

Summer 1992

# THE NEW ACADEMIC

volume one  
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The Magazine of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

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## EMPOWERING STUDENTS

*Lee Harvey and Alison Burrows*

'Empowering students' is a phrase often bandied about at conferences and in the literature on teaching and learning. Empowering students, however, means many different things and it is debatable how serious we really are about giving students control over the educational process and their post-educational lives.

There are those for whom empowering students lies at the heart of a radical reappraisal of higher education and underpins any assessment of educational quality. There are others for whom empowering students is a contradiction in terms. Students cannot possibly know what is good for them, nor should they be encouraged to make a nuisance of themselves by demanding time, effort and resources from a hard-pressed intellectual elite that deigns to give them the benefit of its wisdom.

For those to whom empowering students is an important consideration for the future development of higher education, four approaches of empowerment are identifiable. First, empowering students is equated with *student evaluation*. Students are invited to provide their views on the content and organisation of the programmes of study in which they are involved. These are fed back into the day-to-day management and teaching of the programme and into the longer term strategic plans. Some institutions require that students' evaluation reports are included in annual course reports and review and validation documents.

A second approach to empowering students is to give them more control over their learning. This ranges from allowing students to *select* their own curriculum to students entering into a learning *contract*. The selection of a curriculum usually means, in practice, choosing which *teaching* programmes they attend and thus which assessment they undertake. While superficially liberating, this does not necessarily empower the student. The American experience from the 1960s suggests the contrary. An unstructured collection of small units which the student selects from a sometimes bewildering array of available options, with little or no guidance, can ill-equip them for the post-educational experience. The problem with the open 'cafeteria' approach is that while units are accumulated there is often no identifiable progression. It is the 'Green

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This issue's special supplement, edited by Carole and David Baume, covers developments in art and design teaching. See pp11-14

## THE NEW ACADEMIC

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# EDITORIAL

The theory goes that if it ain't bust, don't fix it. The CVCP Academic Audit Unit's recently published annual report<sup>1</sup> suggests that teaching in universities ain't exactly bust, but that the demands of changing from providing elitist to mass higher education are resulting in the emergence of a few creaks and groans which suggest an imminent need for overhaul.

In order to change, people need to know both that where they are is no longer pleasant **and** that there are rewards to be had in moving on to a new position. Greater emphasis on quality assurance mechanisms in institutions is showing up for many where the need for change is. The difficulty comes in identifying the rewards of moving on to the new place (apart from sheer personal survival, that is). The Academic Audit Unit's report points to the need for effective teaching to be rewarded by promotion or other forms of recognition. It also highlights the need for the 'domestic' arrangements for external examiners to change to a more 'contractual' arrangement between the university and the examiner and for a proper level of remuneration to be established for external examiners.

And then there's the issue of performance indicators. The report refers to ways in which universities are now establishing quantitative performance indicators and using these effectively. But, as it points out, the development of qualitative indicators is still in its infancy. It is essential that institutions find ways of ensuring that the fundamental changes they are making to their way of delivering higher education, as a result of growing numbers of students and other pressures, improve rather than diminish the students' learning experiences.

The AAU annual report expresses the auditors' disappointment that too few academic staff encountered in the institutions audited so far are devoting much time to curriculum development or to innovative teaching methods and practices. It may well be that, whilst pressures are building up to make life as a university teacher more and more stressful, there seem to be few rewards being dished out by universities to those staff who are attempting to develop imaginative and innovative approaches to growing student numbers. The report says: "If more is not to mean worse, the new academic demands of the expansion will need to be managed consciously and imaginatively". This cannot mean just individuals and course teams developing new approaches: universities' management, structures and procedures must also develop to support their teaching colleagues.

1. CVCP Academic Audit Unit *Annual Report of the Director 1990/91*, February 1992, CVCP Academic Audit Unit, University of Birmingham

### APOLOGY

In the article by Wendy Stewart-David and Geoff Moore in the second issue of *The New Academic* two boxes of information about student and staff expectations were omitted. Our sincere apologies to the authors for this error. The omitted information is available from the SCED administrator, Jill Brookes, 69 Cotton Lane, Moseley, Birmingham B13 9SE, tel. 021-449 6313.

Ideas, comments and articles for the next edition of *The New Academic* should be sent to the Editor, John Gold, c/o SCED.

The Special Supplement in the autumn issue will be on Business and Management. Contributions should also be sent to John Gold, c/o SCED.

## Empowering Students. Continued from page 1

Shield Stamp' approach to education. Collect enough credits and cash the book in for a degree. What is likely to be missing is conceptual development. Of course there are a number of well-structured modular courses in Britain which do not fall into this trap.

The development of a learning contract, while apparently more restrictive, has a much greater potential to empower students. The student does not simply choose which teaching programmes to attend but negotiates a *learning* experience. This has been used in work on management competences. The teacher is seen as a facilitator. The object of the programme is to achieve the management competences as specified. It starts with the facilitator helping the students to work out what competences they have achieved and how they might go about providing the evidence of their competence in that area. The rest of the programme might be in the shape of a learning contract negotiated between students and facilitator concerning work on achieving the other competences. The students control *how* they learn and when and how it is *assessed*. In an extreme case there could be no lectures or seminars at all.

A third perspective on empowering students is the idea of a Student Charter. Like any other consumer charter this is intended to give students a greater say about the nature and purposes of higher education as a whole. There are various ideas of what such a charter should involve and these reflect various degrees of student empowerment. The weakest is the Student Charter as a set of expectations about teacher performance (usually set by management) that students monitor. A stronger version is the charter as an independent kitemarking body monitoring basic provision within programmes, such as seminar facilities, library, information technology and personal tutorial provision (*Guardian* 15/10/91). It is debatable whether these 'watchdogs' empower students. They react to, rather than inform, educational policy. A strong version of a charter would go beyond the classroom and give the 'consumer' power to effect changes in institutional or even national provision.

The involvement of students as a pressure group in policy at the national or even institutional level has been perfunctory. The Student Satisfaction Project work at Birmingham Polytechnic provides a rare example of 'consumer' perceptions (if not demands) having direct effects on aspects of *institutional* policy. Recent research

is focusing more on students: for example, HEIST have just reported the results of a national survey of students.

While each of these approaches offers some control over the education process it is debatable how far they go to empowering students in their post-education careers. The fourth approach attempts to do both. Students, it argues, are empowered by developing their critical thinking, or metacognition. This requires an approach to teaching and learning that goes beyond requiring students to learn a body of knowledge and be able to apply it analytically.

Metacognition is about encouraging students to challenge their own, their peers' and their teachers' preconceptions; to question the established orthodoxy rather than swallow it unthinkingly; to develop their own opinions and be able to justify them. Metacognition encourages students to think about knowledge as a process *they* are engaged in, not some 'thing' they tentatively approach and selectively appropriate. Metacognition is about students having the confidence to assess and develop knowledge for themselves rather than submitting packaged chunks to an assessor who will tell them if it is sufficient or 'correct'. Metacognition requires students to self-assess, to be able to decide what is good quality work and to be confident when they have achieved it. In short, an approach that encourages metacognition treats students as *intellectual performers* rather than as compliant audience. It transforms teaching and learning into an active process of coming to understand. It enables students to go easily beyond the narrow confines of the 'safe' knowledge base of their academic discipline by applying themselves to whatever they encounter in the post-education world.

An approach to teaching and learning that develops students in this way is thus an altogether 'dangerous' process for professional academics. It is not just a loss of control over the structural organisation or academic content of higher education, it is a loss of control over the intellectual processes.

How far, then, is the drift towards empowering students likely to go? Will it be a mere gesture: a Student Charter of minimum acceptable conditions; a voice on a Board of Studies; or the provision of modular programmes with unlimited choices? Or, will it be a serious attempt to empower students through proactive involvement in educational policy, learning contracts and the development of metacognition?

*Lee Harvey and Alison Burrows are Senior Research Fellow and Research Fellow respectively for the Quality in Higher Education Project at Birmingham Polytechnic*

*If you have any comment to make on the issue of student empowerment or any of the other issues in The New Academic please write to the Editor, John Gold, c/o SCED.*

## THE SEMINAR

Graham Gibbs

While students experience more lectures than any other teaching method, lecturers, other than those in science, technology and the creative arts, probably spend more time in seminars than in any other teaching situation. Seminars are amongst the most expensive elements of British higher education. Some institutions' buildings were designed on the assumption that teaching happened largely in small groups in lecturers' offices. They are assumed to have a central role despite the fact that they are largely missing from higher education systems elsewhere in Europe. One of the most common fears expressed as classes get larger is that the burden of taking many parallel small seminar groups will become intolerable or alternatively that seminar groups will become too large to be effective. Abandoning seminars is not considered as an option. There is clearly a widespread and pervasive belief in their value. What is it which seminars are supposed to achieve which makes them so important and justifies their costs?

Seminars are supposed to involve students in discussion. Exploratory talk is crucial to the negotiation of meaning and to the development of understanding and anything which fosters exploratory talk would seem worthwhile. In practice the student who has prepared for a seminar does most of the talking - and this may involve reading out loud rather than exploratory talk - and most seminar group members say little. Studies of the participation of group members in such discussion reveals what we have all experienced - that a few members dominate and almost everyone else hardly speaks at all. This is partly a consequence of group dynamics - all unstructured groups reveal much the same patterns of interaction. It is also partly a consequence of the responsibility for the session residing in the only two people who know something about the topic being discussed - the seminar presenter and the lecturer - while the remainder have taken little trouble to prepare and adopt a range of strategies for disassociating themselves from responsibility for the success, or failure, of the session. When I was a student seminars were invariably awful but it never occurred to us to try to do anything to make them work - they were simply to be endured.

It is possible to change the dynamics of groups using a whole range of structuring devices - for example individual work, discussions in pairs, syndicate work, and so on. This can dramatically

change the level of involvement of students and increase the extent and quality of exploratory talk. The resulting sessions do not, however, resemble seminars. It is also possible to undertake induction exercises with students, concerned with how to make seminar sessions productive, and to develop a group contract between students so that everyone shares responsibility for making the sessions work. It is even possible to assess students at the end of the course on their contribution to making the seminar sessions work: assessing the extent and quality of their preparation, the way they made constructive contributions, the way they brought others into the discussion, and so on. These measures can have a dramatic effect on the health and value of seminar groups. However they do not address the next issue.

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*seminar n., monologue by a reluctant student to a small reluctant audience on a topic of interest to neither.*

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Seminars are claimed to develop students' ability to join in discussion and debate, to argue orally and to convince others, to question and to critique. These skills are assumed to be vital to subsequent work and for the rest of students' lives. Given the actual level of most students' involvement and the actual level of debate in most seminars this may seem a forlorn aspiration. However there is a more serious problem. As with my argument in the last issue of the *New Academic* about the value of essay writing, the main problem facing the transfer of skills from one situation to another is the similarity of the two situations involved. Outside academia people simply do not have discussions in the form of unstructured seminars. The presentation and discussion of evidence and arguments in the world of work takes a variety of forms: committees, courts of enquiry, cross-examination of witnesses, advocacy, negotiation, selling, and so on. If we were serious about this transfer to subsequent life then we would bring these forms of discussion into the classroom. Some of the most exciting and rigorous debates I have experienced in higher education borrowed such formats as frameworks for discussion. Such formats also provide a framework for a larger number of students to

become actively involved than do unstructured discussions and usually require more thorough preparation (for example preparing questions for witnesses or trying to anticipate difficult questions one might be asked).

Seminars are also claimed to develop students' presentation skills. Working with a Humanities department recently I suggested that this aim should be taken seriously and that students should be shown how to use overhead projectors, devise appropriate handouts and generally upgrade their presentation skills. Unfortunately there were no overhead projectors available, no facility for any kind of projection in the offices in which all group work took place, and no photocopying facilities with easy access for students. It was also considered unreasonable to ask students to pay for photocopies. Outside of academia presentations which consisted of the

presenter reading out from a script which no-one else has a copy of, with no visual aids whatsoever, would get short shrift - except where they have a largely ritual function, as with after-dinner speeches. I think if we were serious about developing presentation skills we would devise different kinds of activities and provide different kinds of resources. We would assess presentation skills and not just the content of seminar presentations. And we would provide training in presentation skills and not just expect students to be able to do it by osmosis as a result of sitting in so many brilliant lectures.

I don't believe that the seminar, in its traditional form, is worth holding on to. When resources are so tight we ought to review the real aims of seminar teaching and see if we can achieve these aims more directly and more purposefully in different ways involving less staff time but more student effort.

*Graham Gibbs is Director of the Oxford Centre for Staff Development.*

## Second European Groupwork Symposium

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# COMPETENCE OR COMPETENCES? HOLISM OR VOCATIONALISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

*Sue Otter*

## **What do we mean by competence?**

Competence, or rather occupational competence, has become the cornerstone of the national standards which form the basis of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). NVQs have effected a major shift in the direction and focus of vocational education. Emphasis has moved from a situation where education and training played a leading role in defining the presumed needs of employment, to one where the needs of employers are defined nationally through lead bodies and descriptions of occupational competence. The concept of competence developed in NVQs is broad, and seeks to avoid a narrow task or skill based approach.

*Competence is a wide concept which embodies the ability to transfer skills and knowledge to new situations within the occupational area. It encompasses the organisation and planning of work, innovation and coping with non-routine activities. It includes those qualities of personal effectiveness that are required in the workplace to deal with co-workers, managers and customers. (Training Agency Guidance Notes No. 1 - 1988).*

Competence in NVQs is a concept which is clearly related to a workrole, and the national standards describe in some detail the functions required in the role and the activities which must be carried out to achieve the function. Occupational competence is related to the function rather than to the characteristics, traits or qualities of an individual. It differs markedly from the notion of competence in higher education. Here competence, rather than specified competences, is a holistic notion related to the achievement of the individual, not to the ability to carry out specified functions. Competence in higher education is linked with the development of the individual and with notions of excellence.

## **Higher education and occupational competence.**

There has been much opposition in higher education to the model of occupational competence. One criticism is that the model appears to deny the validity of professional knowledge and understanding, and a second is that the pre-specification of what competence is can restrict the exercise of professional

judgment and stifle the development of innovative and creative approaches.

It should be appreciated, though, that much of the comment has focused on the material produced at NVQ levels 1 and 2. Draft NVQ standards at Level 5, in a range of professional areas, will shortly be available and will constitute a fairer test of the functional analysis approach to describing occupational competence at professional levels. They will need to demonstrate that they can capture the inevitable contradictions and complexities of professional work and take account of the moral principles and complex judgments which are essential in professional competence. It will be important that they are framed in the recognition that the competent graduate has hitherto been described as possessing a wide range of intellectual, personal and social competences, including critical thinking, analysis, communication and the ability to work with others. Here the construct of competence has relied less on the ability to describe the competence in detail than on the general ability of individuals to act intelligently in a range of situations which cannot be predicted beforehand. According to this holistic view, one cannot describe competence on the basis of functions and tasks, instead it is an attribute of the individual, and describes what s/he brings to the job. There is an obvious tension with the occupational view, and it will be interesting to see how the NVQ draft level 5 standards treat it.

## **What about knowledge?**

Knowledge is a pluralistic concept which does not lend itself to simplistic definitions. Its creation and dissemination are, however, at the heart of higher education, and form the starting point for the development of the higher education curriculum. It is often assumed that acquiring, processing and applying knowledge develops the range of cognitive and personal skills which make up graduate competences. Competence is often, therefore, an implicit part of the curriculum. The validity of this assumption is questionable, and data from graduate employers continues to suggest that by no means all graduates have developed some of these basic

competences. Surveys of graduates have suggested that degree courses do not equip them with the competences they require in the world of work. The knowledge-centred curriculum does not deny the importance of competence, but may not help to develop it either.

In occupational competence the situation is reversed - competence is the starting point for the development of the standards and knowledge plays a supporting role. Standards in occupational competence are described as outcomes - they describe what should happen as a result of the activity, not how to do it. Occupational standards are in fact lists of outcomes, which lead one to infer that the individual possesses certain sorts of competence.

### Competences or outcomes?

Debate on the place and nature of competence in higher education inevitably leads to discussion of the purpose of higher education and the ways in which it is made accountable, (what is it for?, what are we trying to do?, are we achieving it?). It is clear that higher education is more than merely vocational

preparation, and that an occupationally based competence model would be inadequate to describe the competences expected in graduates.

The aims of many courses suggest that the development of the individual through a holistic notion of competence is of prime importance. The extent to which many courses actually achieve this is less clear, and although there is evidence of excellence in higher education it is also clear that degrees are awarded to students who have scarcely raised the level of their performance during their period of study. The difficulty is not in recognising excellence, but is in ascribing and maintaining more basic standards. The holistic model provides a conceptual basis for defining the competences sought in graduates, but these should, however, be more precisely defined than is usual in academic circles. The occupational model offers a solution in the form of describing the learning outcomes, rather than the competences or the processes through which they are developed. It may be that a marriage of the holistic and occupational approaches will provide a useful basis for clarifying the place of competence in the higher education curriculum.

*Sue Otter is head of the CATS office at Nottingham Polytechnic, and has completed a large-scale study of the outcomes of higher education.*

## *Teaching In Higher Education*

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## FRANCHISING AND TRAINING IN MALAYSIA: Minah Birds and Major Developments

*Gina and Alistair Wisker*



There is an unquenchable thirst for knowledge, education and training in Malaysia. An unusual and mutually beneficial relationship between UK and Malaysia is the franchising agreement between Anglia Polytechnic, and the Goon group of colleges in Ipoh, Penang and Kuala Lumpur.

A few months ago we were lucky enough to be sent to Kolej Goon, Ipoh to deliver a participative inservice course for staff in these three colleges. This course was part of the preparation for Goon to franchise the first year of some of Anglia's degree courses, and to mount a Foundation or Access programme, designed to lead students to study at Anglia and elsewhere in the UK.

Alistair Wisker lectures at Bedford College of HE, and Gina at Anglia Polytechnic. We have both worked in staff development, and together delivered courses. Gina used to live in Singapore and so she had an idea of the climate! But this trip was unique for us, involving many preparatory jabs and long hours of travel on a variety of planes which grew smaller at each stage up Malaysia. It was an enlightening and fascinating experience, and one we will treasure. Hopefully, it also paved the way for further relationships between Anglia and Malaysia.

Staff developers travel heavy. We took course books (Gibbs and Habeshaw *Preparing to Teach.*), loads of OHP transparencies, and a camcorder for the microteaching sessions. Against a background of lush tropical trees and minah birds we worked with seventeen colleagues from two of the Goon colleges,

Ipoh and Penang, to cover important HE teaching strategies, ensuring that reflection, modelling and transfer took place: The staff had varied backgrounds; the Penang teachers were more established and experienced; the Ipoh staff were younger, less involved in the decision making and committee structure of their college. All were highly motivated (even in their half term week!). After initial reticence, because of the unusualness of the situation, they all joined fully in group work and the fruitful sharing of experience and practice.

Initially when they reported back from group work the one man in each of the five groups did the reporting. We pointed this out and bemused them somewhat because men, we were told were 'culturally important' in Malaysia. With a little practice in the following days, however, the women happily discovered their 'cultural importance' and spoke up in the large group.

We worked with them on why we lecture and assess, how to develop innovative, student centred learning approach in small groups, resource based learning (they were worried this might put them out of a job!), course design and development, and quality assurance.

Our aims on the course were:

- to involve all the staff
- to provide information about methods, systems, developments
- to encourage reflection, discussion, action planning
- to provide the opportunity to model and experiment with methods and strategies.





We were keen to introduce to staff active learning, student centred teaching/learning, reflectiveness in students, student ability to take responsibility for their own learning, and delivery and facilitation of an assured, quality learning experience.

Microteaching sessions tend to be revelatory, and those at the centre of our course were no exception. Ipoh and Penang staff tried out some of the teaching/learning strategies we had worked with over the week, used OHPs, sometimes for the first time, and were videoed, which was clearly a surprise! They all enjoyed wincing at themselves on screen. Many of the staff obviously have a good foundation for further teaching in HE. Those with more O or A level oriented didactic styles recognised where they needed to stretch their students with more problem solving and more involvement.

We were treated with generosity and courtesy. On our afternoon off Haji Zainal Abidin Abd Manaf, the Academic Manager, kindly volunteered to drive us off into the landscape. We saw innumerable kilometres of rubber trees, a peanut drying company, and a pottery and exotic batik shop (the enormous vase got back safely!) On the final Friday we shared the last mango in

Haji's garden on a very English looking garden swing seat.

At the end of the course there was the awarding of certificates, very much valued in Malaysia. These were presented by the Chairman of the funding company of Kolej Goon. The presentation was preceded by a lunchtime conversation about franchising during which the chairman announced his conviction that if Kentucky Fried Chicken can franchise their fast food outlets around the world, then higher education can be served in the same way. (Kentucky Fried Degrees have now entered the family store of conversation starters). Finally and surprisingly the group gave as some lovely pewter desk sets to mark an enjoyable and educationally successful week.

We then moved on briefly to beautiful Penang to see the Penang College Institute Perkim Goon, which was very busy indeed. This whistle stop tour ended with a couple of days in Singapore buying things to replace all those heavy books.

We'd go back any day! for the thirst for educational development almost as much as for the marvellous food, the scenery and the friendliness.

**Gina Wisker lectures at Anglia Polytechnic  
and Alistair Wisker is a lecturer at Bedford College of HE**

## SCED Accreditation

Since January, a working group to develop a programme for accrediting teachers in Higher Education has been meeting and running training events. Eight institutions have joined the pilot scheme and the group, now a free standing SCED committee with Dr Liz Beaty of Brighton Polytechnic in the chair aims to have the first programmes recognised by September. *Contact Liz on 0273 693622 for more details.*

## Networking News

Derek Bell, Liverpool Institute of Higher Education has taken on the role of coordinator for SCED local networks. Contact Derek at LIHE Stand Park Road, PO Box 6, Liverpool L16 9JD if you want to know what is going on in your region. Network coordinators please keep Derek updated.

If you live in or can easily travel to the North East, you might like to know that the next NE event is on 2nd July at Hull University on the theme of competence. *Contact Sally Brown at Newcastle Polytechnic EDS Newcastle NE1 8ST to find out more.*

## SCED Women

Around the country, SCED women continue to meet to work together: the last meeting in Brighton was well attended, and we meet next at Leeds University on 26th June, with discussions focusing on educating women for the professions. Any readers of the New Academic, SCED members or not, are welcome to contact Sally Brown as above for details (although we might try to persuade you to join SCED if you come along!).

## SCED Papers

Sales of SCED papers have almost doubled in the last two years, and there are now 32 in print. Latest of these is "What's so special about Women in Higher Education?" edited by Gina Wisker, a publication that has grown directly out of the SCED women's network. Currently on the stocks is a two-parter on Learning Contracts, edited by David Baume and Sally Brown, Volume One concentrating on an overview of philosophy and practice, with Volume Two providing examples of Learning Contracts in use. Also in preparation is a second Induction pack for New Lecturers to complement the first which is bought by many HE institutions and is SCED's best seller.

*Details of these and all other SCED papers can be obtained from Jill Brookes SCED Administrator, 69 Cotton Lane, Moseley, Birmingham B13 9SE.*

## SCED Conferences

Appraisal: the Implications for Academic Staff Development was the subject of this May's SCED conference held in

## SCED CURRENT CORPORATE MEMBERS AND CONTACTS IN EACH INSTITUTION

### Polytechnics

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### Other

CNAA John Brennan

conjunction with Derbyshire College of Higher Education at the Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick.

This November's conference, organised jointly with SRHE (Staff Development) will be entitled "Living with expansion in Higher Education - Coercion, Collusion or Negotiation?". It will be at Stoke Rochford Hall, Grantham from 10.15am prompt 30th November to 1st December; overnight accommodation on the night of the 29th November will be available to those with long distances to travel.

### Return from the Antipodes

SCED aficionados will be pleased to welcome back to England Mike O'Neil who was on secondment to the University of Western Australia for fourteen months. Formerly chair of SCED, Mike is now back in harness at Nottingham Polytechnic and is looking forward to making contact again with SCED colleagues.

### KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH SCED

**If you have items of SCED news for wider dissemination, please contact Sally Brown as above.**

### Data Protection Act

In order to comply with the stipulations of the Data Protection Act,

I am notifying all members that their membership details including their skills register entry are held on computer. **If any member has any objection to this, please let me know.**

Jill Brookes, Administrator

The third in the series of special subject supplements in *The New Academic*, is devoted to art and design. It has been edited by David Baume of the Open Polytechnic and Carole Baume of Calibre Training Ltd.

## TURNING ART EDUCATION INSIDE OUT

### *The Department of Art & Design's "Artist in Residence Scheme"—a component of The Polytechnic of East London's B.A. Hons. Degree Course in Fine Art.*

In the last issue of *The New Academic*, Professor Lewis Elton in his article 'Quality Enhancement and Academic Professionalism' discussed phases of a system under change through reference to the work of Kurt Lewin. The first 'unfreezing' stage involves external agencies challenging the system's practices.

In 1986, the Fine Art Course at North East London Polytechnic (as it was then) came under scrutiny from NAB (the National Advisory Body). NAB perceived the course insular, and stipulated that it should initiate and cultivate links with the community. In a positive response, student residencies were initiated in local schools, firstly by a new Course Tutor, Geoff Brunell, and subsequently by the residency Co-ordinator, Jane Riches. As Head of Fine Printmaking at Manchester Polytechnic, Geoff Brunell had experienced placing students on residencies through Wigan's Artists in Schools programme initiated by Rod Taylor, Art Adviser and Director of Drumcroom Education Arts Centre.

After some initial resistance from tutors and students, the first encouraging beginnings led to a residency becoming a course requirement for all students. The first stage of change has passed and, according to Lewin's theory, the scheme five years later could be described as firmly in the second stage, where desire for change gradually grows as "those within the system actually want to change, because they believe in the goals that the change implies".

#### **The nuts and bolts of the scheme:**

Students participate during the autumn, spring or summer term of their second year. A residency is planned by students, with tutorial assistance and the guidance of previous students wherever helpful. We have a database of hosts wishing to participate regularly: schools, hospitals and various other public contexts. Past experiences include theatres, galleries, a waste recycling plant, drugs advice centre and a 'floatation therapy' unit!

Students spend a month full time (four days per week) on site or two months part time (two days per week). Generally 50% of the time is spent on personal practice and 50% in collaborative ventures with their host/audience.

Careful pre-planning allows for flexibility and an understanding of each party's expectations and role. It is, however, the issue of role which periodically comes under review and clarification, as experience further defines the residency parameters. Students are

encouraged to make presentations to their host audiences. Funding of materials is usually from the host institution, sometimes supplemented by the college.

Weekly college seminars provide a student forum for theoretical issues, evaluation and peer support. Contributions to these seminars, a written journal and a slide presentation, form the basis for assessment. Students, whilst on site, receive a visit from the residency co-ordinator or studio tutor. Finally students complete a self evaluation.

#### **So what are the benefits for staff and students?**

Residencies can largely be understood as inverted forms of traditional studio practice. These 'inversions' may be considered as realizations that have further helped define not only the aims of the scheme, but also of the course.

Here empowerment may be considered as a major student benefit: Caroline Harris, Artist in Residence, Foundation Studies, Hastings College of Arts & Technology writes in her Journal:

*The experience was invaluable to me, as it was one of the first times, outside the entrance interview situation, that I have had to explain my work to a body of viewers who have no in-depth knowledge or experience of it.*

This empowerment facilitates the student operating in unfamiliar surroundings, experiencing social exchange and artistic discourse from a position of their own resources and relative independence. Just as importantly, this empowerment inculcates a sense of responsibility for handling their own learning programme. The balance of power shifts from staff to student; the student adopts a major role as educator within the system, reinforcing the notion that what students bring to the course in terms of personal histories and experience should affect course pedagogy. This shift implies in turn, a shift in the tutor's role from 'educator' to 'facilitator'.

The specificity of audience and site which students experience as Artists in Residence underline the fact that art message and art engagement are not static and polarized, but part of a rising and ebbing tide, a process encoded in languages exchanged between artist and audience, created through context and determined by response. It is such responses of both word and act that encourage a personal re-coding of one's own understanding.

**John Cockram**

## THE STUDENT LEARNING CONTRACT ON THE HND PACKAGING DESIGN COURSE AT WSCAD\*

I must confess that I initially viewed the 'student learning contract' with considerable concern. The thought of giving a student year group both the authority to direct their own programme of study and the power to devise appropriate assessment criteria seemed a possible recipe for disaster.

The HND Packaging Design course does, however, recognise a shift in emphasis from a tutor-directed culture to one which is student-led. Student centred learning has become a key element which is being practised throughout the two year study programme. Students are encouraged to identify and research topics for the independent learning project within their first year, and to develop ways to present their research back to the group through personal presentations. Students are then required during their second year to arrange and organise work placements themselves alongside the continuation of their course projects, building on lectures and seminars in marketing and business studies.

With the course now in its second year we decided to take the current good practice of students managing their own learning a step further and develop a learning contract in which the students would determine their own programmes of study during the final term. This task was made somewhat easier by my participation on WSCAD's staff development programme on teaching and learning strategies. As part of that course I was required to write my own learning contract, encountering the initially steep learning curve inherent in the identification and clarification of one's own learning goals. This experience certainly helped shape the way in which the learning contract is introduced to Packaging students.

The HND Packaging Design contract has to contain a proposal for at least one design problem that the student has identified. Students' contracts must include:

- Description or title of proposed project
- Objectives
- Programme of study
- Criteria for assessment

Students are also given this checklist:

- Does the proposed project involve a creative and innovative problem-solving challenge?
- Will it enable you to demonstrate your technical abilities?
- Is there scope for collaboration with companies/consultancies to gain 'live' external involvement?
- Does it involve use of all your communication skills?

- Will this be a good test of your ability to manage your own project?

Students have responded with enthusiasm to having greater autonomy. I had feared that the many different projects might lead to a fragmented year group. In fact the year group has spontaneously formed itself into smaller specialist groups with common areas of interest. The process of negotiation has also led to students clarifying their learning objectives and personal outcomes for the course.

An unexpected outcome has been the confidence with which students not only present their own skills but also exploit the talents of their fellow students. For example, one contract has established a learning programme designed specifically to enhance career ambitions in marketing and project management. As part of the programme of developing management and organisational skills this student is orchestrating and acquiring sponsorship for an exhibition of Packaging student work to be shown at Pakex 92, the exhibition of the packaging industry held at the NEC. This is beneficial not only to the student undertaking the project but to the student body as a whole.

However the introduction of learning contracts has not been trouble free. The briefing sessions at the beginning of the project proved to be a great strain on the teaching resource, and we have had to look at more efficient ways of helping students to write their contracts. Currently we are looking at using group workshop sessions to build on the original briefing. Staff will act as facilitators to encourage discussion and debate between students, to help them to clarify their learning goals and identify possible outcomes. The group can then put forward its own validation criteria.

The use of learning contracts in HND Packaging Design at WSCAD, whilst still finding its feet, is showing encouraging signs. The course's movement to three year BA(Hons) degree status for 93/94 gives us the opportunity to increase learner autonomy still further. We expect to see students better prepared for the workplace, showing greater initiative and ability to manage their own time. Most of all I think this process will enable students to recognise and transfer the intellectual and personal qualities developed through the design process to future personal and professional challenges.

Seymour Roworth-Stokes

\*West Surrey College of Art and Design

## CREATIVITY IN A 'LEARNING CULTURE', OR THE JOY OF ASKING QUESTIONS

### Towards a learning culture

In a 'learning culture', where artistic production and intellectual activity go hand in hand, two key elements are at work. We may call these elements 'instinctive experiment' and 'structured methodology'. Instinctive experiment grants freedom to ask questions; structured methodology provides an academic framework with which to underpin ideas and to render them intelligible to others.

As these two elements interact, questions are generated by the learner, rather than being externally engendered and artificially imposed. This approach can be used equally in essay writing, project work or for larger dissertation assignments. The method has proved successful with students of a wide range of abilities and backgrounds. It also works well as student numbers grow.

### The approach in outline

Briefly, students are asked to suggest a theme of particular interest and relevance to themselves. Then they have to decide what questions they wish to ask about their chosen theme. Next they prepare a structure plan and flow charts which outline a whole essay, project or dissertation in the space of a page or two, before any reading at all is undertaken.

### Structure plans

The structure plan is an initial written outline. It is modified and enlarged as the student's reading grows and their information base broadens. The structure plan has these three elements:

- *Introduction*—Main questions to be asked.
- *Body of text*—Chapter headings each representing a separate aspect of the study; Subheadings reflecting different topics within each aspect of study.
- *Conclusion*—Answers to the questions posed and indications of further questions that could be asked. (This section generally is completed after the reading has been undertaken.)

The creative nature of the structure plan lies in its susceptibility to growth and change as new thoughts arise and information bases grow.

The student also has the problem-solving task of deciding on the importance of any one area of the study:

- Should it stand as a main question, or is it simply one aspect of a main question already posed?
- When is a theme significant enough to merit the status of a chapter?
- When is a theme a sub-heading within a chapter rather than a new chapter?

- How can chapter topics be further sub-divided to accommodate related yet peripheral material?

The structure plan is an exercise in ordered logic. Making a structure plan acts as an introduction to abstract thinking. Learning to order aspects of study according to their relative importance within an overall larger structure exemplifies learning to see the wood for the trees.

### Flow charts

The structure plan is then transformed and extended into a number of flow-charts. Elements of a flowchart include main questions, chapter headings, topics and their subdivisions. These elements are entered into boxes of appropriately larger or smaller size to render the structure plan more immediately visible and comprehensible. Arrows are used to discover and show how different sections of the study inter-relate.

### Creativity in theoretical and practical studies

One could argue that pieces of weaving, ceramic, metalwork and painting etc. are created in much the same way as is described here for theoretical studies. Individual materials and design elements are selected, ordered according to the relative prominence the artist wishes them to assume, and subjected to the overall demands of the single composition.

The autonomous researcher and the creative thinker can work equally well with words, yarn, clay, metals, jewels or paint: each is merely a medium for self expression. Technical dexterity in a material sense finds a parallel in theoretical work, insofar as vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and argument based on correct use of evidence etc., are tools of the trade which need to be mastered. Accidental effects in artistic creation find a parallel in theoretical work, for example with the discovery of an unexpected piece of data that totally changes the complexion of an argument as it had been envisaged up to that point.

The belief that theory and practice are closely allied is central to a creative research frame of mind. Empirical research is important in artistic creation.

The beauty of valuing and developing a 'research mentality' is that many of the abilities it exploits are inborn. It is student centred and autonomous in character; most importantly of all it raises standards. Students move from the unknown to the known in a structured way. I have seen that, the greater the intellectual leaps, the richer the artistic expression has become. Students at all levels have found this structured questioning approach a joyous, exciting, enticing and satisfying route to self discovery.

Anna Muthesius

## FROM PRODUCT TO PROCESS: NEGOTIATED STUDY IN ART AND DESIGN

Much of the current debate in Art and Design education stems from one issue: how can we provide more with less and still maintain quality?

Like the rest of higher education, Art and Design employs a simple formula: good teaching plus high standards of learning = quality product. But emphasising quality products and teaching has undervalued the third element in the equation: high standards of learning. A form of apprenticeship has become the dominant learning mode in Art and Design, as true for fine art atelier systems as for vocational training. In many ways, final shows in Art and Design are equivalent to the ceremonial presentation of masterpieces for assay and entry to a medieval guild. To put it more directly, little distinction is made between what tutors believe they are teaching and what students are assumed to be learning.

This is where a basic shift of emphasis is needed: the student element in the quality equation has to receive more attention. There needs to be a shift from product to process. Paradoxically, sharing power more equally between tutor and student—for this is what it eventually means—not only raises the quality of student learning through a sense of ownership, but also goes some way to addressing the central question of how to do more with less.

Various approaches are being developed—one of them at Birmingham Polytechnic Institute of Art and Design, where learning facilities at access and degree levels have been developed over the last five years through negotiated study. This has roots in the concept of independent study pioneered by The Polytechnic of East London, also in art and design foundation courses, and in the general philosophy of adult education.

In this approach to learning, students are

empowered through an organisational framework to negotiate their own study programmes according to backgrounds, needs and intentions. Each student builds an individual learning context through writing a past, present and future document that, in effect, constitutes a personalised course. This course is negotiated since both tutors and students have to meet each other half-way in terms of course content, socio-cultural perspectives and, crucially, resource usage.

Quality of learning is assessed according to standards and expectations evolved through negotiation. Generally, students expect to become better equipped to identify their learning goals and more capable of achieving them. Tutors expect students to learn how to manage their own development through planning and undertaking self-structured assignments designed to raise their awareness, expectations and achievements. Continuous debate, a unit assessment structure, credit accumulation and strong tutorial support help students pace and monitor their learning progress. They are thus able to achieve according to standards evolved to meet their own perspectives.

Though continuously developing, negotiated study shows it is possible to address the initial question by adopting a process orientated approach and fostering quality of learning amongst students. This is not being proposed as the only solution. It would be ironic however if we, in a sector of Higher Education that prides itself on promoting creative activity, cannot exercise enough imagination to see that there are other ways of achieving our educational aims than those to which we have become accustomed.

Tom Jones

### CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS SUPPLEMENT

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## TEACHING UNDER THE MICROSCOPE



Microteaching is a scaled-down teaching activity. It lets the teacher in training experience the essence of teaching, or try out a particular technique or style of working, in an environment which is not intimidating; which offers some measure of confidentiality and support; and which facilitates reflection and self-development.

Microteaching can take a variety of forms. However, it typically involves delivering a short teaching performance, with means for feedback and/or analysis. The actual form can vary according to the facilities available and according to the preference or choice or priorities of the individual "microteacher".

The following three forms of microteaching indicate the method's features, and its flexibility:

### The 'empty classroom'

The microteacher delivers the lesson (scaled-down, or perhaps full in the case of experienced teachers wishing to extend their skills), in an empty classroom or in a studio but in any event to a video-camera/recorder rather than to students. At its simplest, this need not involve even a technician being present.

The microteacher can then take away the tape and analyse the performance at leisure and in total privacy. He or she could also choose to ask for feedback from

experienced colleagues (see also: Classroom Observation & Feedback, on page 17, below).

### The 'peer group'

The microteacher works in a small peer-group. Each member delivers a short lesson in his/her group, and provides constructive comment and advice on the performance of colleagues. Presentations may be video-recorded, if groups or individuals choose (see also: Peer support for improving teaching, overleaf).

### 'Live' microteaching

The microteacher works with a small group of actual students, may be with a teacher colleague present, and is recorded doing so. Students are then asked for feedback on the lesson, in conjunction with playback of the recording. The colleague's function is to keep discussion neutral and to avoid the microteacher being put into a defensive position.

This is an advanced form of microteaching, however, and requires some measure of confidence on the part of the microteacher (and of the students), so is more likely to happen with experienced teachers.

Microteaching is a very flexible approach in practice. These three forms merely indicate its potential.

**Chris Osborne**

## PEER SUPPORT FOR IMPROVED TEACHING

An enthusiastic fan of student self- and peer-assessment, I am exploring how these powerful educational techniques can be applied to teaching.

Outside observation of teaching, for whatever purpose, can be intimidating - rather like an examination. Also like an examination, it rarely results in much useful detailed feedback for the examinee. What about inside observation - by a group of lecturers working together as a learning set or cell?

The group would consist of peers, observing each others' teaching and giving each other feedback. The peer-ness of the process would reduce (though not remove entirely) the stress. The peer-ness would also aid constructive and mutually supportive dialogue, rather than leading to the rather mechanistic one-shot data which a more distant observer, however skilled, tends to bring. The evaluation produced would be formative, rather than summative. A dialogue would develop, over the months, along with shared understandings. Mutual respect would constrain insensitive extremes of comment; but that same mutual respect would allow considerable and developing rigour.

It is not yet clear what form the government's requirements for classroom observation will take. The system I suggest, here would lead to larger quantities of observation than would any conceivable (ie. affordable) system of outside inspection. It could also lead to reports. The reports could be the subject of discussions with a line manager; possibly group discussions.

Anxieties about the rigour and objectivity of the process I am suggesting are the mirror of the anxieties some lecturers express about student self and peer assessment. Will it be rigorous? Will lecturers connive to protect a 'weak' colleague? My experience is that, where criteria for assessment are made explicit - preferably by the participants themselves - and where evaluative judgments have to be backed by clear evidence, then the quality of peer assessment judgments is at least as high as that obtained from 'expert' assessors.

Another effect of involving students in their own assessment is to help them develop a critical and reflective attitude to their own learning. The same, I predict, will happen for lecturers, who through this process will become more aware of their own competence and of their own potential for growth as teachers.

As well as peer assessment, these learning cells or sets would also involve much peer learning. The combination of observing other practitioners at work,

and reflecting together on the skills being employed and the criteria against which those skills should be judged, provides a powerful learning environment.

Not all teaching takes place in the lecture theatre. This approach could be extended to all aspects of teaching, although some sensitivity to the students' wishes would be needed in smaller group settings. But students, I feel, would be intrigued at their lecturers collaborating in this way to assess and improve their practice as teachers, and would for this reason discount any transient discomfort. And what a model of collaborative reflective practice to show the students!

The same approach could be extended to all parts of the teacher's work, including the icebergs of assessment and administration. Discussion, development of criteria, and reflection on practice could bring improvements in these areas too.

Lecturers are feeling the increasing load of assessment resulting from increasing student numbers. The few outside 'expert' observers of teaching will face a similar large demand on their already busy time.

The peer assessment process I suggest will not be free. But it will benefit the participating lecturers; through seeing each other at work and through the resultant assessment and dialogue about standards, about criteria for assessing teaching, about the art and craft and science of teaching.

Department heads too will benefit; they will receive reports on teaching in their department without risking the hostility of those they observe, some of whom might not consider a head of department the most appropriate judge of their teaching.

Peer assessment, by lecturers as well as by students, feels an appropriate approach to improving student learning.

Sally Brown

## CLASSROOM OBSERVATION AND FEEDBACK

Classroom observation and feedback is a powerful development tool, both for trainee and experienced teachers. The observation and feedback should be provided by a professional and impartial colleague who will give confidential feedback and, as desired or negotiated, follow-up support.

Confidentiality is essential to the service, as is the willing participation of the lecturer. Because of this need for confidentiality, the service must not be associated with staff appraisal procedures.

Ideally, it should be the individual lecturer who invites the observer to discuss how the observation might best be conducted, why it is requested, what its outcomes might be, what forms of recording to employ. And again it should be the lecturer who invites the observer into his/her class.

Classroom performance may be recorded by video



or audio - the former is more informative, but can also be seen as more intrusive for teachers low in confidence. Other forms of recording include checklists, pro-formas and spontaneous notes.

Observation is followed by a feedback meeting (or meetings) between observer and lecturer. At these meetings the observer can answer questions from the lecturer about their teaching. The observer should be descriptive rather than judgmental in their comments. They should help the lecturer form their own judgments on their teaching, focusing always on the changes which the lecturer will make in their practice. Such meetings need not make use at this stage of any recordings - the lecturer should have the right to take away recordings for private viewing before choosing whether or not to use them in feedback discussion.

After the feedback is completed, any recording should be erased immediately, unless the lecturer wishes to retain it for him/herself. Similarly, any pro-formas or checklists used during the classroom observation or during the feedback should become the property of the lecturer; no duplicates or copies should be made at any stage.

Overall the aim is to:

- work with colleagues, as a joint venture, to find practical solutions to everyday classroom concerns;

- develop colleagues' confidence in their classroom teaching competence, and to encourage them to keep this competence under review through self-appraisal as an ongoing activity; and,
- stress the total confidentiality of the support service offered to enhance classroom teaching skills.

Roy Tremlett

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Chris Osborne** is Deputy Head of the School of Information Systems; set leader for Independent Studies in the Modular Degree Scheme; and works for the Academic Development Unit and the EHE programme, all at Middlesex Polytechnic

**Dr Roy Tremlett** is a member of the Continuing Education Division at South Bank Polytechnic.

**Sally Brown** co-edited (with Peter Dove) SCED Paper 63 on Self and Peer Assessment.

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## CONSORTIUM COLLABORATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

*David Bridges*

### **ERTEC and Consortium Working**

The ever-increasing corporateness of higher education institutions and the Tory government's strategy to cultivate market place competitiveness between HE institutions might appear to create an unpropitious climate for cross institutional collaboration. But the Eastern Region Teacher Education Consortium (ERTEC) has shown not only that such collaboration is possible in the current climate, but that it brings with it discernible benefits.

ERTEC operates as a consortium for staff and curriculum development under the Employment Department Enterprise in Higher Education (EHE) initiative. ERTEC consists institutionally of Homerton College Cambridge and the schools/departments of education of Anglia Polytechnic, Bedford College of Higher Education, Hatfield Polytechnic, University of Cambridge, University of East Anglia in partnership with The Engineering Council.

### **The perceived benefits of consortium working**

The main benefits recorded so far have been these:

- The *greater pulling power* of the consortium with sponsoring and funding agencies and *greater political weight* in, eg, making representations to national bodies and senior industrialists than single institutions might have carried. (cf Neal 1988 p15.) The wealth of human and other resources available to the consortium as a whole has been an acknowledged advantage when members have bid for contract work.
- The consortium serves to provide *support for innovators* professionally and in their own institutions. It functions especially in this way in the Management Committee at which institutional coordinators can voice their frustrations and ask for and receive moral support and practical help whether it be in the form of advice on strategy, technical assistance with the word processor, help in organising a conference or a letter to their institutional head supporting the case for more secretarial assistance.
- The consortium has found very practical utility in having *a structure which facilitates and legitimates*

*the networking of experience*, bi-lateral collaboration and economies of staff effort eg by collaborating in developing a profiling scheme or an information technology guide rather than replicating much of the same work in separate institutions.

### **Issues raised about consortium working**

The issues which the experience of consortium working is raising are however an antidote to complacency and in many ways rather more interesting than the perceived benefits because they are perhaps a little less predictable. They include these:

#### *Who experiences the consortium?*

The Management Committee experiences it intensively; clusters of staff experience it episodically; students hardly at all. Perhaps this does not matter in so far as the drive is to securing change in the institutions and not to setting up the consortium as an end in itself. On the other hand the consortium apparatus needs to beware of serving or appearing to serve an in-group rather than the population of its member institutions as a whole.

#### *Consortium activity as a substitute for institutional activity*

One acknowledged risk is that far from supporting would-be innovators in their drive for institutional change, the consortium provides them with the less threatening and risky alternative of a safe haven of like-minded colleagues located at a geographical, psychological and political remove from the site of conflict. In other words, activity in the context of consortium committees and working groups becomes a substitute for activity in the less hospitable surrounding of the institution. (cf on this Francis 1992 who writes with particular reference to the Scottish Enterprise Consortium.)

#### *The consortium as a prop to institutional circumvention*

With external funding channelled through the consortium, change agents operating within the

institutions can (and do) set up their own systems for the promotion of change, systems of reward and patronage, policy and decision making, which to a greater or lesser degree by-pass the mainstream management structures. It is a continuing issue of debate within ERTEC as to whether this represents enterprise at its best or its worst, though our conclusion is with Francis that "the enterprise coordinator ... may be able to influence the involvement of individual members of staff through

the building of project systems, but will be unable to embed these developments within the institution without the commitment and involvement of the management team". (Francis 1992)

#### References

- Francis, E (1992 forthcoming) 'Change agents, glass ceilings and EATE' in *Journal of Assessment and Evaluation*.  
 Neal, DC ed (1988) *Consortia and Inter-Institutional Cooperation*, Riverside NE, ACE/Macmillan.

*David Bridges is Professor of Education, University of East Anglia  
 and Director, Eastern Region Teacher Education Consortium*

## REVIEW

### Learning to Teach in Higher Education

Ramsden, P.

*Routledge, London, 1991. ISBN 0 415 06415 5*

Although this book makes an unpromising start with lots of self-reference (Chapter 1) and stereotyped examples of teachers' attitudes (Chapter 2) by Chapter 3 Ramsden gets into his stride and the reader is treated to three excellent chapters which offer a cogent and succinct summary of a tremendous amount of research into teaching and learning in higher education, much of it conducted by the author himself and much of it very recent. We are not merely being offered a few teaching tips (as the title might suggest) but a careful, empirically grounded reflection on the nature of learning, of students' perceptions, attitudes and learning styles, on what shape desired learning outcomes may take and how they are best achieved through teaching method, course design and assessment techniques. In short the book aims to help the reader develop a deep understanding rather than a surface knowledge of approaches to successful teaching and learning.

Chapter 6 offers two case studies which lead us into Ramsden's "six key principles of effective teaching in higher education". These combine the best elements from the behaviourist, cognitive and humanist traditions. The first is represented by the recommendation to develop clear goals and appropriate methods of assessment and feedback, the second by the principle of providing intellectual challenge and the third by reference to concern and respect for students and student learning. The six principles are firmly grounded in explicit theory which itself is rooted in the experimental results discussed earlier in the book.

The final section discusses the implementation of the six principles. This is more effectively done in some areas than in others. For example, principle 3 "appropriate assessment and feedback" is covered thoroughly and well whereas principle 2 "concern and respect for students and student learning" is discussed tangentially, often through quotes from others or amid a discussion of other issues. There is a strong case for at least as much explicit attention being given to this as to, say, evaluation (another area covered in detail). The teacher-student relationship and their relative status and authority is an area in which traditional attitudes are most firmly entrenched.

Ramsden's expressed aim is to "help lecturers change their understanding of teaching" and this is likely to happen for readers who give the material the attention it deserves. The claim that the book "links educational theory and the practical realities of teaching in an entirely new way", while a little overstated, is not far from the truth. The reader who wants to learn how to write a good multiple choice question will be disappointed. S/he will, though, be better placed to decide whether multiple choice questions are the best form of assessment for any given course. Perhaps just as important s/he will have learned to think about the learning process as well as the teaching process, what is happening for students in addition to what the lecturer is doing. Ramsden's book should interest and enlighten anyone involved in teaching and learning in higher education.

*Paul Trowler is a senior lecturer in education at Lancashire Polytechnic*

# ELECTRONIC SUPPORT FOR COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

*Peter Goodyear*

Many lecturers have been put off the use of Computer Assisted Learning as much by the pedagogy it embodies as by its technical complications. Not much CAL actually attempts to transmit neatly structured packets of knowledge to isolated passive learners, but this image is pervasive enough to account for considerable mistrust among teaching staff. In this article I want to describe a very different approach to CAL - an approach we have been using for the last three years to support collaborative learning among geographically distributed groups of postgraduate students. The approach can work equally well for more conventional undergraduate courses, and should be of interest to anyone wanting to preserve small group discussion activities in times of worsening staff:student ratios.

The technological key to this is asynchronous electronic communication - sending messages via computer without requiring the sender and recipient(s) to be available at the same time (or place). Electronic mail is a good example, available in most HE institutions to staff and students. The *pedagogical* key - more problematic by far - is an understanding of how to facilitate productive use of electronic communications. This problem can be reduced to a set of questions - who should send messages about what, when and to whom?

Most of our experience has been accumulated through a distance taught modular MSc in IT and Learning. The starting points or seeds for electronic discussion on each module consist of a set of selected readings and a project-like assessment exercise, introduced by a study guide. Each module is staffed by two to four tutors and has between eight and twenty five students. Most modules involve the acquisition of some practical skills and generate detailed technical queries. Typically these are from learner to tutor(s) and each arises directly from a problem encountered by the learner. Unambiguous, complete and succinct queries receive the best response - a feedback process which, by the by, sharpens the learners' writing skills. As the course members develop confidence in, and awareness of, each others' knowledge and experience, so they begin to address queries to each other instead of, or as well as, to the academic tutors. While we have seen this develop most readily in dealing with focused "closed" technical questions, there is some spill over into more open-ended queries about both technical and non-technical matters. The extent of peer support is in large part a function of perceived expertise but we have evidence that some students prefer to take "dumb" questions to their colleagues rather than to their tutors. What we see (or rather, what we hear about) is the existence of a number of self-help networks - a distributed version of what might otherwise happen in the coffee bar.

"Query and answer" is only one form of discourse, and a relatively low level one at that. Electronic communication can support more sustained discussion, such as when a theme, issue, or argument is developed by a number of students over a period of time, with or without tutorial intervention. We have not seen this work as well as the problem-oriented Q & A correspondence. Where it has worked best it has used electronic conferencing rather than electronic mail. Electronic conferencing supports one-to-many communication, resembling a seminar rather than a private conversation or private exchange of letters. These more open debates are afflicted by four main problems. First, issues for discussion rarely arise spontaneously from the student group. Second, any discussion item, once underway, attracts the attention of only a minority of students. Then, the quality the discussion can be very varied - some participants contributing well thought-out, polished pieces of text while others respond in a more immediate "brain storming" fashion. Neither is wrong in itself but the combination of the two styles can be sufficiently uneven to prematurely end the discussion. Finally, these discussions *can* grow to a size where students joining late are put off. It's as if they've walked into the middle of a debate whose meaning they can't catch until they've traced its origins - by which time the debate has moved on again.

None of these problems is insoluble. Because we place a high value on discussion, we are prepared to work towards solutions. These include helping with the seeding and structuring of discussions, but it's likely that we need to make explicit the extent of our commitment through some thoughtful assessment of contributions to the discussion. This demands new skills from the staff, though I suspect these skills are more easily attained than the skills needed to make fair assessments of students' contributions in conventional "live" seminars.

Why are we attracted to this mode of teaching?

1. It allows us to offer specialized advanced courses to economically viable groups of students by extending our catchment area to international proportions. We can teach to our research strengths.
2. We can design, assemble materials for, and run courses very quickly. Electronic tutorial support means we have an interactive adaptable system in which weaknesses in materials can be remedied through discussion (eg of difficult sections of a text). This contrasts with the Open University model, in which the lack of tutorial support requires the development of tightly structured, thoroughly tested materials. We can be quicker on our feet,

- responding rapidly to demand, dealing with relatively small numbers of students, updating courses frequently.
3. We can share tutorial support with our students. By encouraging peer-support we not only reduce the load on tutors but we engage the students in higher-order learning and teaching activities that have clear educational benefits. Many of our advanced-level students have considerable relevant experience, whose sharing is a central part of the educational process.
  4. We have flexibility over our tutorial work. Providing we respond in an acceptable period, we can teach when and where it suits us. A significant educational benefit is that we have more time to formulate a clear and considered response, can take time to refer to source material or consult other tutors - things difficult to do in unscheduled face-to-face tutorial work. This also makes use of less experienced tutors (eg graduate students) a more

viable proposition.

5. We can re-use our tutorial support. Our answers to frequently asked questions can be stored and made available to later students.

None of these benefits is easily achievable. It has taken some years to learn how to make good use of the technological resources available to us and we wouldn't yet claim to know "best practice". Trivial technical and logistic problems can have profound effects on the quality and enjoyment of our work. We've been fortunate in winning a large EC grant for a project (JITOL) to help us iron out many of these problems and to develop richer resources for supporting collaborative learning. While our sights are on improving electronically mediated distance learning, there are obvious application for parallel developments on campus. We look forward to seeing a good deal more collaborative learning in the next few years.

*Peter Goodyear is director of the Centre for Studies in Advanced Learning Technology and a member of the Department of Educational Research at Lancaster University.*

## LISTINGS

## COURSES AND EVENTS

### JULY

- 12-14 **Girls and Women in Computing.** Mrs K Wainwright, The Division of Adult Continuing Education, University of Sheffield, 65 Wilkinson Street, Sheffield, S10 2GJ. Tel & Fax: 0742 768653.
- 1-2 **Managing With More Students - Retaining Quality with Reduced Resources.** Warwick University. The Oxford Centre for Staff Development (see next entry) **Fees: £295 (res), £265 (non-res).**
- 2-3 **Learning in Teams.** Oxford Polytechnic. The Oxford Centre for Staff Development, Oxford Polytechnic, Gipsy Lane, Headington, Oxford, OX3 0BP; Tel: 0865 819172, Fax: 0865 819859. **Fees: £278/£238 (Res), £248/£198 (Non-res), lower figures indicates discount is booking made six weeks prior to event.**
- 3-5 **T.E.X.T. Conference: International Cats.** Cambridge. Office Manager, TEXT Head Office, Derbyshire College of Higher Education, Kedleston Road, Derby, DE3 1GB. Fax: (0332) 294861. **Fees: £190 incl. board.**
- 6-7 **Higher Education: Where does our future in Europe lie?** Birmingham Polytechnic. CRAC Conference Office, Sheraton House, Castle Park, Cambridge, CB3 0AX; tel: 0223 460277. **Fees: £253.80 (Res., Grand Hotel, Birmingham); £197.99 (Res., Birm. Polytechnic), £178.01 (Non-res.)**
- 7-9 **Education, Training and Personnel Development.** NEC, Birmingham. Brintex Limited, 32 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 2SS; tel: 071 973 6401; fax: 071 233 5054. **Free Admission to Exhibition.**
- 10 **Capability & Competence in Higher Education.** Leeds. (Event No. 92/2816/LE). The Staff College, Coombe Lodge, Blagdon, Bristol BS18 6RG. Tel: 0761 462503; fax: 0761 463104. **Fees: £95.**
- 12-14 **New Learning 92 : Never mind the technology, where's the learning?** Norwich. New Learning 92, TVEI Unit, County INSET Centre, Witward Road, Norwich NR7 9XD; tel: 0603 33276, fax: 0603 300467. **Fees: £149 incl accomm. & meals.**

12-14

**Pre-Seminar Workshop: Higher Education in the new Democracies.** Glasgow. See main Conference details 14-18 July. **Fee: £275.**

13-15

**Counselling skills for managers in higher education.** Bristol. (Event No. 92/29/2) The Staff College, Coombe Lodge, Blagdon, Bristol BS18 6RG. Tel: 0761 462503; fax: 0761 463104. **Fees £235.**

13-15

**Open Learning: Crossing New Boundaries.** Cambridge. CRAC, Sheraton House, Castle Park, Cambridge, CB3 0AX; tel: 0223 460277

13-15

**Open Learning: The Quantum Leap.** Cambridge. Alex English, CRAC Conference Office, Tel: 0223 460277.

13-16

**Insight into Management for Post-16 Students: and their Teachers in the North West.** Salford. CRAC, Sheraton House, Castle Park, Cambridge, CB3 0AX; tel: 0223 460277.

14-18

**Eleventh International Seminar on Staff and Educational Development : Maintaining Quality and Widening Access.** Glasgow. Dr Chris deWinter Hebron, H+E Associates, 12a Church St, Stiffkey, Norfolk NR23 1QJ; tel/fax: 0328 830339. **Fees: £520 appx.**

28-30

**Fourth International Conference on Assessing Quality in Higher Education.** Twente, Netherlands. Chris de Winter Hebron, Academic & Training Director, H + E Associates Ltd., 12a Church Street, Stiffkey, Near Wells-next-Sea, Norfolk NR23 1QJ; tel/fax: 0328 830339. **Fees: £385 (approx).**

### AUGUST

10-13

**Insight into Management for Post-16 Students: National Insight into Management.** Bromley. CRAC, Sheraton House, Castle Park, Cambridge, CB3 0AX; tel: 0223 460277

18-21

**SAGSET/ISAGA Joint Annual Conference - Developing Transferable Skills through Simulation and Gaming in Education and Training.** Edinburgh.

Dr Fred Percival, SAGSET/ISAGA Conference 1992, Craiglockhart Campus, Napier Polytechnic of Edinburgh, Edinburgh EH14 1DJ; Tel: 031 455 4394/4320; fax: 031 455 7209.

28-30 **IL 92 - The Edinburgh Conference.** Heriot-Watt University. ICBL, Heriot-Watt University, Riccarton, Edinburgh, EH14 4AS; tel: 031 452 3282, fax: 031 451 3283.

30 - Sept 2 **Cambridge/Lancaster Forum 2.** Cambridge. *New Approaches to Higher Education-Teaching large numbers; monitoring and auditing quality; sexual harassment, access for ethnic communities, linguistic intervention; management of Higher Education.* Details from: Katherine Ashcroft, School of Independent Studies, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YN. Tel: (0524) 65201 ext. 4666, Fax: (0524) 843934.

## SEPTEMBER

**Insight into Management for Post-16 Students: and their Teachers in South Wales.** Cardiff. CRAC, Sheraton House, Castle Park, Cambridge, CB3 0AX; tel: 0223 460277

2-4 **Programme on Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE) 1992 General Conference: 'Higher Education without Borders: International Dimensions of University Management'.** Paris. Details from: 1992 General Conference, IMHE Programme, OECD 2, rue André Pascal, 75775 Paris Cedex 16, France.

7-9 **National Insight for Undergraduates: Insight into Management in Retailing.** London. CRAC, Sheraton House, Castle Park, Cambridge, CB3 0AX; tel: 0223 460277

9-10 **The Library Technology Fair.** Hatfield. Bill Forster, Hatfield Poly Lib (0707 279665).

9-11 **European Issues in Educational Media.** Strasbourg. ETEM Conference, British Universities Film Council, tel: 071-734-3687.

15-17 **CILT CALL 92: How can Computers assist Language Learning?** Stephanie Buchanan or Ruth Hansford, CILT, Regent's College, Inner Circle, Regent's Park, London NW1 4NS; tel: 071 486 8221.

23-25 **6th National PICKUP Conference for Higher Education - "PICKUP Practice: The Achievement of Excellence".** Nottingham. Details from Miss E G Mears, Continuing Education.

## OCTOBER

7-9 **Multimedia and CD-ROM.** Wiesbaden, Germany. Claire Menadue, Reed Exhibitions, Heerdter Sandberg 32, 4000 Dusseldorf. Tel: 010 49 211 556281; fax: 010 49 211 556231.

27-29 **TIME Europe '92 with CD-ROM Europe 92.** Wembley. John Rodgers, LEO, 41 Lowndes Street, London SW1X 9HX; tel: 071 823 2101; fax: 071 823 2028.

27-30 **New Worlds in Information and Documentation - the International Federation for Information & Documentation (FID) Congress.** Madrid. FID '92 Organizing Committee, ICYT, Joaquin Costa 22, 28002 Madrid, Spain. Fax: (010 34) 1 564 2644.

28-31 **Multimedia Computing.** Utrecht, Netherlands. Dick Tucker, ILS Ltd., PO Box 85921, 2508 CP, The Hague, The Netherlands; tel: 010 31 70 35 60 666; fax: 010 31 70 36 17 861.

30-Nov. 2 **Second International Seminar on Student Wellbeing and Development "Strategies for Student Success".** University of Twente, Netherlands. Student Wellbeing Seminar, H+E Associates Ltd., 12a Church St., Stiffkey, nr Wells-next-the-Sea, Norfolk, NR23 1QJ; tel & Fax: 0328 830339. Fees: £425 (full).

## NOVEMBER

15-27, **The British Council: Educational Technology in**

**Higher Education: Developing strategies for effective learning.** Loughborough University. Courses Dept., The British Council, 10 Spring Gardens, London SW1A 2BN; Tel: 071 389 4406/4264/4252, or your nearest B.C. Office.

18-19 **RESOURCE Conference.** Doncaster. Trevor Millum, Tel: 0302 240331.

15-17 **SRHE CONFERENCE 1992: Learning to Effect.** Nottingham. Denise Kitchener, The Commercial Centre, Nottingham Polytechnic, Burton Street, Nottingham, NG1 4BU; tel: 0602 486409. Fees: £220. Call for Contributions.

## DECEMBER

**SCED Conference:** See page 10

Our thanks to Haydn Mathias and colleagues at Southampton University for these listings. If you would like your event included, please send or fax details to The New Academic Newsdesk, c/o Whiting & Birch Ltd, PO Box 872, Forest Hill, London SE23 3HL. (Tel: 081-699-0914 / Fax: 081-699-3685)

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### Helping Students to Learn: Teaching, Counselling, Research

Kjell Raaheim, Janek Wankowski and John Radford  
*SRHE/Open University Press, 1991. ISBN 0 335 09319 1 (pbk), £12.99*

'What a good title for a book' I thought when I was asked to review it. After all, most readers of 'The New Academic' spend much of their time trying to do just that - trying to help students to learn successfully. SCED is an organisation devoted to enhancing the quality of the *learning* experiences of students. So this looked as though it should be a book in the hands of all colleagues who read anything produced by SCED. Moreover, the last book I reviewed from this series was 'Part-Time Students and their Experience of Higher Education' by Tom Bourner et al; this was in my opinion a brilliant book providing all sorts of valuable practical data about the learning side of the teaching-learning equation. I hoped the present book would be just as valuable - alas, it was not to be so.

The present book has several admirable qualities; well referenced; well indexed; and providing food for thought about teaching processes and learning processes. It is altogether an admirably learned discourse, but it seems to assume that all students have problems, and need the understanding and professional expertise of psychologists to overcome them.

My problems with the book may originate from its source - it is a revised and expanded second edition of a book published in 1981 with the title 'Helping Students to Learn at University' by Kjell Raaheim and Janek Wankowski (Bergen: Sigma Forlag, 1981). It is one of those books arising from experience in Universities, which seems to forget that there are *far more* students learning in all sorts of other Institutions of Further and Higher Education. However, now that Polytechnics are becoming Universities, perhaps our students are about to transform the way they learn? Or is it that books by educational psychologists tend to be about how educational psychologists see educational psychology students learning?

My own researches (I have asked thousands of students some simple, open-ended, non-psychological questions about how they actually do learn) indicated that students of all ages learn by a combination of the following four things:

- wanting to learn (psychologists may call this 'motivation')
- learning by doing (including learning from mistakes)
- learning from feedback (especially from their peers!)

- digesting it all (making sense of the 'doing' and the feedback).

Real students hardly ever mentions things like the 'non-cognitive or orectic' aspects of their education. But let me be fair - I'll list the titles of 12 Chapters, and maybe you'll see what's in this book for you (and for your students).

1. Teaching and Learning: a Selective Review (John Radford)
2. From School to University (Kjell Raaheim)
3. On the Pedagogical Skills of University Teachers (Kjell Raaheim)
4. The Need for the Development of Study Skills (Kjell Raaheim)
5. The First Examinations at University (Kjell Raaheim)
6. Success and Failure at University (Janek Wankowski)
7. Disenchantment, a Syndrome of Students' Motivations and Attitudes to Teaching and Learning (Janek Wankowski)
8. On the Vagaries of Students' Motivations and Attitudes to Teaching and Learning (Janek Wankowski)
9. Assisting the Individual Students with Study Difficulties (Janek Wankowski)
10. Reflections on Operational Prescriptions (Janek Wankowski)
11. Increasing Students' Power for Self-Teaching (Janek Wankowski)
12. The Teachers and the Taught (John Radford)

If this list of chapter titles turns you on, you'll enjoy the book. The book has indeed been extensively updated and revised - it includes many references to work published in the last few years. However, there are even more references to work published in the 1970s and 1960s (and earlier). How students learn has probably not changed much, but the learning environment students find themselves in has changed almost beyond recognition, with much of further and higher education providing 'student-centred' learning processes and resources. Therefore, a book addressing how students learn in *traditional* University environments is not really addressing the appetite which is whetted by the title 'Helping Students to Learn'.

*Professor Phil Race, Educational Development, the Polytechnic of Wales (shortly to be the University of Glamorgan, but whose students will probably continue to learn in much the same ways as they do now?)*



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To Katherine Ashcroft,  
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