted - classroom specific and role specific - and it was suggested that this might mean different aspects of excellence are appropriate within each. What are we testing?

This was taken further during discussion groups – one involving academic staff participating in the project and the other involving the students. The group made up of academic staff discussed a list of 'dimensions' of excellent teaching and then when the groups combined, participants were asked to mark their top five and bottom five dimensions.

Dimensions of Excellent Teaching

1. Subject-specific knowledge
2. Life skills/being well-developed people/having a life, etc.
3. Communication/interpersonal skills
4. Empathy/concern for the learner
5. Reflection on one's own practice
6. Range of strategies/techniques
7. Being available in the student bar
8. Enthusiasm/inspiration
9. Being a high profile researcher
10. Organised/reliable/good at routine
11. Knowing what students find hard
12. Fairness/consistency
13. Being well dressed

14. Awareness of student needs at different levels
15. Engaging with widest number of students
16. Teaching for 'learning that lasts'
17. The ability to develop as teachers
18. Being available outside teaching time
19. A vision of what learning and teaching could be
20. Being famous (and on the telly)
21. Conscious of the different demands on teachers and learners
22. Self-awareness
23. Having a formal teaching qualification
24. Knowing how people learn/how teaching works

Staff Top 5	Student Top 5
1. Enthusiasm/inspiration	1. Range of strategies/ techniques
2. Subject-specific knowledge	2. Enthusiasm/inspiration
3. Communication/ interpersonal skills	3. Teaching for 'learning that lasts'
4. Knowing how people learn/how teaching works	4. Knowing how people learn/how teaching works
5. Organised/reliable/good at routine	5. 11, 14 and 18 all tied in this position

Staff Bottom 5	Student Bottom 5
1. Being well dressed	1. Being famous (and on the telly)
2. Being famous (and on the telly)	2. Being available in the student bar
3. Being available in the student bar	3. Being a high profile researcher
4. Being a high profile researcher	4. Being well dressed
5. Having a formal teaching qualification	5. A vision of what learning and teaching could be

Top 5 matches*	Bottom 5 matches
Enthusiasm/inspiration	Being well dressed
Knowing how people learn/ how teaching works	Being famous (and on the telly)
	Being available in the student bar
	Being a high profile researcher

* Although staff and students only agreed on two of the top 5 matches, when this was discussed, it was apparent that the choices students had made were all about communication so really there was not such a divergence of view as it may have appeared.

The concluding discussion was based around how these dimensions of excellent teaching could be used. Suggestions included:

- Using them as recruitment and selection criteria and for assessing performance
- Using them for training/development/induction - students could give feedback against competencies which would illustrate weaknesses

- Production of a discussion document/leaflet based on the outcomes of these discussions for internal circulation with questions to stimulate discussion.

It was also recognised that there were practitioner issues that project members may want to explore further and it is the intention of the Project Leaders to create opportunities to facilitate this during the coming year.

Conclusion

The Knowledge Café project has begun to facilitate the culture of joint educational development which was hoped for. Participating members of academic staff at both institutions remain keen to continue developing this collaborative approach, particularly to explore ways in which their colleagues in both institutions could benefit in very practical ways. The model adopted in 04/05 has been very successful so far, but needs further development for sustained growth.

Participants wished to see an output from the project with which they felt comfortable and which could also be used internally by colleagues. The discussion in May expanded on this and it was felt that defining concepts of excellence in this way (by engaging with peers) would result in frames of reference owned and utilised by the academic community – rather than a management/audit tool.

Funding staff for their time in attending the Knowledge Café sessions has also had incidental outcomes for both institutions as participants are using that money for their professional development – using it to purchase resources which are helping to develop them, and their colleagues, further.

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Progress within the Higher Education Learning Partnerships Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

Mark Stone and **Antonia Walker**, University of Plymouth

The work involved in taking the significant learning and teaching developments planned for, and outlined in the original bid, into a work-in-progress has been substantial. This brief account introduces a few of the key issues, challenges and experiences from the Higher Education Learning Partnerships (HELP) CETL.

In summary, the HELP CETL is working to build upon the excellent track record of the University of Plymouth (along with its regional Further Education College partners) in developing successful HE in FE partnerships and significantly widening participation while simultaneously maintaining high retention levels. The University of Plymouth Colleges faculty (UPC) guides, supports and strategically coordinates the provision of HE in 18 FE Colleges (named as partners in the bid). The HELP CETL was established through the excellent practice developed over fifteen years across the partner Colleges within the South West.

The HELP CETL programme, and the vision and aims that underpin it, are derived from the existing culture and ethos of UPC, key aspects of which include:

- Developing a shared sense of purpose
- Promoting scholarship and research
- Collaboration (across subjects or interests e.g. ICT) to improve the quality of the student experience by developing staff, enhancing infrastructure and sharing good practice
- Dissemination through regional, national and international collaboration.

The HELP CETL programme aims to further strengthen the partnership,

enhance the students' experience, support an expansion of provision, and spread good practice both across the network and, more widely, through collaboration with other HE in FE consortia, Foundation Degree Forward and HE Academy Subject Centres. The key pedagogic influences of the HELP CETL, and the Communities of Practice (CoP) and Award Scheme in particular, include:

- Schulman, Wenger and Huber in developing communities of practice
- Practice at the University of Wisconsin Colleges
- Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
- Boyer and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
- Holistic approaches to developing teaching-learning environments
- Constructive alignment
- Ways of thinking and practising in the subject and subject pedagogy
- Troublesome Knowledge and Threshold Concepts - linked to the ESRC-funded Enhancing Teaching - Learning (ETL) Project.

Realising the vision

The HELP CETL approach involves three main inter-related strands, supported by and linked to the capital programme. These are:

1. A programme of Development Activities linked to the UPC strategic agenda
2. A Teaching Fellowship and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Award Scheme for HE in FE staff linked to the development activities of the HELP CETL
3. Establishing physical and virtual support for the emergence of Communities of Practice linked to

the sharing of knowledge and practice across subjects and Colleges through the development activities and the award holders.

The CoP development and facilitation is at the heart of the HELP CETL programme. All Development Activity and Fellowship/CPD award holder activity is situated within the context of emerging CoPs. This account will focus on the CoP and Award Holder models adopted by the HELP CETL.

Fellowships and CPD Awards

The Award Scheme is implemented as one model to develop the capacity for research and scholarly activity within the HE in FE context across the partnership. It is central to the HELP CETL as the development of research and scholarship is a significant issue for HE in FE academics.

The original plan was to award:

- Six £10,000 annual HELP CETL fellowships to HE in FE teaching staff
- Fifteen £3,000 annual CPD Awards to academic and support staff.

The aim is for the award holders to have a significant role in leading Development Activities and CoPs, becoming ambassadors of the work of the HELP CETL as their individual projects develop.

The scheme aims to enhance the professional standing of award holders by:

- Recognising existing expertise and excellence
- Rewarding contributions to HELP CETL developments
- Building capacity in pedagogic research and scholarship
- Redressing the current problem of providing appropriate rewards and recognition for teachers of HE in FE.

The Award Scheme was one of the first priorities of the CETL and was initiated before most of the core CETL staff were in post. This was done for two key reasons. First to allow for awards to be advertised, applications received and awards granted with enough time for College staff to plan and undertake the work from the beginning of the 2005/6 academic year. Secondly, the award scheme placed a focus on the Colleges and the excellent work of the staff within them, rather than the University. Initiating the scheme early on in the HELP CETL programme allowed for development work to start quickly and publicly while the administrative and organisational aspects of establishing a CETL, within the UPC Faculty, University and with other stakeholders got underway.

The initial outcome of the Fellowships and CPD Award process in 2005/6 was:

- 11 Fellowships - totalling £85,000
- 10 CPD Awards - totalling £30,000

from 7 colleges:

- Bridgwater
- Cornwall
- North Devon
- Somerset College of Art and Technology
- Plymouth College of Further Education
- Plymouth College of Art and Design
- Truro

in 8 subject groupings:

- Art and Design
- Arts and Humanities
- Business
- Education
- Health and Social Care
- Social Sciences
- Technology
- Tourism and Hospitality.

The HELP team has recently been working with the initial award holders to reflect on the process and experience of the award scheme, along with how the award holders may link to the development of Communities of Practice within and across their disciplines, and how their role in the HELP CETL can be researched and captured. There is

initial evidence that award holders benefit from being able to share their project ideas and experiences with other staff. This is a move towards building links with academics in other colleges working with similar issues and has potential as a basis for developing a community of practice.

Communities of Practice

The HELP CETL aims to inspire teaching and learning communities to research and reflect on their practice, to share and disseminate knowledge and experience as well as share resources, within the South West region and beyond. The HE in FE context within UPC involves working across a dispersed regional partnership and beyond. The aim is to facilitate the creation of dynamic and effective physical and virtual communities to enable greater communication and collaboration across physical and academic boundaries. CoPs will be supported to develop and/or emerge from new and existing networks or groups.

It is to be hoped that the emerging CoPs will provide guidance, support and development opportunities to members, participants and others. One key type of emerging CoP is the UPC Subject Forums. Subject Forums were established by UPC, following a model at the University of Wisconsin Colleges where colleagues come together across a regional HE partnership to take forward their subject-based agenda.

As well as Subject Forums, other groups or networks have a key role in developing, supporting, evaluating and disseminating their own and others' good practice. Initial work is underway to facilitate the establishment or development of CoPs focusing on:

- Infrastructure
- Blended Learning
- Retention, Progression and Transition
- Subject Forum and CoP Interdisciplinary Trading Zone
- Work Based Learning
- HE in FE Partnership Theory into Practice
- HE in FE Partnership Management

and Leadership.

Over the next few months, work by HELP CoP developers will be enhanced by an initiative to underpin the work and development of physical CoPs with the deployment of virtual Community of Practice and Knowledge Management ICT tools and systems.

Challenges and risk-taking

The CoP development and support, including the use of technology to underpin this, was identified within the original bid as an area of planned risk-taking.

Further risks that have become more apparent during the set-up phase relate to two key areas of work. First, work has been undertaken with a very wide range of University administrative or infrastructure services in support of the CETL. This has, on the one hand, delayed some planned work but, on the other, has led to other, useful but unplanned, outputs: for example, a streamlined process for the release of capital funding to University of Plymouth Colleges. A second key risk involves capacity. Many University and College-based staff across UPC, while having excellence to offer, are working at or close to capacity. It is challenging to facilitate further, CETL-supported, developmental opportunities without adding significantly to their workload.

For the HELP CETL team, some members of which are relatively new to the field of educational and academic development, there also comes the challenge of simultaneously taking forward one's own professional development whilst working with established, excellent practitioners, and supporting development opportunities for HE in FE colleagues across UPC.

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Using a Projects Day to showcase teaching and learning

Sue Gill and Carol Summerside,
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Research-intensive universities can sometimes be perceived as rather stony ground when it comes to supporting teaching and learning. The pressures to 'do' research are growing as we move towards the next RAE and these pressures can be intense for many members of staff. The challenge for people like ourselves, working in the area of curriculum enhancement, is twofold:

- How to provide opportunities which prove useful for the staff involved
- How to raise the profile (and importance) of teaching and learning in the institutions' collective consciousness.

With these challenges in mind we have recently run a Teaching and Learning Projects Day which, feedback suggests, achieved the first aim. While it is more difficult to measure the second, we feel confident enough to be planning a repeat performance next year.

This paper offers a description of the event held in January 2006. We set ourselves the aims of recognising and supporting teaching and learning projects and bringing them to the notice of the wider University community. In order to achieve these aims the event was organised into two parts:

- Part 1 - a morning workshop for all staff involved in teaching and learning projects. The workshop was facilitated by Professor Sally Brown (PVC, Leeds Metropolitan University) and was entitled 'Making the most of your projects: delivery, dissemination and delights'
- Part 2 - a lunchtime display/dissemination event open to the whole institution. For this part of the event each project was allocated a display board and table in one of our large, centrally located conference spaces.

One of the main comments which prompted the organisation of the event came from a colleague managing an FDTL project who spoke of the perceived isolation of projects from the rest of the institution. Over the next few months the feeling grew that we should 'do' something to recognise the innovative nature of much of the work being undertaken in teaching and learning, and provide the opportunity for the institution to do something for the staff involved.

We set ourselves the challenge of inviting all the teaching and learning projects we could find in the University to come together for the workshop and display/dissemination event. A small amount of funding was found to cover the



Teaching and Learning Projects Day

operational costs of the day and our Staff Development Unit kindly agreed to cover the costs of the external facilitator. With this in place we were able to undertake the first challenge, that of identifying the projects to invite. We used a loose definition of projects to make sure we included both the single person project and the externally funded CETLs. While finding out about the large projects was straightforward, the smaller ones were sometimes much more elusive to track down and we had to rely on our existing networks and word of mouth. One project present at the day we had only found out about three days before the event! In the end we developed a list of almost 60 projects, of whom 37 were able to take part in the event.

We were fortunate to be able to secure Sally Brown to lead the workshop. Her knowledge and enthusiasm was perfect for the event and having a PVC at the event sent a strong message about the importance of the projects and their staff. The only drawback is that she set a very high standard for the next person to take on the task!

Sally said of the event: *'It was tremendous to see the breadth and scope of the projects represented at the workshop. It provided superb opportunities to showcase projects across the University and to let people know what else was going on around them, so that they could form new productive relationships with each other.'*

On the day over 50 members of project teams took part in the workshop. The workshop was a resounding success and it was difficult to get people to move to their display stands as they were continuing the discussions begun in the workshop. These discussions continued while project teams had lunch and took the opportunity to view the other displays. Once open to the University, over 70 staff visited, including our PVC (Teaching and Learning), the Deans of

Undergraduate Studies for all faculties and the Academic Registrar.

Immediate outcomes

There was an overwhelming sense of enjoyment and bonding on the day from the project delegates. Representative comments from them include (when asked what elements of the event they found most useful/liked the most):

- *A great opportunity to network with others in similar areas*
- *A fantastic way to pick up on what is happening within the University in just a couple of hours*
- *That teaching was being given some profile in the university.*

The delegates and visitors were impressed by the variety, quality and innovative nature of the projects and the broad spread of faculties and schools represented.

For ourselves, partly as a result of wanting to publicise the day and report on it afterwards, we have set up a monthly teaching and learning newsletter and hope to encourage other people to write for it, not just one of us (SG).

In the longer term

We now have the task of maintaining the momentum and interest generated by the day. We are currently (March) working on our evaluation of the day from the viewpoint of the project delegates. This will help us repeat the event next year. We plan to use the same format but have a different theme for the workshop and we want to get more of the rest of the institution into the event and will be overhauling our publicity to achieve this.



Teaching and Learning Workshop

We've also realised that we'll need to educate our colleagues on how to staff their stands after complaints from one project that no one wanted to speak to them. This may have had something to do with the way they were all stood talking to each other in front of their stand. . . .

Our preliminary evaluation has already shown some participants looking to work together in the future. We have also heard of two colleagues who visited the lunchtime session who are now discussing developing a joint module between their Schools in Medical Sciences and HASS (Humanities, Arts and Social Science). So we may have been a catalyst in the development of a new project which we hope will be represented at the next projects day in 2007!

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Work-based Learning and Workforce Development

David Johnson, Independent Consultant

Introduction

Why does Higher Education (HE) still have a problem with work-based learning? Despite conferences devoted to it and many articles and publications on the subject, HE still sees work-based learning as an interesting but marginal area of activity. However, it challenges the historical approach to the delivery and assessment of student knowledge and raises concerns about academic rigour and standards.

Work-based learning is the key to HE's involvement in workforce development. There is a direct link between workforce development, economic development and social regeneration, and the link between them is the provision of opportunities for the individual to fulfil their potential. Raising the status of work-based learning presents a significant opportunity for HE to engage with workforce development as it will open up new markets with significant numbers of new learners, which will in turn promote deeper relationships with employers.

So why has work-based learning remained marginalised within HE? Perhaps because we have yet to achieve a common understanding of what is really meant by 'work-based learning', how it should be assessed, accredited and validated. Is work-based learning different from practical learning, work experience, work placement, experiential learning, work-related learning, learning by doing, life-place learning, or is it a generic term covering all of these? At the moment there are probably as many definitions of work-based learning as there are HE providers, employers and students.

Also, HE has to some extent been discouraged by the way some developments in course provisions

have been derided in the media and society in general (e.g. media studies, surf studies) so there is a pressing need to bring about a level of social change whereby work-based learning courses are seen as credible, valuable, and equivalent yet different from academic courses.

Raising the Status of Work-based Learning

Raising the status of work-based learning in HE, driven by the needs of individuals, employers and ultimately government, must have as its objective the creation of a more skilled workforce that is imaginative, flexible, and capable, and which has the ability to re-train as required.

HE has concentrated on the 18-21 age group, providing them with an established curriculum taught in traditional ways, with prescribed assignments and examinations. Universities and the majority of their academic staff are familiar and comfortable with this system, based on summative assessment of knowledge acquisition based on a body of subject literature.

There may be a feeling at some universities that there are enough potential students around without the need to enter new and difficult areas, because traditionally they have focused on a ready market from schools, which teach and assess in the same way, enabling them in three years to educate those students to the honours degree level. However, continuing to base a strategy on that premise is unlikely to prove successful for the UK/EU 18-21 age group, because demographics show that these numbers are declining.

Some universities have recognised this, but have decided to follow a strategy of internationalisation. For others this will not be an option and, therefore, if

they wish to sustain and build student numbers, those universities will need to engage with the, as yet, largely untapped market of workforce development.

Statistics are hard to come by, if only because of the problem of definitions, but the Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE) estimates the size of the market where employers are prepared to pay for workforce development to be between £4 billion and £8 billion. (That may be a conservative figure, as the Learning Skills Council has estimated the market to be worth £25 billion.) Of that, only £130 million goes to HE. Whatever the figure, HE appears to be missing out on a large and lucrative market. Once it grasps the point that, in the present financial climate, accessing a further 10% of this market will provide additional funding of £400–£800 million, there will be a rush to engage.

The market is potentially even bigger if other groups are included such as house parents, carers, the unemployed and those working in voluntary capacities. Where work-based learning is concerned it is essential to understand that significant, recognisable learning can occur anywhere and at any time outside of formal educational structures or designated teaching spaces, and also outside of formal employment.

The challenge is to provide a set of work-based learning pathways through education, with clear progression opportunities, establishing parity between work-based learning, academic provision, and combinations of the two. This involves a complex set of issues. There is a very large market made up of individuals and employers, who to date have been wary of formal education and view HE as a 'club' they would not be allowed to join.

The urgent need is for a bridge between work-based learning and academic learning. This might be achieved by the use of, for example, National Occupational Standards (Roodhouse, S. and Hemsworth, D. (2004)), which were developed by employers through Sector Skills Councils but remain rooted outside the HE system. HE is familiar with course and module learning outcomes, and they can be derived from, or mapped across to, National Occupational Standards. Swails (2004) recommended that the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) should consider relating its benchmark statements to those standards. It would also be important to be able to map the National Occupational Standards across to the National Qualifications Framework that came into effect in 2004.

Because of the lack of clarity around work-based learning in HE, students and employers are wary of committing their time and resources to something that may ultimately be seen as having little value. The DfES (2004) stated that:

'The evidence that foundation degrees lead to genuine career opportunities in their own right, as well as progression to honours degrees, would have a major impact on demand.'

Although the quotation relates to foundation degrees, the principle applies to vocational awards in general.

This is an exciting market as the following examples illustrate:

- **Large employers** increasingly operate internationally with no sense of geographical boundaries or artificial time periods based on notional academic years. Staff can therefore find themselves working anywhere in the world for variable periods of time which in very many cases denies them access to UK HE (or at the very least disrupts their studies) and crucially does not allow for the recognition of what they will have accomplished and learned from their time working overseas

- **Small and Medium Sized Enterprises** have traditionally been a difficult sector in terms of HE involvement. Because of the nature of these enterprises, HE in its traditional form is not an option for many of their employees and yet real and significant work-based learning is being achieved that is going unrecognised
- **Large government departments and public sector bodies** - HE needs to work with these to develop specific programmes leading to specific awards. In the case of, for example, the Fire Service or the Police, this would involve work-based learning gained at critical incidents. There are some 58,000 fire officers and some 400,000 police officers across all ranks. The Fire Service now uses Individual Personal Development Schemes which do not lead to any award. The learning involved is neither accredited nor validated by HE so individuals cannot use it to access higher awards
- **Disaster Management** is an area of growing importance in the UK and internationally, and involves cross-disciplinary working of a high order that could be recognised and validated
- **Research Degrees** - the market also includes the need for work-based learning to include research degrees. The UK PhD has been criticised by the government, industry, research councils and students alike and this has led to the development of professional doctorates. These in turn have been criticised if only because in many instances they simply ape the PhD. The position regarding doctoral provision in the UK is important for the economic and social well-being of the country and yet it is sliding into disrepute. It is too important an area to be left to local initiatives and needs a national solution.

What Needs to Change?

The current delivery, assessment, accreditation, validation and funding arrangements serve only to disenfranchise work-based learning

courses. The recognition of work-based learning must be supported by consistent, transparent and robust processes which will establish the credibility of courses and awards with students, employers and society as a whole.

Central to raising the status of work-based learning are the mechanisms for the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) and validation with which universities engage in a variety of *ad hoc* and inconsistent ways. APEL has not been widely adopted in part because subject-based academics need a clear match between the experiential learning being claimed and what they teach. It has also suffered from being viewed as labour intensive. HEIs have been cautious about what they see as the risks involved in accreditation, where quality assurance is deemed to be more vulnerable. All universities are only too aware of the impact of poor QAA reports and positions in league tables and this serves to make them highly conservative where non-traditional learning is concerned. National Occupational Standards, universally applied and understood, might help to overcome this concern. This view is echoed by Challis (2005) who identified a number of reasons why accreditation is not widely used but, perhaps more importantly, identified the need for institutional commitment at the highest level to ensure that accreditation is accepted as 'normal business'.

APEL decisions are a matter of academic judgement. As the staff may have varied levels of experience and training, it might be much less of a lottery if decisions were based on transparent and explicit standards, as could be provided by the use of National Occupational Standards.

HEIs impose upper limits for APEL from one-half to two-thirds of the credit required for an award. There is no objective reason for the variation and, indeed, the QAA's (2004) draft guidelines for accreditation do not assume a maximum level. As long as all the standards/learning outcomes have been met, there is no reason why the amount of credit should not

be 100%, thus bringing to an end the artificial requirement for work-based learners to engage with some part of the academic curriculum, even though they can demonstrate they already meet it through their experience.

Consideration will also need to be given as to the evidence that a work-based learner would need to present when claiming accreditation and whatever form it takes it will need to meet the four tests of acceptability, sufficiency, authenticity and currency.

HE's concerns about labour intensive accreditation could be addressed by engaging in a deeper relationship with employers. This will only be achieved by the involvement of industry bodies, professional bodies and employers from the outset to ensure relevance, credibility and focus. Employers are often used to verify an individual learner's occupational competence but are not used for the summative assessment of academic credit. A partnership with employers becomes possible with the use of transparent, meaningful and accepted standards, such as the National Occupational Standards, against which judgements can be made.

The cultural and historical tradition of HE values the conventional mode of learning that predominates with each subject, based on its own canon of literature. Many universities still operate on the basis that lecturers are teachers rather than facilitators or brokers of knowledge and skills who are responsive to the needs of the student.

Burns *et al.* (2000), in commenting on these cultural and historical attitudes, stated:

'Education that delivers skills for the benefit of individuals and employers has always been recognised as part of the infrastructure of an industrial society. Society provided the opportunities for education through university, further education colleges and schools. One common characteristic of all these (institutions) was that they decided what the courses were and when they were available.'

The QAA has an important part to play where work-based learning is concerned. In 2004 the QAA stated:

'The emerging agenda for Higher Education in the UK promotes lifelong learning, social inclusion, wider participation, employability and partnership working with business, community organisations and among Higher Education institutions nationally and internationally. Consequently Higher Education institutions are increasingly recognising the significant knowledge, skills and understanding which can be developed as a result of learning opportunities found at work, both paid and unpaid, and through individual activities and interests.'

This provides encouragement from the QAA to attract learners who would be unlikely to consider an award because of their lack of confidence or of the formal qualifications which might normally be required for entry into a degree programme, and the mechanism for this is accreditation. However, quality assurance processes do consume valuable resources that are then ironically unavailable, for example, to produce new ways of facilitating and supporting student learning.

The traditional curriculum and its delivery and assessment are being questioned by the government, employers and students. Students commonly reflect that university was life-enhancing but consistently state that it did not provide them with the skills they needed to obtain and retain employment, or indeed be able to set up their own business. Employers complain that graduates do not have the skills looked for to enable their recruitment.

Academics will need to operate within a pedagogic model that recognises and values work-based learning as equivalent yet different to the academic learning of the traditional Honours Degree. HE will need to be responsive to the needs of employers to have internal training courses and experiences validated, thereby providing individual employees with a

gateway to further qualifications and courses. Individuals and organisations will derive satisfaction in having their in-company training kite-marked by HE.

The changes being advocated in this paper can take time to implement, requiring high-level direction and a great deal of consideration. Middlesex University (Garnett *et al.* 2004) dealt with the issues raised in this paper by recognising work-based learning as a field of study in its own right, clearing the way for individual learners to claim for the full extent of their learning achieved. This is a model of good practice that needs to be disseminated and accepted nationally as a way forward, enabling HE to sidestep the culture and traditions of academic learning and to work within an alternative pedagogic model.

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Putting principles into practice: a change model for a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

Liz McDowell, University of Northumbria at Newcastle

The CETL initiative and models of change

Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) are an initiative of the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The aim of the initiative is to:

'recognise, celebrate and promote excellence by rewarding teachers who have made a demonstrable impact on student learning and who enthuse, motivate and influence others to do the same.' (HEFCE, 2004, p.3)

Whilst CETLs are expected to show a 'discernible impact', we are told that they are not projects. We are all very familiar with projects where we bid for funding to undertake development according to pre-defined programme goals. CETL is different in the sense that we were invited to define for ourselves what 'excellence' meant in our context.

'We do not attempt to define excellence in absolute or "gold standard" terms. This ... is more likely to constrain than encourage institutions to select excellent practice in a local context.' (p. 10)

Projects bring with them a raft of expectations and mechanisms: accountability, targets, business plans, milestones and so on. CETLs come with a vision:

'Our vision for CETLs is of vibrant, dynamic entities with a visible presence in their institutions.'

Projects provide us with a defined framework within which to work, to plan our activities, and to demonstrate our progress, impacts and achievements. Perhaps, as Murray Saunders (2005) has discussed in a recent Higher Education Academy newsletter, CETLs are operating within a different framework. Projects have been underpinned by technical-rational and resource-driven models of change. The new framework is underpinned by complexity models of change (Trowler, Saunders and Knight, 2003). Networks and partnerships are seen as the way to harness the energy and vision of staff, and perhaps students, for positive development. These processes can seem ill-defined and unpredictable: however, this kind of approach fits well with the proposals of the CETL in Assessment for Learning (AfL) at Northumbria, one of the 74 CETLs currently funded. (The full list can be found at <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/TInits/cetl/final/>)

CETL Assessment for Learning

The CETL AfL is based on well-established innovative practice and research in assessment. Our approach to AfL means that students benefit from assessment which does far more than simply test what they know. They take part in the kinds of activities that are valuable in the long term, helping them to develop and providing them with guidance and feedback. They learn how to assess themselves, and to support others, as future professionals. For us, AfL is not primarily a set of techniques but a re-conceptualisation of learning which can lead to a variety of specific practices.

We use a set of six principles or conditions to express our perspective on AfL. It requires a learning environment that:

1. Emphasises authenticity and complexity in the content and methods of assessment, rather than reproduction of knowledge and reductive measurement
2. Uses high-stakes summative assessment rigorously but sparingly, rather than as the main driver for learning
3. Offers students extensive opportunities to engage in the kinds of tasks that develop and demonstrate their learning, thus building their confidence and capabilities before they are summatively assessed
4. Is rich in feedback derived from formal mechanisms such as tutor comments on assignments and student self-review logs
5. Is rich in informal feedback. Examples of this are peer review of draft writing and collaborative project work, which provide students with a continuous flow of feedback on 'how they are doing'
6. Develops students' abilities to direct their own learning, evaluate their own progress and attainments, and support the learning of others.

The CETL is cross-institutional but is initially based in a small number of core subjects: childhood studies, education, engineering, English, history, and psychology. Within each of these subjects there is a CETL Fellow who takes a leading role in the enhancement of AfL practices. Although starting with a few subjects, we aim to influence practice across the university. When considering how we should go about this, the way forward seemed obvious – if not easy! We can adapt our AfL principles and apply them, not to students and their learning, but to the process of staff and organisational learning that we believe can transform practice across the university.

Using the six principles in changing AfL practice

The rationale behind our AfL principles is that assessment is a crucial element of learning and teaching, and that we should harness the power of assessment to promote good learning. If we then think about changing teaching and assessment practice as a process of learning at individual, collective and organisational levels, we can then see how our principles can be applied to the promotion of effective change.

This shift of focus requires us to:

1. *Recognise and value complexity and authenticity in AfL practices*

We expect AfL practice to vary considerably across different contexts, subjects, modes and levels of study. We aim to support staff in developing their own understandings and interpretations of AfL principles and in developing AfL practices that fit their subjects and contexts. This means using a partnership approach where everybody is engaged in learning and strengthening their understandings of AfL and the rich variety of ways in which it can be employed. This is quite different from change models which aim to promote 'best practice' solutions or to disseminate ideas and methods derived from pilot projects and 'early adopters'.

2. *Use evaluation to support development and keep accountability demands in check*

Formative evaluation, which helps to improve AfL practice and enables sharing of experiences and ideas, is a key component of our activities. This contributes to a positive climate where engagement with AfL is fostered through participation and social motivations. We do need to be accountable but we do not want a heavy emphasis on hitting targets to dominate what we do. We must enable emergent outcomes and achievements to be fully taken into account in demonstrating the value of our activities. Over emphasis on accountability demands can very easily lead to a reliance on incentives and sanctions as extrinsic motivators for change. The parallel here with the dangers of summative assessment dominating our learning and teaching is clear.

3. *Assist staff to gain the confidence and capabilities to develop their AfL practices*

Change often requires support. Things often do not work out exactly as we hope and there are often disappointments along the way. We aim to foster a positive environment where colleagues in local teams, and across the university, can collaborate in delivering the kinds of educational changes they wish to promote, can exchange ideas, difficulties and solutions and share successes. We aim to provide a wide range of tools and resources to help staff to access a range of AfL ideas and approaches that they might adapt, and to alert them to potential pitfalls. Equally important is our strategy to review and develop the university environment, especially its procedures and processes, to make them more hospitable to the requirements of AfL. We need to address barriers to AfL

practices and to put more supportive structures in place.

4. *Use formal feedback to promote change in AfL practice and in the university environment*

At the local or 'classroom' level, the use of evaluation tools provides formal feedback on the effectiveness of AfL approaches and provides pointers towards further development. Broader organisational learning requires discussion of AfL to be part of the formal processes and decision-making systems. We ensure that AfL is considered within the formal quality assurance and enhancement structures and that we participate in relevant committees. CETL AfL has a voice in important decision-making bodies, such as Learning and Teaching Committees, and is sufficiently embedded to ensure that we are included in formal consultations on matters relating to learning and teaching. Particularly important are formal links with the student body at institutional and departmental levels.

5. *Use informal feedback to promote change in AfL practice and in the university environment*

Our approach to AfL is based substantially on social models of learning. We expect learning to be more effective when there are opportunities to test out ideas and give and receive feedback, to collaborate with others to meet challenges, and to broaden thinking and understanding through access to a range of views and perspectives. This is just as important for staff as it is for students. CETL AfL supports interaction and collaboration amongst immediate colleagues and develops communities of interest across the university. We are greatly assisted in this by having a physical centre. The CETL hub provides a well-designed, well-equipped and welcoming environment where staff can meet and work together in a variety of ways, from organised meetings and workshops to chats over a cup of coffee. We are already noticing the ways in which this new environment can free up creative 'space' for thinking about new developments and also the benefits that 'bumping into' like-minded colleagues can generate.

6. *Develop the university's capacity to generate and support positive change*

CETL AfL does this by helping to create an environment which is supportive of change which is led at the local level, building on collaboration within existing teams and across the university. We particularly contribute by providing tools, resources and support for change based on AfL principles. As a very prominent focus, CETL ensures the visibility of the change, progress and energy centred on AfL through the flows of communication and feedback within a complex institution.

Rhetoric or reality?

To some readers our change agenda may seem somewhat idealistic and perhaps impractical. It does differ from some of the accepted approaches to good project management, dissemination and embedding. If we go along with the often-heard claim that there is nothing so useful as a good theory (or set of principles?),

perhaps the utility of our approach will be assured. Our change agenda has, in fact, a dual history, being based on both AfL principles developed over many years, and experience of successful institutional-level change management in relation to e-learning. In the e-learning development programme, successes were based on providing tools and support for locally-based developments, fostering learning through collaboration and communication, and investing considerable time and energy in transforming the university environment into one which is user-friendly for e-learning. The parallels with our CETL AfL approach are evident.

Nevertheless, there are still worrying moments. For example, when a committee demands to see progress on targets and figures to back up the claims, and these seem to represent only an impoverished version of all the exciting activity that is *really* going on. There are still times when a CETL director wakes up in the night thinking: 'Are they really going to believe we're achieving anything worthwhile?' However, these concerns are part of the 'gift' of CETL status, bringing along with it the opportunity to be part of a new framework for change in higher education, moving away from some of

the constraints of technical-rational project-based approaches, and making it work!

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Further information

The CETL AfL web site is under development at: http://northumbria.ac.uk/cetl_afl/

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Book Reviews

Leading and Managing People in Education

Tony Bush and David Middleswood
ISBN 0 7619440 8 7
Sage Publications, 2005

The focus of *Leading and Managing People in Education* is Schools and Colleges; however, much of the book is equally applicable to leadership and management issues in tertiary and higher education institutions.

Educational leadership has become a field of global significance during the past few years and the national and international research literature cited in this book reflect this. The authors start from the premise that developing people provides the best prospect of enhanced and sustainable performance and that recognition of this from leaders and managers is likely to be a motivating force in enhancing people performance.

The book is divided into 3 sections: Leading and Managing People: Setting the Scene; Key Concepts Underpinning Educational Leadership; Leading and Managing Key Processes. In the first section, the authors give considerable attention to making the

distinction between the twin concepts of leadership and management. They argue that the two concepts must be given equal prominence but it is important to recognise the differences. Quoting recent research, they suggest that organisations which are over managed but lack strong leadership eventually lose any sense of spirit and purpose while poorly managed organisations with strong charismatic leaders may soar temporarily only to crash shortly thereafter. With this as a backdrop, this first section then covers a raft of issues such as motivation, professional development, empowerment, the importance of recognising the contribution of support staff to the success of the organisation and the nature of successful educational leadership. As an academic staff member in a leadership position in a university, there was much I learned in reading this section of the book.

Moving to the second section of the book, the authors provide an excellent chapter on organisational cultures. Given the increasingly diverse nature of the workforce and the 'clients' of most organisations, it is clearly important to understand the concept of culture at local, national, societal and organisational levels. Leaders and

managers must recognise the influence of 'culture' within their own organisations and understand its impact on the workforce. Leading nicely on, the next few chapters focus on organisational structures and roles, staff motivation and job satisfaction, leading and managing for equal opportunities and leading and managing through teams.

Each chapter provides pros and cons of different styles of management and leadership and the book moves easily between national and international mini case studies of different approaches. The chapter on organisational structures and roles, for example, looks at issues of providing flexibility between management prescribed roles for individuals and self-defined roles, the potential and the pitfalls depending on governance, funding and the political imperatives associated with different types of educational organisations.

To the delight of this reader, the authors have emphasised the importance of staff motivation, job satisfaction and professional development to the overall success of the organisation through enhanced retention of staff.

The final part of the book takes us through the management of key processes. Examples include: leading and managing staff recruitment and selection; induction of staff as an ongoing process rather than a one-off programme; the value to staff and to the organisation of having effective mentoring and coaching processes in place and the added value of having fair and transparent performance management and appraisal procedures.

The final chapter of the book highlights schools and colleges as learning organisations and emphasises the point that in a true learning organisation both staff and students see themselves as learners. This is a highly appropriate endpoint.

This book is an easy and accessible read while at the same time covering a vast range of up-to-date research. The authors place a strong and appropriate emphasis on: the symbiotic relationship between management and leadership; the need to recognise that a one-size-fits-all approach to either leadership or management is the road to nowhere and the importance of globalisation to the development of leaders and managers in schools and colleges.

I found this to be a very valuable resource book and despite its emphasis on schools, I believe much of what the authors have to say is of equal value to leaders and managers in Colleges and Universities.

Lorraine Stefani, is Director of the Centre for Academic Development at the University of Auckland.

Audience Response Systems in Higher Education

Edited by David A. Banks

ISBN 159140948-9 Information Science Publishing, Hershey, PA, 2006, 405 pages

This collection is the first book about audience response systems which¹, typically, allow each student in a group to vote in real time, choosing one of

several options using the buttons on a handset. The signal from the handsets, either infra-red or radio wave, is detected and processed by a PC that displays them graphically with a digital projector. Depending on the technology and the number of handsets in use, voting results can appear in seconds or a few minutes. ARS are typically used in lecture theatres with large groups but also in classrooms with smaller ones.

If you are unfamiliar with them, it is not surprising. Although they have a history in HE of four decades, only in the last few years have handsets begun to migrate from the hidden classrooms of enthusiasts into the mainstream, due partly to falling equipment costs and an increasing number of manufacturers, and partly to the changing expectations of the learning experience of both students and teachers.

If you are sceptical – wondering why you would want to give multiple choice tests to large groups – then this book will make you reconsider. It is predominantly concerned with pedagogical issues: how to use the technology in various ways to engage students in productive learning activities. If you are already interested in the possibilities, this book will provide plenty of ideas and advice from authors based in the USA, UK, Canada, Australasia, and South Africa.

I admit to being an enthusiast, and I have to declare an interest as a co-author of chapter 21², but I tried to take a sceptical position when reading the book: Who is in control of the learning-teaching situation when ARS are used – learners or teachers, or technology? What beneficial pedagogies does the technology enable? What evaluations have been done? The answers, briefly, are that the technology is not in control, but that teachers can use it to share control with their students; that a number of teaching strategies have been developed and tested; and that typically evaluations have very positive outcomes.

The four chapters in section 1 – describing aspects of the history of technology by authors involved in its

development – were absorbing. Louis Abrahamson gives a substantial ‘brief history’ in chapter 1, based on his personal involvement since 1985. At first he encountered suspicions from colleagues that the technology was to be used for monitoring and controlling students. These fears soon dissipated ‘after the classroom successes were becoming too obvious to refute’. He suggests that using the system leads teachers to question their pedagogical strategies and discover better ways to teach. (It may also be the case that it was and is those teachers who are reflecting on pedagogy who will experiment with such systems: unless one were concerned for student learning one would not see the need for the communication in the classroom that these systems support.)

Abrahamson, and others, review the evidence for the educational effects. The reaction of students is generally overwhelmingly positive: ‘the great majority of students believed they understood the subject better, came to class better prepared, paid more attention in class, and enjoyed it more.’ There is less literature on the effects on learning outcomes, but it is also very positive.

Chapter 2 by Eugene Judson and Daiyo Sawada provides a less personal, systematic, history and a review of the literature on evaluations: ‘has student learning been enhanced’ and, if so, ‘what led to such improvement?’ Firstly, student reaction is generally positive: research shows clearly that use of ARS motivates students. On student performance, much will depend on the teaching strategy of which the technology is a part. Early use was as a lecture-pacing device with a behaviouristic flavour; dividing a lecture into sections and checking individual understanding after each section before moving on. There was little evidence of improved outcomes from this strategy. However, from about 1990, pedagogy was influenced by constructivist principles and now an ARS is often used to support sharing of thought processes and to facilitate discussion between students and with teachers. At least in science teaching, the more recent evidence is of significant improvements in conceptual understanding.

Chapter 3 by Ray Burnstein and Leon Lederman describes a 10-year period of developing the uses of a wireless ARS in lectures, transforming a passive student experience into classroom interactivity. Chapter 4 by Harold Horowitz is based on his 25-year experience of ARS. After a description of early experiments, in which students were more positive about ARS than were the teachers, he gives a history of the technological development. He ends with advice on question design, which other authors also provide.

The remaining 20 chapters are varied and, to a greater or lesser extent, are case studies based on local experience over a shorter period than in section 1. They involve many subject areas, from law to maths to medicine. Words that recur prominently include motivation, participation, activity, interaction, and engagement. There is often emphasis on pedagogy and evaluation. Readers will want to skim and sample what is most relevant to them. Chapter 13 by Penuel, Abrahamson and Roschelle, is unusual in that it develops a sociocultural theoretical framework that sees learning as a transformation of student participation in the class.

What can we make of all this? My own experience of using voting systems, both electronic and manual, is that they can transform the teaching-learning situation. An ARS opens up new possibilities for face-to-face teaching and learning in groups. Reflective teachers in HE have started exploring these possibilities; we can join them with the reassurance that others have often achieved positive results. Parts of this book provide a good introduction to the literature and to some tested pedagogical strategies. In the last 10 years learning technology, or e-learning, has concentrated on online support and interactions, but many teachers and students want face-to-face contact. An ARS makes possible new types of communication in the classroom, just as online services do outside the classroom. ARS seem likely to become a significant tool in enhancing the face-to-face learning experience. We may one day wonder how we taught without one.

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- ¹ Some alternative labels are listed on Steve Draper's Interactive Lectures website at <http://www.psy.gla.ac.uk/~steve/ilig/main.html#Using>
- ² See <http://www.communicubes.com>

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Teaching International Students

Edited by Jude Carroll and Janette Ryan

ISBN 0415350662

Routledge Falmer, 2005, 405 pages

This is a timely, welcome and effective publication, edited by two of the leading authorities on the subject, that will be of use to staff developers, teachers and others dealing with international students directly or indirectly.

The large increase in international student numbers in anglophone universities in recent years, and the challenges and opportunities this presents, has also shown up a widespread lack of expertise and a dearth of resources. This collection of essays provides a valuable source of practical advice backed by theory from 14 different contributors of varying experiences and specialisms.

In their introductory chapter 'Canaries in the coalmine' Ryan and Carroll set out the background for the collection with a convincing exposition of how modifying our attitudes and practices to deal with international students can have benefits to staff and other students alike.

The rest of the book is divided into three parts: 'Cultural migration and learning', 'Methodologies and pedagogies', and 'Internationalising the curriculum'. Within this framework there is a pleasing balance of either theoretically or practically biased chapters. The former provide an agenda for pushing for an overhaul of learning contexts, while the latter give the less experienced a wide variety of strategies. With the lack of in-depth cross-cultural experience of many lecturers (and staff development/

student support staff) it is also helpful to have the plethora of anecdotal examples that the contributors include.

While this book rides the wave of the inclusion agenda and rightly attacks the 'deficit' model of international students, at the same time warning notes are sounded. As Professor Louie points out in her chapter 'Gathering cultural knowledge - Useful or use with care?', in the rush to improve our intercultural competency we can be prone to asking for specific solutions ('How do Koreans learn?') or universal cures, when we are dealing with an almost infinitely complex subject. A theme that seems to emerge is that what is most desirable is a 'meta-cultural' standpoint where we can adopt a neutral attitude to objectively assess all the cultural factors involved, including our own.

In the end, it is the chapters that provide practical advice on teaching that will be most eagerly welcomed by teachers and staff developers. Carroll contributes a number of these and the subject of multi-cultural classes and inter-student reactions. Good, too, to see that the importance of the English language as a medium is fully discussed as well as the current 'hot topic' of plagiarism and strategies for prevention.

It is clear after reading the book, if it was not before, that international students feel hard done by and misunderstood, and that the problems are significant. It is equally clear that the information and evidence contained here will be of great use in awareness-raising and improving teaching and learning, if it is applied. As touched on in the final chapter by the editors, the question is how to embed this awareness in the practices and ethos of an institution. With the current agenda of internationalisation, the recruitment of large numbers of international students, and widening participation, the book could not be more pertinent.

John Morris, International Student Support Officer, University of Keele.

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dyslexia has increased steadily over recent years. This is not to say that there has been an increase in the likelihood of students having dyslexia, more that the methods of diagnosis have become more advanced and as such more people are receiving accurate diagnosis. It is important to emphasise that just because a person is diagnosed with dyslexia, it does not mean that they will have the same preferences or learning styles as someone else with dyslexia.

As dyslexia is more widely recognised, lecturers are becoming more adept at tailoring material to their range of needs. To say that e-learning is of assistance to a dyslexic learner would be understating the issue. E-learning in its simplest, and some might say most commonly used, form (making materials and information available in an electronic format) can be of great benefit to a very large number of students, irrespective of ability. If materials are made available electronically, then the student can adapt the look of the content to suit their own needs. For example, if a handout for a session is available before the lecture, a learner could change the font, text size, alignment etc. to ensure its appropriateness for their needs. This method can work exceedingly well if there are a number of students with conflicting needs within the same class.

Although making material available in this way is exceedingly useful, it does not negate the need for lecturers to be aware of general techniques they can implement. For example, documents produced in a sans serif font (such as Verdana, Trebuchet or Arial) can increase readability.

Some other tips on writing accessibly would include:

- Using the in-built Headings and Styles options to appropriately structure a document
- Use appropriate fonts and designs e.g. a sans serif font, minimum size 12, left aligned
- Avoid underlining and capitalisation. Consider bold for emphasis
- Ensure background is a single colour with sufficient contrast with font
- Consider materials printed on a pale coloured background, such as cream or yellow.

Supporting staff to support disability

TechDis believe that e-learning is a major tool for lecturers to provide a range of learning experiences to support disabled students. Not all of them will meet the 'guidelines and standards' laid down by either technical groups or single-issue disability groups, i.e. it is unlikely that a single piece of learning material will be suitable for both a kinaesthetic dyslexic learner and a blind learner. To support the Higher Education sector in providing valid e-learning experiences for all learners, a series of materials have been developed exploring these issues. The TechDis Staff packs can be downloaded or viewed online at <http://www.techdis.ac.uk/staffpacks>; there are currently seven packs looking at a range of disability and technology related issues including those discussed in this article. The packs are best used in workshop sessions, where staff can discuss issues and

approaches. If you would like further information about how to use them, or a hard-copy of the pack, e-mail helpdesk@techdis.ac.uk.

The provision of materials via technology does present the opportunity for supporting a greater diversity of needs, furthermore it also allows students who may be using specific technology to better support their needs. For example, a blind student using software that reads to them, or a package that provides inline support for spelling, context and meaning of some words or concepts that, because of their disability (e.g. dyslexia), they may have difficulties with. This would not be possible using face-to-face methods alone, but by supporting aspects of e-learning, the education experience becomes more widely accessible.

Useful links

- TechDis Website: <http://www.techdis.ac.uk>
- TechDis Staff Packs: <http://www.techdis.ac.uk/staffpacks>
- TechDis Technology Database: <http://www.techdis.ac.uk/gettechnology>
- UKOLN Website: <http://www.ukoln.ac.uk>
- Digital Media Access Group: <http://www.dmag.org.uk>

References

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- Sloan, D., Kelly, B., Phipps, L., Petrie, H. and Hamilton, F. (2005) 'Forcing Standardization or Accommodating Diversity? A Framework for Applying the WCAG in the Real World', in *Proceedings of the 2005 International Cross-Disciplinary Workshop on Web Accessibility (W4A)* (<http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/web-focus/papers/w4a-2005/>, accessed May 2005).

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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.

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Disability and e-Learning

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Introduction

In September 2005, the TechDis and UKOLN teams won an award for their research paper highlighting technology standards and issues of e-learning accessibility. The theme of e-learning and accessibility standards (including the Holistic Model of e-learning) is examined in this paper along with how this impacts on learning styles and teaching techniques within Higher Education. The paper also covers the issues surrounding the use of e-learning for dyslexic users and the role staff developers can play in supporting disabled staff and students.

Driving the change

Since the passing of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001), there have been very few institutions in court defending their practice (and of those which appeared in court, all cases were settled before verdict). Why is this the case? Perhaps, cynically, some would say that institutions settled before reaching court, averting bad publicity and costly lawyers. However, it may be that there are very few staff working in our sector who would deliberately discriminate in their practice. If asked to amend our practice in order to support the needs of a disabled student or colleague, who would refuse? This may be an idealised view, but when we look at the range of education initiatives in Higher Education – all of which aim to support students and student learning – perhaps it is not surprising that there have been few cases.

The level of funding spent specifically on disability projects has been small when compared with mainstream learning and teaching. However, the legislation did achieve one significant aim: it raised awareness. In a short period of time projects and initiatives, such as the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning Projects, and the then Learning and Teaching Support Network, asked themselves, 'what does this mean for my practice?', or more honestly 'what does this mean for my practice, and will I end up in court?' The outputs from these projects, tempered with appropriate advice from Staff and Educational Development Units, provided an excellent basis from which to find alternative pedagogies for supporting disabled students.

In e-learning the approach to supporting disabled students was to look for a technological answer, a set of standards and checkboxes that could be ticked when achieved. This misapplication of technology standards and guidelines initially hampered support for disabled students through e-learning. In a face-to-face learning situation we (the sector) understood that we needed to adapt our approaches to suit the different needs we encountered, but faced with using technology to teach, we want to create a uniform and standardised experience. In the Phipps-Kelly Holistic Model for e-learning (Figure 1, below), the learner's needs (in this situation a disabled learner) are seen as a part of the whole

institution, where accessibility of a learning resource, the infrastructure of the institution, local factors (such as subject discipline or language), the intended learning outcomes and the usability of the resource are all considered in the context of a quality enhancement framework. This quality enhancement framework is needed to support the approach, ensuring that documented policies are provided and systematic procedures for ensuring compliance with the policies are implemented.

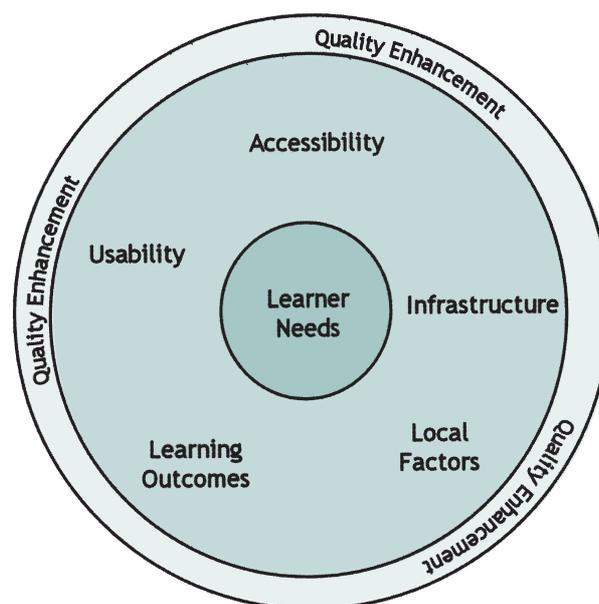


Figure 1: Phipps-Kelly Holistic Model

The advantages of the Holistic Model over a 'standards' approach to e-learning

For staff involved in e-learning, development and deployment are often rapid, feeding a specific need. The application of 'standards' not designed to support learning can create major barriers, as discussed by Sloan *et al.* (2005). The Holistic Model encourages the learner's needs to be considered first and foremost. For example, encouraging the use of interactive multimedia (e.g. Flash-based material) as a resource for very visual-tactile learners, perhaps some dyslexic learners, but recognising that a radio play may be more appropriate for a blind student. This is more aligned with 'face-to-face' not 'e' practice, where many lecturers often vary their delivery and methods depending on the situation.

Dyslexia and technology

Currently in Higher Education the most commonly encountered disability is dyslexia (and other Specific Learning Difficulties such as dyspraxia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia and developmental co-ordination disorder). The number of students entering universities with diagnosed

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