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THE NEW ACADEMIC

volume two number one

The Magazine of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

THIS ISSUE INCLUDES:

This issue's special supplement, edited by John and Margaret Gold, covers developments in planning and surveying education.
See pp11-15

NEED MORE MEAN WORSE?

Phil Race

More what? Worse what?

One way or another, there is little doubt that the next decade will see a substantial rise in the participation rates in higher education. Whether this is seen as a way of bringing the United Kingdom towards the levels already attained by major trading competitors, is, literally, academic. There will be more students. There will be more teachers - but not as many as we may feel we need to maintain standards.

What may become worse? The following possibilities spring easily to mind:

- the educational standards of higher education in the United Kingdom
- the quality of students' learning experience in higher education
- the quality of the rest of students' experiences of higher education
- the job-fulfilment of teachers in higher education

In this article I shall start from a pessimistic viewpoint, looking at ways than 'more means worse', and then turn to an opportunistic viewpoint, exploring ways that the challenge of more students can be turned to the advantage of all who participate in higher education in the United Kingdom.

Ten ways that more means worse?

1. *More syllabus content*

There is the danger that as we try to accommodate increasing numbers of students, we will expand the content of the syllabus in every discipline, increasing the number of specialisms and trying to provide an ever-widening range of different learning opportunities. In my opinion, we are already too good at producing specialists and not good enough at equipping our students with the skills (transferable skills, enterprise skills, life skills) that they need to put the fruits of their education into practice in the real world outside our universities.

2. *More watching and listening*

Students in higher education presently spend a considerable amount of their time and energy watching us and listening to us - especially in lectures. As Graham Gibbs argued provocatively (*The New Academic* No.1,

Continued overleaf

EDITORIAL

Crisis? What Crisis?

We all know about the failings of forecasters - those people who examine current trends, make some lofty assumptions, and then make a complete hash of interpreting the future. However, you don't need second sight to realise that teaching in British higher education faces a serious demographic crisis in the next fifteen years. The reason is simple. Large numbers of staff were recruited into higher education in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Soon they will retire. According to informal estimates, some 70 per cent of the staff of universities designated before 1991 will retire between 2003-2007 AD. Virtually at a stroke, many departments will lose the bulk of their senior teaching staff.

Various questions arise: Who is going to replace them? Assuming that the answer is animate, how will they be selected? Will they receive formal training as teachers or follow the postgraduate research route as before, with a little remedial in-service instruction in teaching and learning methods? Perhaps most important, is anyone actually thinking about these issues? It is now only a decade until the demographic crisis takes effect. Any sensible system of educational planning would be increasing the training of personnel *now* in order to have a cohort of experienced staff in place by 2003. Does anyone see the faintest signs that this is happening?

Join the Debate

In these days of performance indicators and crude numerical counts of publications and citations, some may worry whether it is worth spending time writing for *The New Academic*. If such things worry you, relax: our postbag indicates that *The New Academic* gets read and generates lively debate. Moreover, the material that appears here is fully reputable in professional terms since all articles, as opposed to opinions and short pieces, are refereed either by the editorial panel or by outside referees. So if you would like to contribute, please feel free to submit material, either directly to the editors or through any members of the editorial team. A detailed 'Notes for Contributors' is now available to help you (copies can be obtained from the SCED office). As always, we look forward to hearing from you.

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1991), not much real learning is associated with such watching and listening. Nevertheless, many will be tempted to accommodate the larger numbers by having ever more watching and listening - it's almost as easy to lecture to 400 as to 100.

3. *More 'filled time'*

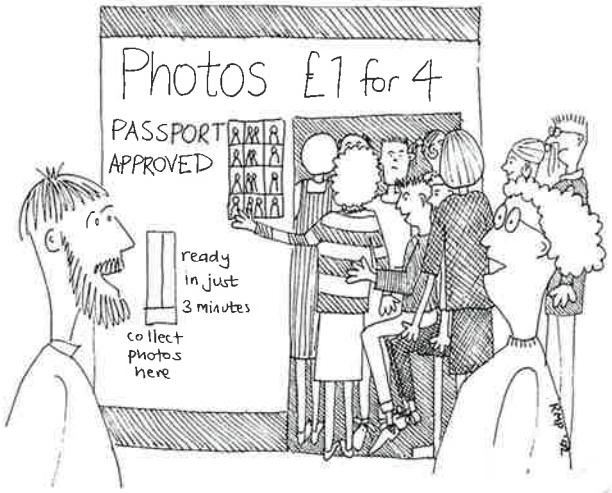
The way higher education works has traditionally been dominated by timetables. These are usually 'teaching timetables', and there will probably be a move towards intensifying them. There is a tendency to measure the effectiveness of staff in higher education in terms of their teaching timetables - which may bear little relationship with the quality of the learning which results during these timetables. In fact, most students will tell you that the 'real learning' happens outside the teaching timetable. The real learning often happens as students prepare for assessment, weeks or months after 'being taught'.

4. *More queueing*

As it is already, students spend a great deal of time queueing. Perhaps the fact that this is already so is a symptom of British patience in that it is considered churlish to complain about queues. Yet aside from some incidental, but often useful, peer group interaction, most time spent in queues is completely wasted. With large numbers of students, queues in libraries, in computer centres, in laboratories, outside tutors' door, in refectories - and at the Students' Union bars - will all increase. 'More means worse' seems unavoidable here.

5. *More lectures used for 'transmit-receive'*

From the point of view of the traditional lecturer, the lecture situation is ideal for getting through a lot of material with a large number of students at the same time. The fact that it is usually the lecturer (and not the students) who is getting through a lot of material is often ignored (ask your students how much they retain from the average lecture). Larger numbers may



Are they trying to get into the Guinness Book of Records?

No, there's been a room change. They should be in the Main Lecture Theatre!

mean a tendency to use lectures to do things that previously were done in more-interactive ways.

6. *More competition between students*

There is already too much competition between students in higher education. Our best-educated people are usually very successful at competing with each other - and very unsuccessful at collaborating with each other. Can you see the effects of this in your own institution? If we accommodate more students into higher education, and retain the traditional ways of 'sorting them' out into first, seconds, thirds, and also-rans, the competition will increase.

7. *More boredom*

When we ask students for feedback about the quality of their learning experiences, the word 'boring' sends shivers down our spines. 'How can something as fascinating as electrochemical thermodynamics be *boring*?' we ask in disbelief. We avoid asking students questions where the answer 'boring' could be forthcoming. When we remind ourselves that we are dealing with highly-intelligent young people, it should come as no surprise that they find a lot of things boring. They tend to be bored most easily when they can't do anything much (except write notes) - as, for example, in lectures. More of these will promote even more boredom.

8. *More students for the same resources*

In higher education today, there are seldom as many books as libraries would wish to provide. There is seldom a surplus of reading-desks where students can study. There is never a surplus of student accommodation. Computers and laboratory facilities are normally stretched. More students? You don't need me to go on.

9. *More assessment (of the traditional kind)*

Exams may cause students to get down and do some work, but otherwise exams are lost learning opportunities. Students hardly ever get the opportunity to get their scripts back, and to learn from their mistakes and their triumphs. Even tutor-marked assessment (such as essays, laboratory reports, projects) tends to give students far less feedback than would be desirable. If the pile of essays becomes twice as high, it is reasonable to suppose that the quality of feedback to students will diminish further.

10. *More regurgitation*

'Monkey see, monkey do' still applies in higher education. In many subjects (not yours, of course) it's possible for students to get by quite well by simply identifying the most important points of the subject, getting a reasonably firm, short-term grip on them, regurgitating them coherently when required, and then forgetting them.

Ten ways that more can mean better?

1. *More emphasis on learning-by-doing*

Not much learning, in fact, happens any other way. Lectures may be good at providing students with stimulation, and helping develop their attitudes, but the real learning happens when students start trying to do something with the subject material. Most of students' learning-by-doing does not happen in the presence of their lecturers, but on their own or, better still, in small groups of fellow students. If we place more emphasis on the value of learning-by-doing, help students to structure that style of learning, and then let them get on with it, we *can* accommodate more students in higher education.

2. *More opportunity to receive feedback*

Students learn from the feedback they receive. They learn from the less-formal feedback that they draw from their peer-group. With more students in higher education, they're going to have less opportunity to get that formal feedback from us. However, we can help them to become better at giving and receiving feedback from each other.

3. *More learning through collaboration*

If there are more students in higher education, there is automatically more opportunity for students to collaborate with their peers. Where can we help? We can pay particular attention to designing task and activities which are *best done collaboratively* instead of competitively. We can help students form and

maintain study syndicates. We can help them get over the hangups about needing to compete, by helping them to find out how much more they can learn collaboratively.

4. *More opportunity for 'digesting'*

Students need time to make sense of their learning experiences. They also need time to make sense of the feedback they receive - both from us and from each other. The time that students need for this process of 'digesting' does not have staffing or resource implications. If we can free some of the time that students spend in unproductive learning situations, we can help them increase their learning effectiveness by taking a less-active role ourselves.

5. *More learning through assessing*

While traditional forms of assessment may often be 'lost learning opportunities', it is possible to create forms of assessment which enhance learning. Self-assessment, and peer-assessment, when developed appropriately, can allow students to think more deeply about essays they write, presentations they give, reports they write, and various other important learning outcomes. Involving students in the processes of assessment can give them a deeper insight not only into the subject matter they learn, but also into the 'rules of the game' of assessment. This can meant that, even in traditional forms of assessment, students can prepare themselves better to show themselves at their best.

6. *More opportunity to give feedback*

Having more students in higher education increases the opportunity for us to gather feedback from them about their learning experiences. It can be as quick to give a questionnaire to 400 students as to 100 students, and if we then involve students themselves in analysing and prioritising the findings from the questionnaires, it can even be quicker than doing so ourselves. The findings can then become the basis for negotiations, whereby students gain a sense of ownership of the decisions to improve their learning experiences.

7. *More chance to mix and match*

Modularisation and credit accumulation and transfer schemes allow greater flexibility for students. The greater the numbers of students, the more viable unusual learning combinations and pathways become. With careful planning, it becomes possible to offer students far more ownership of their curriculum options, allowing them to capitalise on their individual strengths.

8. *More value placed on existing competence*

It has been said that most students spend up to half their time on things that they already know. With increased numbers of students in higher education, it is clearly time to ensure that students can receive credit for things they already know, without having to participate in rituals. Students who can demonstrate that they have already mastered a topic deserve exemption from any further requirement of spending time with that topic, and need to be given the opportunity to demonstrate their existing competences, as a way of enabling them to decide sensibly how best to use their time in higher education.

9. *More emphasis on study skills*

It is now well known that higher education does not merely measure students' intelligence or competence, but measures their ability to organise their studies effectively and efficiently. Exams tend to measure examination technique. Revision demands good time-management techniques. Written answers require good skills or expression and analysis. By providing help with the processes of studying, teachers in higher education can help students to realise their full potential. Students can be helped to be more and more self-sufficient, so that increased numbers of students can learn effectively.

10. *More attention to 'wanting'*

If students really *want* to learn, they are very likely to succeed. Conversely, many of the student casualties in higher education today are caused not by any lack of intellect or competence, but by a lack of motivation. Perhaps one of the most valuable roles of teachers in higher education is to create and maintain the 'desire to learn', and not merely to be brokers in information. A lecture which causes most of the students present to go enthusiastically into some active learning is an

example of the optimum use of situations in which there are large teaching groups.

Quality of the learning experience

I have limited myself to just ten ways that increased student numbers in higher education can lead to disaster or to triumph. There are many more cases to be argued in each of the two directions. If we move away from the sanctity of course content towards enhancing the processes of learning, we are likely to maximise our opportunities to use large numbers in a positive way. If we focus on learning rather than on teaching, we are on our way towards helping greater numbers of students benefit from higher education. In short, if we look after the learning, the teaching will look after itself - whatever the staff-student ratios.

Phil Race is Professor of Educational Development at the University of Glamorgan and author of **500 Tips for Students (SCED, *Basil Blackwell, 1992*).**

LISTINGS

NOVEMBER

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

25 **Education Partnerships for Business: Committing to Quality.** Heathrow. *CRAC Conference Office, Sheraton House, Castle Park, Cambridge, CB3 0AX; tel: 0223 460277.* ***Fees: £164.50 inc. VAT, B&B extra.***

25 **Computers, CALL and IT for beginners.** London. *CILT, Regent's College, Inner Circle, Regent's Park, London NW1 4NS; tel: 071 486 8221.*

30 **PICKUP: Effective Relationships with Businesses.** Egham. *Carol Pedrick, DES Pickup Office, Magdalen Centre, Robert Robinson Ave, Oxford Science Park, Oxford OX4 4GA.* ***Fees: £90.***

30-1 Dec **SRHE: Living with Expansion in Higher Education - Coercion, Collusion or Negotiation?** Grantham. *Jill Brookes, SCED Administrator, 69 Cotton Lane, Moseley, Birmingham B13 9SE; tel: 021 449 6313; fax: 021 449 6314.* ***Fees: £120-150 (res).***

DECEMBER

1-5 **Training Indonesia.** Jakarta, Indonesia. *Financial subsidies from DTI available to UK participants Details: Overseas Exhibition Services 071-486-1951.*

2-4 **PICKUP: Mastering Training Needs Analysis.** West Dean College. *Allun Clark, Chichester College of Technology, tel: 0243 533899; Jil Barker, Thames Valley University, tel: 0753 697584.*

13-15 **Self-access langauge learning (Adult/FE/HE).** Cambridge. *See CILT 25 Nov.*

15-17 **SRHE CONFERENCE 1992: Learning to Effect.** Nottingham. *Denise Kitchener, The Commercial Centre, Nottingham Polytechnic, Burton Street, Nottingham, NG1 4BU; tel: 0602 486409/418418.* ***Fees: £220. Call for Contributions.***

1993

JANUARY

6-8 **CUA Module 4: Appraisal and Staff Development.** University of Birmingham. *Jean Grier, Administrative Co-ordinator, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, University of Edinburgh, Summerhall, Edinburgh, EH9 1QH; Tel: 031 650 6125, Fax: 031 668 4341.*

FEBRUARY

22 **PICKUP: The Human Resource Development Function in College and Universities.** *See PICKUP 30 Nov.*

MARCH

10-12 **The 2nd Learning Company Conference.** Warwick. *The Learning Company Project, TRANSFORM, Suite 55-56, 22 High St., Sheffield, S1 2GE, tel: 0742 721178; fax: 0742 729706.* ***Fees: £475 + VAT.***

11-13 **"Assessment '93": The CALICO Annual Symposium.** (Evaluation of the effectiveness of computer assisted instruction, using technology to evaluate human performance (e.g. computer adaptive testing), using technology and human factors to evaluate educational technologies). Williamsburg, VA, USA. *See Calico entry 12-14 August.*

17 **PICKUP: Financial Management.** *See PICKUP 30 Nov.*

Easter **CUA Module 1: A Framework for Staff Management.** Venue to be confirmed. *See CUA entry 6-8 January, 1993.*

APRIL

5-8 **AETT 28th Annual Conference: Designing for Learning.** Glasgow. *Ross Hoey, Conference Manager, AETT '93 Conference, Jordanhill College, 76 Southbrae Drive, Glasgow G13 1PP; tel: 041 950 3229; fax: 041 950 3268.*

DECEMBER

14-16 **SRHE CONFERENCE 1993 on Governments and the Higher Education Curriculum.** University of Sussex. *Anyone interested in contributing a paper under one of the following five theme titles is warmly invited to contact the conference coordinator (Prof Tony Becher, EDB, University of Sussex, Falmer, Brighton BN1 9RG). The five themes are: _ Access and employment policies _ Government and the industrial ethic _ Audit, inspection and the demand for quality assurance _ The State and curricular structures _ Governments and professional education.*

Further particulars about these events can be obtained from Academic Staff Development Office, Teaching Support and Media Services; Ext. 3784, Fax. 3005, email: asd@uk.ac.southampton.

IS THERE MORE TO GROUP WORK THAN MEETS THE ACADEMIC EYE?

Jo Malseed

The experience of a new group-based student-centred course in Independent Studies at Lancaster University suggests there may be much more to group work than leaving eight students together for a set number of weeks to do a group project.

Tutors and students on this course, now in its second year, have found that not only does effective group work need thorough preparation, but also adherence to some of its underlying student-centred principles can overturn conventional approaches to teaching, learning and course administration.

Students: learning to work effectively in groups

A major belief underlying the course is that working collaboratively can construct supportive and productive learning environments. However, most students in the first year of the course found working in groups gruelling:

> *The main thing I learned was how not to commit murder... just." (Student on Lancaster course, 1990/91)*

Working with people they had not chosen (timetable constraints prevented students composing their own groups), finding times when eight people with different timetables and responsibilities can meet outside contact hours, and making group decisions were not easy.

Keen to 'let go control' and not slip back into didactic teaching methods, the tutors largely left the students to 'battle it out' amongst themselves.

This year things ran differently. Students spent much of the first term learning ways in which they could work effectively (and ineffectively) together. They engaged in listening exercises, drew up (or rejected) 'ground rules', got to know each other, shared work - and sometimes personal - problems, and played games together.

Learning to work as groups takes time. Even at the beginning of the second term some of the tutors and students were still worried that groups were not 'pulling together'. Students needed to remind themselves of the ingredients of effective group work, and to analyse what was happening within their own groups.

All the benefits of this new approach are not yet clear, but it seems that groups which have been given time to feel comfortable together and to learn about working together have managed to address and get beyond many of the problems with which the 'uninitiated' last year spent most of their time blindly grappling.

Tutors: responding to student needs

Students cannot be expected to work together and take over responsibility for their own learning if their expressed needs are ignored, overruled, or not taken seriously. Tutors on the course soon realised that they need to listen and respond to students' needs and ideas.

Resources

With more control over their own learning, many students on the course develop new, as well as familiar, forms of communication in their groups. The department has had to re-think its policy on student access to resources, and now provides some (limited) funding for these needs. Essays usually only require pen, paper and access to the Library. However, visual displays, oral presentations, research reports, photography, poems, plays, short stories, videos, drama, games and group work require desk-top publishing facilities, dark-room facilities, creative writing courses, video-making courses, study skills workshops, equipment for making overhead projector transparencies, props, paint, flipcharts, markers and Blu-tak, and a comfortable workroom with exhibition space.

Assessment

The course is now working towards a new assessment system, involving detailed explicit feedback during the year, and awarding a single negotiated mark for each student only at the end of the course.

For the first year and a half of the course students could choose - in the interests of supporting each other, development and taking over responsibility for their own learning - from a range of marking and assessment procedures, including tutor, self and tutor, peer assessment of individual students, and group assessment of themselves. All these involved students

ABOUT THE GROUPS

Students join one group for the duration of the course.

Each group has **a theme.** This year the group themes available are:

- Religion and Science: Convergencies and Conflicts
- Global and Personal Perspectives on Consumerism
- The Social Aspects of AIDS and HIV
- Green Thinking and Green Action
- Environment and Society
- Sexuality, Politics and Power
- Health and Social Policy
- Journalism, Media and Society
- Gender and Scientific Knowledge
- Conventional and Complementary Medicine
- Social Inequalities

With the freedom and flexibility offered by the course, groups also tend to develop interests in many other areas.

Each group meets with its tutor for one two hour session a week, and the course runs for 25 weeks.

drawing up their own work schedules, negotiating their own deadlines, clarifying the aims of pieces of work, suggesting their own criteria for assessment, and engaging in self evaluation - with the self and tutor, peer and group options also engaging students in marking and providing feedback.

This involvement has led some students to question the meaning of awarding marks and grades, and to suggest alternatives. As two students put it:

I'm not confident with the way things are. I mean, what is 52%, what is 58%?... It doesn't really mean anything. But I definitely like the feedback... Without marks you'd be more likely to concentrate on your development, your progress After all this discussion and feedback, giving a mark seems irrelevant.

Awarding meaningful marks is widely felt to be impossible on the course, especially with its student-centred context where emphasis is placed on personal development. But the restrictions imposed by the University mean that response to student and tutor ideas has not yet stretched to replacing marks and grades.

Tutors: providing tutor training and support

In its favour, it is often stated that any students, irrespective of discipline, age and ability, can engage in group work. However, the same may not be true of tutors. The tutors on this course, most of whom are postgraduates, have a collective wealth of teaching experience - in HE (including the OU), FE, Adult Education, schools, the Prison Service, Youth and Community Service, and the NHS - but all have come to believe that they need specialist training and a great deal of support in order to tutor on a course like this.

Tutors on the Lancaster course are required to participate in an annual, 'tailor-made' training programme. This year the programme drew on expertise from within and outside the University, and included interactive sessions on group work philosophy, workshop design and techniques (including various study skills workshops), creative problem-solving, warm-ups and icebreakers, the assessment of 'conventional' and 'unconventional' pieces of work, learning contracts, and consensus decision-making.

However, even with four or five follow-up days, this is not enough. The tutors have found that they need support throughout the year. The temptation to fall back into more conventional, didactic methods of teaching is often overpowering, even though the tutors acknowledge that such methods tend to foster superficial passive learning. Faith in a student-centred group work approach is one thing, but the measure of tutor confidence needed to sustain it in practice is quite another: it tends to come only with experience.

Several tutors have remarked that they could not have survived the course, let alone developed, without the support of a central resource of workshop packs and reading material, and a weekly tutors' meeting. Here tutors air and discuss any problems which they have encountered on the course during the week, exchange ideas, draw up policies and maintain an impression of the overall development of the course. As the meetings run on a group work approach they also allow the tutors to gain first-hand experience of working in groups, so they can better understand the problems and benefits of group process encountered by the students.

All this suggests that there is much more to group work than eight students and an end product. In fact a student-centred group-based course has to, by its very nature, respond to both student and tutor needs and ideas. This means change and continual review - a considerable departure from the pre-packaged, static nature of many traditional courses.

Jo Malseed is a group tutor on the first year Independent Studies course at Lancaster University, and is also the overall course co-ordinator. Working with youth theatre and training as a Dramatherapist, she is now exploring the introduction of drama techniques into teaching and learning on the Independent Studies course.

LETTERS

Dear Editor,

In his article 'Eight Myths about Assessment' (*The New Academic*, Autumn 1991), Graham Gibbs set himself the task of 'debunking some cherished beliefs'. Such thought-provoking articles are to be welcomed, even if we find their content somewhat uncomfortable. However, we feel compelled to take Gibbs up on part of what he writes under his Myth No.5 'Assessment indicates what has been learnt'.

Citing an Open University study in which a group of applicants took the Science Foundation Course exam at the same time as the previous year's students, Gibb's writes 'While the average exam scores of the two groups distributions of scores was considerable, with the best of the students who had not yet taken the course scoring above the average of those who had finished the course'.

In the absence of any statement to the contrary, most readers would assume that this was a recent study carried out on the current version of the Open University's Science Foundation Course (S102). In fact, the study relates to a previous version of the course (S100) and took place in the early 1970s (A.R. Kaye, 1973). The design and evaluation of science courses at the Open University, *Instructional Science*, 2, pp.119-191). 76 applicants to study S100 in 1973 (the 'pre-test' group) took the exam in the autumn of 1972. Their performance was compared to that of 76 students in the 1972 cohort (the 'post-test' group) matched for educational background, occupation, sex, previous knowledge of science, etc. The mean score of the 'pre-test' group was 51.0. The percentages who would have 'passed' the exam were 10% for the 'pre-test' group and 67% for the 'post-test' group. Kaye's conclusion was that 'comparison of these two distributions shows an encouraging gain in the 'post-test' group over the group who had not yet taken the course'.

Thus, while there may be some truth in Gibbs' claim, he does seem to have stretched the point somewhat. Nevertheless, to the extent that his claim was true for 1972, we ought to ask whether it could apply to S102 in 1992? Unfortunately, we simply don't know. However, we can say that, given the demographic changes that have occurred in the Science Foundation Course student-body over the intervening 20 years, it seems unlikely. The most striking of these many changes is the decline in the proportion of students working in education (26.5% in 1971, 4% among students new in 1992). This is counterbalanced by significant increases in other occupational categories (eg. skilled trades, other manual work, communications and transport, clerical and office, sales and services). Many of the students registered to take S100 in 1973 already had a Certificate in Education and were probably teaching science as part of their everyday work. It is not particularly surprising, therefore, that some of these students achieved higher scores in the 1972 exam than did the average student in the 1972 cohort.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Pat Murphy
Chair, S102 Course Team
Faculty of Science
Open University

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Dear Editor,

Notes to Graham Gibbs on his essay 'Down with Essays!'

Overall, you are improving, but there are signs of some easily rectified bad habits beginning to creep into your essay writing.

1. I enjoy a good slice of spleen as much as the next man Graham, and polemics are good fun, but in an academic environment you have to combine passion with reason.
2. You seem to be having some trouble distinguishing between your own experiences and prejudices, and events in the outside world. For example, you suggest that the primary goal of essay writing:

   > *...is to obscure ignorance - to make as much as possible from as little as possible and to give the impression of knowledge where none exists - to 'fake' good.*

   That may be *your* goal when writing an essay, but it is not shared by everybody else. Essays are an extremely effective and economical means of assessing a student's understanding of a subject, and if followed by critical feedback, can help to improve that understanding. The process of turning vague thoughts into words is, as I am

sure you will agree, a very powerful learning activity.

3. The idea of using reminiscences about your undergraduate days as a vehicle for attacking essays is sound, but you fail to demonstrate their relevance to the debate. It is important to continually ask yourself when writing an essay 'Does this sentence contribute to my answer to the question posed by the essay title?' If it does not, then it should be deleted. Your recollections of University life do not throw any light on the debate about essays, but they do offer tantalising glimpses of either your earlier writing performance or perhaps the marking habits of your tutors at the time. You say, for example, that:

   > *As an undergraduate I learnt how to write essays and get good marks. But I got some of my best marks for essays on topics I knew little about, and cared less, and where I therefore concentrated on getting good marks. On topics I found fascinating, read all about and wrote about with passion, I got poorer marks'.*

   Either your essays on subjects that you found interesting were not as good as the others or your tutors were wrong to mark them so harshly, but whatever the truth of the matter, this sad experience does not constitute grounds for attacking essays themselves.

4. In the latter half of your essay you begin to make rather wild statements alluding to the readership between education and work. Thus:

   > *Essay writing resembles the forms writing takes outside academia in almost no respects (sic) ...Students should be asked to write letters, magazine articles for different audiences, reports to their boss, reviews of progress in projects, justifications for budgets and so on.*

   Might I suggest that you may be getting a trifle confused about the purpose of different forms of written work? Essays are not supposed to resemble business reports or memos. If you want to train people to write letters and business reports, fine, get on with it, but there is no need to do so *at the expense* of essays designed to assess their knowledge and understanding. Essays and reports are not mutually exclusive, they serve different purposes. Surely there is room for both in our education system? Heaven forbid that we ever get to the stage of assessing students of Linguistics or Moral Philosophy by their ability to write business letters.

5. I detect signs in the last few paragraphs of this essay that you have been infected with the craze for judging everything in Education, from syllabus content to the means used to assess students, in relation to its relevance to the Workplace. In a nation rapidly slipping down the World economic rankings this is an understandable, but nonetheless distressing development. The current obsession with money, cost-cutting and the world of work will, paradoxically, only accelerate our decline. This is not the forum in which to expand upon this theme, but please let me make a few reading suggestions.

An antidote to your fixation on relevance I recommend that you have a look at Roger Scruton's essay 'The Virtue of Irrelevance' (in Scruton, R. *Untimely Tracts*, Macmillan, 1984). In order to improve your understanding of the significance of the hidden curriculum and the relationship between Education and work I suggest you get a hold of 'The Other side of the Hidden Curriculum: Correspondence Theories and the Labour Process', by Michael Apple (*The Journal of Education*, 1980, vol.162), and to give you some perspective on the non-vocational possibilities of Education why not try Paul Hirst's thoughts on the notion of a Liberal Education in *Knowledge and the Curriculum* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974)?

You end with a call:

> *A total moratorium on the use of essays would be one of the simplest ways of improving the quality of students' writing and learning, and, at the same time, starting to bridge the gulf between academic life and subsequent work experience'.*

I would like to end with a call for an end to calls for changes to 'bridge that gap'. For those fortunate enough to have a job for most of their adult lives, work experience is quite long enough, there is no need to extend it back into Education at all.

All things considered I suppose that your essay was not a bad piece of work, but its major flaw was your failure to settle on a single style. If you were trying to be satirical, then you failed because so few of your arrows found their targets, and if you were being serious then all the idiosyncratic, and largely irrelevant autobiographical detail seriously reduced its impact as a piece of academic work. Still, don't get too down-hearted I did laugh once or twice, even if it was in the wrong places!

All the best, looking forward to your next effort.

John Ramsay
Business School
Staffordshire University

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Dear Editor,

I am very disappointed with several of Graham Gibbs recent articles in *The New Academic*. Let me begin with

'down with Essays!' (vol.1, no.2). I agree with him that student essays should not be the only vehicle for undergraduates to undertake research or prepare for their examination. Hence my disappointment is not that Graham Gibbs' view is different from mine but that his article is based on sweeping generalisations derived from his own apparently difficult transition from undergraduate work to real life (and derived from little else of substance). For what it is worth, my experience of essays, as undergraduate and tutor, has been exactly the opposite. It has encouraged whatever frequency of application, fluency, style and structure I am able to bring to academic and professional writing. But I do not proceed from that personal experience to advocate compulsory essay writing in Pure Mathematics. Nothing in my experience, or listening to the experiences of colleagues in this and other institutions would make me feel able to pronounce upon the validity of a particular technique employed in other disciplines. My simple assertion is that essays (inter alia) work well in the fields in which I teach (Law and Estate Management). Perhaps Graham Gibbs was trying to encourage us to look as different methods *as well*. We should; we do; perhaps we should do more. I fear, however, that this case is ill-served by a piece of journalism which gives us 'an exercise in calculated deception' as a serious description of essays and a prescription of ' a total moratorium on the use of essays' as 'one of the simplest ways of improving the quality of students' writing and learning'. (Really - without a substitute?) My emotional reaction to this diatribe, as I see it, may well throw more light on my own limitations than on those of Graham Gibbs' writing, but it was irritation that anything 'traditional' in higher education seems to be consigned to the dustbin in principle. Perhaps it should have been amazement that we continue to get away with these shoddy and dishonest practices and continue to fool the HMIs, the employers, the students and ourselves.

However, no sooner had I written these words when I pick up the next copy of *The New Academic* and find that Graham also feels that seminars must go too, because he has come across some which are badly conceived or executed. I can't work out if he is just trying to provoke discussion or if these are prescriptions for us to follow. Once again we have the sweeping assertions based on anecdotal reminiscence. So there is a Humanities Department somewhere which does not facilitate or encourage the use of sensible presentation aids. In our School developing presentation skills through seminars *is* taken seriously. Students are encouraged to use overheads and handouts, facilities are available to them (including photo-copying which the School pays for). We *do assess* presentation skills through seminars. Perhaps we should do more in training for presentation skills, but the standard achieved by many is excellent. But we don't proceed from our positive experience to prescribe seminars for everyone else. They work for us. Students rate them highly in the course appraisal questionnaires. But our seminars are presumably included in Graham Gibbs' derisive definition and are equally dismissed as not worth retaining.

I'm afraid I came close to laughing aloud when I read that if we were serious about relating teaching to subsequent life we would bring 'committees, courts of enquiry, cross-examination of witnesses, advocacy, negotiation, selling and so on'. I have experience of at least four of these and we use some of them regularly. In general they are very resource-intensive, especially courts of inquiry, and are far more likely to fall victim to the squeeze on resources even than seminars.

Graham Gibbs again proceeds as in his previous piece from his own unhappy experiences to large generalisation; 'When I was a student seminars were invariably awful'. When I was a student, they weren't. So I knew that they could be of value in some situations, if properly approached. This last qualification is surely the point. Good seminars are worth keeping. They do exist. They are not all monologues by reluctant students to small reluctant audiences on topics of interest to neither. The most extraordinary piece of reasoning in the article is in the sentence 'Outside academia people simply do not have discussions in the form of unstructured seminars'. Of course they don't. Who recommends that they should? But they do have *structured* seminars: for example these make up a vital element of the continuing education programme which firms of solicitors and chartered surveyors operate. So why did Graham Gibbs introduce that adjective 'unstructured' as part of his case against all seminars? Our students will take part in structured seminars in their professions, both as leaders/facilitators and as other participants. So we prepare them for this with structured seminars, which we find effective and well received. We find them under pressure from growing numbers and are not so keen to abandon them as Graham Gibbs, on the specious ground that some people somewhere don't do them very well.

Is this the hidden agenda in Graham Gibbs' articles? The squeeze on resources make it increasingly difficult or even impossible for us to deliver courses using techniques in which we believe, so we are invited to discover that it doesn't matter, because we have been deluding ourselves again. It now appears that they weren't any good all along.

Yours faithfully,

Anthony Lavers
School of Estate Management
Oxford Polytechnic

In this issue of *The New Academic*, we examine developments in planning and surveying education. The supplement has been edited by John Gold, Professor of Geography at Oxford Polytechnic and Margaret Gold, Senior Lecturer in the Department of European Studies, Thames Valley University.

WHY IS PLANNING SO BORING?

It's always open season for town planning. Politicians, artists, cultural historians; TV programmes, colour supplements, advertising, exhibitions; the urban crisis, the landscape in peril, the city of the future eloquently and imaginatively traded in the global village. Pity, then, the poor planning students, confronting a course that is aimed at institutional recognition in a profession dominated by local authorities, renowned neither for imagination or creativity. One student wanted to call his dissertation 'Why is planning so boring?', but, despite my encouragement, deferred with half an eye to the response of local authority Chief Planner external examiner.

Achieving professional competence, however, should not mean a dull diet of slavish imitation of current professional practice or courses of such compartmentalised complexity that the wood of grasping the potential reality of the future is invisible for the trees of fragmented disciplinary analyses of the present. The roots of planning lie as much in utopian visions, experiment and revolution as the labyrinths of local bureaucracy. As theories and techniques, social and ethical debates, political and professional procedures develop and expand, it's all too easy to lose sight of the core of planning: the everyday patterns of use and activity in and around and between places and building, and its creative well-spring-influencing, if not controlling or building, their future.

In revitalising the design units in the undergraduate planning course at South Bank University this sense of excitement, the wildness of spirit, has begun to emerge. A long delayed reaction perhaps to memories of the incomprehension that met my mental map of Houghton-le-Spring drawn in the style of the cover of *Revolver*; of the pop-out series of collages and postcards illustrating familiar Townscape themes circulated among certain tutors for assessment that were the downside of planning education in the Sixties. A design course that runs *Week 1/Lecture 1: Pre-classical cities in Mesopotamia* and develops nothing more than the ability to draw perfect clones of Brookside Close and Richmond Riverside may delight the Chief Planner of Deadend District Council, but it hardly excites the imagination or stretches the mind.

Traditional skills and values - sensitivity to the character of places and the ability to analyse it, understanding of historical and architectural significance, graphic and verbal ability to communicate present reality and future possibility - are still but developed in a creative and artistic way. Sketch books and performances are worth acres of mindlessly polished presentation boards.

Places and dreams

This juxtaposition of basic skill and far-reaching possibility starts in the first weeks of the course with a one week studio project (that itself is a rarity these days of large classes and timetables of fragmented units). A few hours a week over a term studying uninspiring housing estates have been replaced by a full week immersed in the West End of London. Launching into Charing Cross Road, St James Park, Whitehall, Trafalgar Square basic drawing and analytical skills are taught through site plans and elevations, land use maps and townscape summaries. But these group pieces, lead to an individual vision - 'reclaiming the right to dream'. Knighted architects and Princes of the Realm are not alone in seeing the future. After a week on the site and on the drawing board, (tables actually - planning schools don't have drawing boards anymore), who better to address those fundamental questions of 'How could this place be *better*?' 'What could happen *here*?', than these proto-planners?

Exercises in *Design & Place* are another element, equally rooted in direct experience. Students observe and record their own movements through space and those of other people, identifying the patterns of everyday use and activity that give places life and learning to pinpoint the difference between one place and another. Some of this work they are required to do and are assessed, through their sketchbooks, drawings, notes and records of the moment and the

place. They make these probes against a background of lectures on the history of urban (and garden) design and on building construction, and reminders (in the midst of all our technological sophistication) of the human senses and the four simple elements: earth, air, fire and water.

The most telling moment in this first year unit, however, is the performance-based day at the South Bank Centre. Through a series of basic exercises in movement and space devised by the choreographer Struan Leslie, students map out activities, through observation, imitation and annotation. Eventually in a group performance they recreate the essentials of place and activity. A day of dance would, and has, antagonised many professional planners, yet the activity described lies at the core of many of the more significant analyses of contemporary planning.

Easy pieces?

In the second year, alongside the rudiments of site planning (dealing with densities and development briefs) a series of 'Easy Pieces' (the title is *somewhat* ironic) have been devised to challenge the inevitable please of 'I can't draw' by confronting students with fine art. They learn by replicating styles and techniques and then projecting them into their own proposals. One year it was the neo-expressionist extremes of Nigel Coates, Eva Zahid and others displayed in *Reclaiming the Public Realm* exhibition at the Heinz Gallery; another year took them to graphical works at the Tate Gallery. Transform Jim Stirling's Clore Gallery into the style of Turner's *Norham Castle*? A second year planning student can do it.

Even the sober conventions of site analysis, development proposals and financial analysis of their degree year designed project are tweaked a little. Students give live presentations of their project by means of *edible* models; after all it's those unexpected lunch deals that are so important, and anyway three A3 sheets and a fine black line is just a conventional media. Extensions to a country house have been as clearly described in bread buns and broccoli.

Culture place and creativity

Alongside the design options of urban design, conservation and landscape, Diploma students now have another, *Culture Place and Creativity*, located where professional education is so often lacking: in rhetoric and symbolism, myth and poetics. Against readings and seminar analysis of contemporary culture and urban life, students embark on a *topographical meditation*, and work outwards from a moment of insight to be presented in any medium *other* than the usual academic essay. It resulted liberating, rewarding and serious expression of interest, enthusiasms and abilities suppressed by conventional units and disciplines, projects and divisions.

What, precisely; was the output? A Chandler-esqe story of the darkside of Milton Keynes, (LA in N Bucks); a folding screen that set the brief events of Animal Rights demonstrations against the real horrors of their targets; videos reading and re-reading conservation; a performance piece springing from huge, long lived sequoias growing beside a short lived puny housing estate; and, almost a reaction against all this, a set of beautiful, conventional plans of the River Wandle dragged back to a leafy valley from the sewers beneath the Arndale Centre.

The art school dance goes on forever

Despite the ambitious cultural and critical agenda of the readings of this course - Baudrillard and Calvino, Berman and Eco - much of the seminar discussion and the 'stories' for the meditations were rooted in experience of place and landscape, home and childhood, re-establishing a personal preference point in the every expanding galaxy of intellectual icons. That, in itself, emphasises the key theme: namely that the common element in these and the previous projects is individual experience and its cultivation, communication and transformation into a creative spur. Students learn about space and activity through the body and movement, through juxtaposing difficult 'art', buildings and fantasy briefs, through to a moment when culture and place merge. Writers on planning theory such as Patsy Healy and A.D. King are revaluing the person who also is the professional. Professionals involved with *places* must cultivate their response and sensitivity to places.

Not so long ago, planning courses were tucked into the attics of art schools and huts in the sub-faculties of universities; a sense of excitement and experiment ran through them. Now Town Planning is fast becoming one set of units somewhere between geography and politics, a pathway in urban policy, a professional option in environmental studies. Unless a few steps of that old art school dance are keep alive, there'll be no wild men and women left to dream of all our futures.

Bob Jarvis

GENDER AND SURVEYING EDUCATION

More than two million people are employed in the construction industry but less than 5% of them are women. Women make up less than 4% of the fully qualified members of the RICS (Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors) despite constituting 25% or more of students on some courses.[1] Even allowing for the fact that over 50% are under the age of 30, a disproportionate number of women are in lower grades compared with men, although the women - few though they be - are generally better qualified than the men academically. A major part of the reason for these discrepancies lies in the way that surveyors are educated.

A spurious technological, and mathematical, image swirls around the profession which might be more applicable to some of the construction-related areas since much of the work of the general practice surveyor (estate manager) is more comparable to that of the property lawyer, financial analyst or 'businessman'. Further it would seem that careers teachers in schools, especially girls' schools, have little idea of what 'surveying' is and some will seek to discourage their pupils from entering surveying courses by stories of 'building sites' and 'having to lift heavy machinery'. Some women students were made to feel 'naughty' at school, for wanting to study surveying, and it was only because of parental support, against the school, that they were able to pursue their chosen career.[2]

Once women get on to the courses they often find them 'easier' than they had imagined, and there does not, nowadays, appear to be any noticeable difference as to grades and final classifications, indeed, if anything women do better. This, however, does not mean that the female students enjoyed the course, as one put it, *'my main aim was simply to get through the course: that was all'*. Moreover, women may be 'not given the benefit of the doubt' and judged to be 'equal' to equivalent male students. The overall ethos of surveying education remains extremely male. Yet because an academic career is not the only career option, many students and practitioners believe the opinion that only 'failures' go into education, (presumably because lecturers are not 'good' enough to be working as professionals and in the private sector). It is not surprising, therefore, that well over 15% of the lecturers in some departments are women as measured against only 2% of surveyors overall being in education. There is also a higher proportion at a more senior level that would be the case in many other subject areas.

Students find the atmosphere competitive and not particularly 'girl friendly' with all the usual problems for women in higher education. This is exacerbated by a somewhat 'aggressive' style of learning, with an emphasis on group projects and what are known as 'crit sessions' in which a student has to defend her or his work in the face of 'criticism' (verbal testing) by one or more lecturers in front to the rest of the group (an inheritance from architectural schools). Inevitably in a 'male' profession, one will get all sorts of sexist comments in lectures especially in relation to the more technological areas of the profession (eg. 'I won't ask you girls this question, as you don't even know how to wire a plug'). What is surprising is that female students accept this as 'normal' and are unlikely to complain, indeed they seem to be very even-tempered and able to take anything, commenting "there's no point in complaining in any case we are only here for three years". In contrast, I noted that when male students designed a building with windows on the inside corridors (!) it was just taken as 'amusing' and nothing more was made of it.

Attempts are nowadays being made to attract more 'non-standard' students, including mature women students but there is very little creche provision or supportive understanding. Even where child-care facilities do exist the assumption is that it is for 'students' not 'staff', demonstrating that equal opportunities gestures are skin deep. The real name of the game is getting in more 'students' - the essential 'resource' for empire building, while at the same time discouraging women lecturers from progressing because they are seen as 'competition'. This can result in apparently non-sexist attitudes towards women students co-existing with discrimination towards women staff, giving women students a very confused image of the 'real world'. In conclusion, there is a need for a more serious commitment to equal opportunities in respect of childcare, career structures and teaching strategies. Gender awareness should be a consideration in the definition of professional competence[3], if only because using 'man' power wisely is more cost-effective. These steps would help ensure that women will have a better experience of higher education itself and more career satisfaction when out in practice.

Clara Greed

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THE EUROPEANISATION OF PLANNING EDUCATION: A LOST OPPORTUNITY?

The Single European Act, European Community (EC) directives defining British planning practice and moves to harmonise planning legislation in the EC are important aspects of the contemporary context of United Kingdom planning practice. They also provide part of the backcloth to one of the key issues facing planning education: how should the curriculum of UK planning schools respond to what is happening in Europe?

During the early and mid-1980s, UK planning schools responded in two ways. First, they became active members of the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) which enabled European planning educators to discuss planning education and research through an annual conference and a regular newsletter. Secondly, using ERASMUS and other student and teacher exchange programmes, UK planning schools linked extensively with their counterparts in Europe. Their enthusiasm for this type of linkage is demonstrated by the fact that the number of approved ERASMUS programmes in planning is at a similar level to those in geography and architecture although the number of departments in these subjects is far greater. However, the links between planning schools have generally been restricted to student exchange and other aspects of the ERASMUS scheme, such as staff interchange and joint curriculum development, have remained underdeveloped to date.

This minimal response to Europe began to change in the late 1980s. Some UK planning schools (eg. Birmingham) began to revise their undergraduate programmes to incorporate language teaching, develop specific courses on EC legislation, administrative procedures and financial systems and enhance comparative planning courses. Collectively, UK planning schools worked through AESOP and the European Council of Town Planners to define a core agenda for European planning education which, they hoped, would be instrumental in maintaining the professional identity and exclusivity claims of planners in the face of opposition from other built environment professions. The UK schools and the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) have been seen as particularly important in this demarcation battle. Apart from Ireland, not other European country has a separate, recognised planning profession and therefore there are no European bodies which are equivalent to the RTPI in terms of institutionalised power over practice and education.

These more recent developments are a response to the free movement of professional labour and the harmonisation of some planning controls and procedures, for they are aimed at adapting individuals to the changing world by increasing their personal education capital and in the process perhaps changing their point of entry into the labour market. The rationale underpinning these developments seem as follow: prepare the next generation of planners for European practice by enabling them to develop basic language skills, a knowledge of common European practices and procedures and some specialised planning knowledge about at least one other European country. Curriculum change is contained by this response to the expansion of the syllabus and minor readjustments in the balance of existing elements of the curriculum.

However, I doubt whether this is an adequate response to what is happening in Europe. First, at the economic level, greater European integration and the EC's role within it cannot be isolated from global restructuring and integration. The increasingly world-wide integration of production has led to rationalisation, intensification, and concentration between firms and sectors and new spatial divisions of labour within and between the states of Europe and the rest of the world. The institutionalisation of a unified capital market by the EC, the removal of barriers to the movement of goods, services and labour and the conversion of Eastern European states into market economies is intensifying and further Europeanising the processes of global and national restructuring which have ripped through the member states' economies in the last decade or so. These processes are resulting in a new geography of uneven development which is significantly changing the position and role of the UK: these global processes need to be central to the syllabus of planning schools.

Secondly, greater integration between European states is being accompanied by greater social cleavage and political fragmentation caused by, among other things, the rise of new nationalist movements,

destruction of political entities, scape-goating of ethnic and social minorities, growing personal and collective violence and major movements of the poor from south to north and east to west. These aspects of the new Europe are already important components of the political agenda in many European states and they will increasingly define their planning agendas. To date, however, these processes have received little attention in the curriculum of planning schools.

Thirdly, the free flow of capital between states as well as within sectors and the centrality of land and property capital within these processes is making it even more difficult for planners within particular European states to do anything more than swim with the waves of capitalist development and the resultant economic, social, political and spatial unevenness. Furthermore, the UK construction industry is unusual in that it is fragmented into a large number of professions which have contributed to higher unit costs compared to other European countries. Simpler divisions of labour in Europe result in planning being perceived as a specialisation within architecture and engineering and this has produced a very different pattern of planning education in other European countries. Different models of professional organisation, coupled with the confirmation of the inherent weakness of planners as control agents within the built environment, offer UK planning educators the possibility of challenging the bureaucratic professionalism of UK planning practice and the strong control system exercised by the RTPI over UK planning education. This professional orthodoxy has been challenged before. In the period from 1975 until the late 1980s, for example, the Radical Institute Group of the RTPI facilitated a more critical approach to planning education. Yet despite the fact that many senior UK planning academics are past activists of the Radical Institute Group, professional orthodoxy is prevailing. UK planning educators are promoting the British system through AESOP as a role model for other European countries.

Lastly, the notion of Europe itself is conceptually problematic and planning educators need to address a number of questions about it before they reorganise their courses. These include:

- Is Europe a geographical area of political entity which will change as EC membership expands?
- Which processes, structures and/or issues unify this area or entity and provide a satisfactory principle for the organisation of the curriculum?
- Is the notion of Europe an ideological object which is best seen as representing the interests of an emerging regional trade bloc?
- Does Europe as a basis for syllabus organisation represent at the intellectual level a replication of the exclusion which third world countries experience at the political, social and economic level?

Several planning theorists have argued that the 1990s offer the opportunity for a radical reappraisal of the agenda of planning education and practice. For example, Hague[1] has argued that the economic change associated with the end of Fordism and globalisation coupled with political change accompanying the new Europe provides a potential new basis for the legitimisation of UK planning theory and practice. Borrowing the Green Movement's slogan 'Think global, act local', he advocates a new form of planning that is 'green, participatory, regionalist, regulatory and redistributive'. Likewise, I have argued that the Europeanising of planning theory opens up the possibility of a new agenda which is both critical and transformatory[2] If UK planning educators would grasp the opportunity which Europeanisation offers they could begin to break out of the confines of their narrow professional curriculum and then they might be able to assist in creating a network of European planning practitioners linked by their understanding of global/local processes and their ability to break out of the confines of existing professional practice.

Glen McDougall

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE SUPPORT FOR OVERSEAS STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ENGLAND

Vicky Schofield

Background

During the 1989/1990 academic year, a Directorate working part reviewed the state of support for overseas students at The University of Central England at Birmingham (UCE), then called Birmingham Polytechnic, and made certain recommendations for change. These were based on study of the support that was then provided at the University and on what help was offered by other institutions of higher education.

The responsibility for managing the provision of English Language support for overseas students was transferred from the Faculty of Education to the central Learning Methods Unit.

The Learning Methods Unit

This unit has been in existence for about ten years. Its central aim is to develop and sustain the quality of teaching within the University . The advantages of locating English Language support in the Learning Methods Unit are:

- the LMU already operates within a network of teaching staff across the University;
- study skills for overseas students is complementary to the work of the LMU;
- the availability of clerical support.

The Students

Although UCE does not have a large number of overseas students compared with some other institutes of higher education, that number is gradually increasing. In September 1990 there were approximately 113 new 1st year and 159 second, third and fourth year students based at the main campus, and others at sites spread over the city. About 100 students attended English classes in the academic year 1990/91. Just over 25% of these were of Hong Kong Chinese origin, the next highest percentage being Malaysian.

About 40% of the students who attended classes were from the Business School, with approximately 20% from the Faculty of the Built Environment, 15% from the Faculty of Engineering and 10% from the Birmingham Institute of Art and Design.

English Language Support

Aim The LMU aims to provide a wide range of English language support in specific subject areas, as well as general English for Academic Purposes.

Publicity Information about English Language Support was sent to all 1st year overseas students in Halls of Residence, as part of a Welcome Pack containing useful information about Birmingham and the UCE. Details of classes were given to new students when they visited the International Office.

Letters were sent to all course directors, publicising the service; letters were sent to Deans and Heads of Department enclosing publicity posters: additional posters were put up around the University's campuses; individual letters were sent to all new overseas students and to all 2nd, 3rd and 4th year students, who had failed or been referred.

The Academic Year

During the first week of the course 56 students arrived to take part in the classes. They were given a diagnostic test to assess their ability in grammar and written English. Based on the results of this test, about 50% of the students were expected to experience problems in written work.

For the next 5 weeks, students following a general English for Academic Purposes course, using both published course books and the author's own materials.

The students were then asked to complete a questionnaire, indicating which of the following classes they wished to attend for the rest of the year:

- Academic Writing
- Conversation Skills
- Grammar
- Academic Reading
- Seminar Skills
- Listening Skills

The most requested classes turned out to be Academic Writing, Seminar Skills and Conversation Skills. We therefore arranged 3 Seminar Skills, 2 Writing and 2 Conversation classes per week, with the other areas mentioned having one class per week at lunchtimes, each class being of one hour's duration. Classes finished in the middle of June, as by then, most students were heavily involved in examinations.

Progress review

Each student and his/her personal tutor or course director received a progress review form near the end of both the Autumn and Spring terms.

This indicated whether or not the student had attended classes and commented on his/her strengths and on the areas in which improvements could be made.

One-to-one work

One of the outcomes of the progress review forms was that some students were felt to be in need of extra help, in addition to attending the classes provided.

These students and others referred by course tutors or by English class teachers attended specially-tailored one-to-one tutorials (dealing mainly with essay and project writing) over a number of weeks, until it was felt that they were no longer necessary.

End of Year Questionnaires

Students who had attended the classes and their course directors or personal tutors were each sent a course evaluation questionnaire.

Approximately 30% of students returned their completed questionnaires and 39% of staff theirs.

Students whose attendance had fallen off were asked the reasons why; most replied that they had been too busy with coursework, but that the times of the classes were good for them and that the number of classes was about right. The vast majority of students preferred the specific classes run in the Spring and Summer Terms to the more general ones of the Autumn Term. About 39% felt that the content of the classes was quite relevant to their coursework; 32% that it was not at all relevant; 64% felt that the classes were useful.

Staff were asked if they felt that the English classes were helpful to their students, 66% of them saying they were and 26% saying they were not.

As to whether they were directly relevant to their students' coursework, 33% said they were quite relevant and 20% not relevant, but 33% said they did not know. They were generally satisfied with the number and times of classes.

The reports on students' progress and notification of their absence from classes were felt by tutors to be very useful.

Some staff felt that English classes should be part of overseas students' timetables and some were keen to consult with the author in order to improve the course for the future, which was very encouraging, since it had previously been quite difficult to get any reaction from some tutors about overseas students' English.

Problems

The greatest of these was the drop-out rate of students from classes, mostly due to pressure of coursework, as mentioned previously.

A strategy needs to be developed to persuade students that the English classes should be seen as complementary, not supplementary to their studies and that they could derive a great deal of benefit from regular attendance.

Another problem was communicating with students, because they come from faculties all over the University and live all over Birmingham and elsewhere. The most successful way was to send any communication via students' personal tutors or course directors through the internal mailing system. However, students did not always receive letters or publicity and, moreover, were extremely reluctant to return any reply slips when asked to.

The Future

As the number of overseas students at The University of Central England at Birmingham increases, new strategies are being developed to help them as much as possible. The general English course has been replaced by classes in the specific areas of writing skills, effective reading, listening skills, grammar, conversation and seminar skills.

In addition, classes have begun in the Business School, the Faculty of the Built Environment, the Birmingham Institute of Art and Design and the Faculty of Engineering. This means that students can obtain specific course-related help with English.

The way forward seems to be to develop these areas of more course-specific English classes throughout the University, and the Business School is at the moment considering a proposal to include a workshop-type module, which would be based on topics of general business, social and economic interest, in its timetable for the next academic year.

I await the outcome of its deliberations with eager anticipation!

Vicky Schofield is Tutor in English Language for Overseas Students in the Learning Methods Unit at the University of Central England in Birmingham

CHANGING STRATEGIES IN EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Douglas Edgar

This paper outlines the characteristics of the delivery of educational development at five former English polytechnics, summarises some of the arguments put to us by colleagues in these institutions when we were formulating our own educational development strategy at Glasgow Polytechnic, and attempts to identify some general principles from which can be established strategies for successful educational development.

Taking first the mechanisms used to deliver educational development activities, we found that these fell into four main categories:

1. Mechanisms related to releasing staff

All five institutions had formal mechanisms to release staff to undertake personal staff development, either for secondments to industry (or other academic institutions) and for remission (ie. release) from existing duties to undertake an educational development project within the institution. As an example, in one polytechnic departments bid for a budget to replace successful applicants for the period of their secondment and to cover any additional expenses accruing from that secondment. It was suggested that a period of release of up to one term was perhaps optimum in that it maximised staff development opportunities to achieve the objectives of the secondment yet gave adequate allocation of time for any one secondment to be worthwhile. This scheme allows up to fifteen full time staff equivalent posts to be made available for this purpose annual.

Three other institutions operated a staff release scheme. The essential difference between this and the secondment scheme above related to the purpose - educational development - and its institutional setting. At two of them a sum is set aside annually, for which departments bid in order to provide funding for replacement staff and to support staff in their proposed project. As a general rule these funds are not available for equipment purchase. A characteristic of this staff development mechanism is that a bid must be related to a specific project proposal or role that the secondee has to undertake. In undertaking it, the secondee would normally work with the appropriate staff/educational development central service unit. The third institution applied a similar concept of staff release, but granted longer periods of release (up to three years) and related such release to their networking system of staff development.

The point was generally made that, provided the right person was seconded, this type of mechanism was considered most effective for improving approaches to teaching and learning since it allowed key innovators amongst academic staff an opportunity to develop their ideas and demonstrate these in their own departments at 'grass roots' level.

2. Mechanisms which are 'task' centred

A second type of mechanism saw groups of professionals sharing a common problem, engaging in some common process to find a common solution, perhaps with the aid of a specialist adviser. These can be said to be 'action research' or 'task centred' in orientation. Three institutions had embraced this philosophy in their staff development thinking, especially using *networking* - a term used to refer to groups of individuals who transact with each other on a shared task. Each group is independent of other groups in the sense that the tasks differ, but is linked to a central, coordinating point and a series of peripheral nodes, or, a hierarchical owner/member structure.

The underlying rationale for these activity networks is to facilitate experience and idea exchange through an action research or experiential learning process, allowing best or good practice to emerge and to be disseminated through an institution and beyond. At one institution, networking was the major vehicle through which staff development was planned to take place, with networks that are, essentially, task oriented groups which are encouraged to identify and develop their own staff development needs. Each is supported by a member of the Staff Development Centre whose specific responsibility is to attempt to provide support for the group, link it to other groups and to the Centre. One member of each group serves as convenor, with the resulting time commitment being recognised and offset in the form of an award of some staff release resource back to his or her department. Network groups are given a budget to assist it in realising their perceived staff development needs. At another institution their Educational

Methods Unit has moved away from offering the events-driven institution-wide approach towards a more tailored approach to meeting the needs of identifiable groups within the polytechnic. Again the view was put that this, in conjunction with the staff release scheme, was proving effective in causing *real change* in teaching/learning strategies within the polytechnic.

This 'task' orientation of networking contrasts with the 'event' orientation of activities such as seminars and short courses. In the former network members have *control* over the agenda for the group whereas in the latter the agenda (or curriculum) is controlled by the event promoters. We see this to be a significant shift in responsibility for educational development towards 'clients' and believe that this 'task' oriented approach is one of the keys to unfreezing existing institutional behaviour and inducing and encouraging change within the organisation.

3. Mechanisms which are 'event' driven

All the institutions visited offered a variety of college-wide events usually in the form of short courses or seminars. Examples included courses in equal opportunities, staff appraisal training, specialist educational methods topics and management training for heads of department. In addition, one polytechnic offered an interesting lunch-time seminar programme, directly related to staff development in educational methods, which sought to allow the presentation of 'feedback' lectures by visiting experts (usually about one per term); and to allow polytechnic staff to present their attempts at good pedagogical practice and through these to share and disseminate that good practice. This has been considered a success by this institution with 25% of all academic staff requesting to be put on the seminar mailing list. All five institutions, too, offered extensive and significant course provision, for in-service teacher training.

4. Special mechanisms of an 'event' nature

One polytechnic operated a 'Reading Week' once per term, in which no teaching took place. It was designed to allow students opportunities to undertake and complete assignments and for academic staff to undertake group staff development activities. Another institution initiated an 'Alternative Teaching Week', during which staff and students identified alternative methods of teaching and learning. It was reported that this had provided a forum for worthwhile innovation and helped to create an environment that encourages innovation in teaching. Another development noted at this institution was a policy or promoting 'excellent teachers' to principal lecturer. Descriptive teaching profiles are used, based upon a Canadian profiling system. One consequence of this policy is that it has helped to change the organisational culture towards a more balanced view of the importance of good teaching in relation to research and other scholarly activities. Indeed, as an interesting and unintended consequence, the detailed nature of the profiling system has called into question the methods used for the assessment of the quality of research and related scholarly activities and it has sharpened up the methods by which this latter activity is assessed for promotion purposes!

Discussion

Our conversations with colleagues at these five institutions lead us to a series of general observations.

First, while events-oriented staff development activities such as short courses and seminars continue to exist, there is evidence of significant moves towards: 'task' oriented staff development through group networking activities; the dedicating of resource help, (in the form of secondment or staff release), to individual staff to underpin their specific innovation and staff development initiatives; and creating opportunities to share experiences and good practice through network participation and seminar processes.

Secondly, there was overwhelming support for these kinds of task-oriented, action research activities as effective and efficient methods of staff development. Creating opportunities for people to set their own agenda creates the type of environment in which change in organisational behaviour is likely to take place. It is to this shift in control of the 'agenda' for staff development away from 'providers' to 'consumers' which we consider to be the key to future staff development strategies in educational development. Specialist educational development staff saw their role as facilitators working through the 'healthy parts' or 'good parts' to reach others within the institution.

Thirdly, there was a general belief that a smaller number of well-motivated and capable staff seconded to the 'centre' was preferable to any system which appointed a departmental 'representative' to be responsible for development in his or her department. The message was also clear that those staff seconded to the 'centre' should have a specific task to undertake or role to perform during that secondment. It would seem, therefore, that a successful approach to educational development involves a 'network' of secondees working with, and through, those staff, or groups of staff, with a specific educational development need defined by them.

Fourthly, we believe the policy to promote on the basis of excellence in teaching to be a bold and imaginative move worthy of consideration by other institutions of higher education. Declared policies like this can change radically that 'hidden agenda' - publish or be damned - current in Higher Education.

Fifthly, all the institutions visited had a set of 'sticks

and carrots' to encourage staff development in particular directions. For example, all institutions top-sliced their staff development budgets to protect certain priority staff development programmes. In some institutions staff were given direct financial, or in-kind, support through secondment or staff release mechanisms. Some provided certificates to recognise a satisfactory standard reached in teaching methods and practice and, as mentioned, one went so far as to institute a policy of promoting 'excellent' teachers. It is clear that a sensitive and imaginative reward system can considerably enhance motivation for change within organisations, even if that recognition need not always take the form of a promotion. For example, the opportunities for staff to be innovative, through the 'Alternative Teaching Week', and to share and disseminate their good practices through the lunchtime seminar programme, are in themselves also incentives to change.

Finally, we conclude that the following are key principles:

1 Implementation of a staff development programme in educational development, whilst involving a variety of delivery mechanisms, should exploit, where possible, a task oriented, action research approach as a means for inducing change within the organisations.
2 Institutional funding mechanisms for staff development should be designed to support the individual and group task oriented mechanisms implied above.
3 There should be a well identified system of rewards and recognition for these engaging in such educational development activities.

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THE USE OF GROUP WORK IN THE TEACHING OF LAW

Brian Mitchell

In this article, I describe the use of group work in a level one business law module, the delivery which was influenced by the Enterprise in Higher Education Initiative. Substituting group work for the lectures and seminars usually associated with legal education, the module sought to develop skills of legal research, group work, communication and time management, as well as the acquisition and understanding of legal knowledge. Taught over one semester the module was delivered to three separate student cohorts from 1989 onwards. Each iteration varied slightly from that which preceded it as the mode of delivery was fine-tuned.

Students taking the module were allocated to groups, each of which was required to undertake six tasks:

1. finding the answers to a number of questions designed to introduce the notion of group work, and the use of primary and secondary legal materials;
2. producing a report explaining the rules relating to the formation and dissolution of registered companies;
3. analysis of student-researched newspaper reports with a business law dimension;
4. construction of à legal expert system based on an area of business law;
5. design and implementation of a questionnaire intended to evaluate public knowledge of the law relating to business activity; and
6. production of a written report suggesting legal answers to problems encountered by business persons.

The Student's grade for the module was determined by their performance in two of the tasks identified as contributing to summative assessment. All tasks, however, had to be completed. Interaction between group members was emphasised as being of prime importance. The effort, although not all group members would undertake all parts of a task. Division of labour was considered appropriate and desirable, provided that the whole group took responsibility for the completed task.

In the main students did not object to the use of group work. Responses to the module evaluation questionnaire administered at the end of the third iteration, showed that 65% of those taking it thought it was taught in an interesting and relevant way. Some disliked the use of peer assessment, which was an integral part of group work. I justified use for peer

assessment, however, by reference to my difficulty in assessing individual contributions, and the importance of articulating an evaluation they would be making anyway. It was also explained that this was something they would be required to do throughout their working lives, and that they may as well start now. Students on exchange programmes from other European countries seemed most ill at ease with it, with UK students, particularly those with BTEC experience, less likely to object. Some groups were more willing to use their power to penalise those they felt were not contributing fully to the task in hand. This, on occasion, could cause bad feeling, but also had the merit of generating discussion about the responsibilities that were owed to other group members. No adverse comments relating to peer group assessment were found in the log books that all students were required to keep. Neither did any arise through the medium of the interviews conducted with students to support the action research project.

Both logbooks and interviews show that in a number of instances the use of group work not only developed skills of team work, but also involved students in communal analysis and learning. In a number of instances, too, involvement in group work was identified as a positive feature of the module.

> *Once we had finalised what we believed to be the right answers ...we ...had a four hour discussion on the findings. This is where I believe working in groups really works, we sat there and bounced ideas off each other, looked at possible causes and their remedies.*

> *We then researched one particular area helping each other. We find ...this method may bring a broader answer than one person. I believe that our group meetings have been very useful, worthwhile and to the benefit of all.*

On occasion, there were problems with relationships within groups. On the first two iterations of the module there had been a tendency for group members to work as isolated individuals rather than as members of a team. This manifested itself in assignments which had a patchwork feel to them, and had clearly not been a team effort.

The last iteration of the module consciously dealt with this problem. Each session started off with a game intended to develop group cohesion and identity. This ranged from *Human Bingo* which involved the whole class, to *Structures* which involved students working within their assignment groups. The module work book also had an appendix dealing with group formation and dynamics added to it. .

Despite such efforts, difficulties still arose, as the following interview extract shows:

> *...it is quite difficult to meet up with her, but we do not want her to feel left out of anything. We do not want to be nasty to her, but we felt she was trying to take over and do everything herself. It is a difficult situation.*

Remedial counselling with members of this group was attempted but with little success. The subject of the above comment left the group and operated as an individual. This admittedly was a major failure in a module of this kind, but was the only upset.

Group work obviously places a great deal of pressure on students. They need to consider not just their own needs, but also those of other members of their team. Planning and time management becomes of prime importance, and given the module objectives were hopefully skills students would develop and utilise. The following extract from an evaluation interview shows that at least one group recognised the significance of these skills.

> *...the group as a whole were quite organised. We did not like coming to the lecture, and thinking we had better do this. It has got to be in tomorrow. We had like organised it right from when we handed the last one in. The next one, right we are going to do this over the weekend. We will meet and discuss this. So we were quite organised. I do not know whether the work turned out better, but we did try to be better organised in that respect'.*

Concern is often expressed that group work results in students not devoting as much time to their studies, as when they are required to work on their own. This did not seem to be the case with this module.

An analysis of logbooks for the final iteration shows that students on average devoted 153 hours to the module over the semester, which is only three more that the 150 hours a 15 credit module should require of a student. The use of groupwork does, however, cause certain resource problems which need to be acknowledged. Students need access to syndicate rooms for the purpose of holding group meetings. The use of team-building games, which I consider essential, needs rooms without desks and other obstructive furniture. Time and care must be devoted to explaining the mechanics of the assessment regime, particularly peer assessment. Time also has to be spent counselling groups who are having problems. The saving in time that might be thought to accrue from marking of group rather than individual assignments is illusory. Groups usually generate as much, if not more, work than would their constituent members if set individual tasks.

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Achieving a PhD: Ten Students' Experience

Phillida Salmon

Trentham Books, 192, ISBN 094808059 0 (pbk), 122pp, no price given

To say that I approached Phillida Salmon's book with trepidation would be entirely mistaken. In fact, as with my own PhD research work, I managed to avoid it altogether for as long as possible. In part I was reluctant to face the fact that I had done nothing to advance my own research for months and in part it seemed crazy to contemplate a book review when already battling with the difficulties of jobs, career, family (and of course the PhD). However having read the book, like Phillida Salmon's PhD students on their journey through their research, I found it both an interesting and rewarding process.

Part one deal with the character of PhD research and supervision. I warmed at the outset to finding that as a mature student I was in the majority and in some ways resonated with my experience; the vagueness of standards, the impossibility of predicting the course of the research at the outset, and the deadly stultifying effect should the researcher be forced to do so.

On the subject of supervision the author obviously speak from a wealth of personal experience and it is here that we find her conviction tat a PhD project is a process of development of the student carried through by the commitment and 'passion' of the researcher, unhindered by structure and constraint and supported by the personal commitment of the supervisor to that process.

In part two we meet ten of Phillida Salmon's students. This section I found less gripping and for me it seemed to border on a celebration of the difficulties and awkwardness of ten ordinary people. Coping with these difficulties is an integral part of the author's style of supervision and the chapter is important for that reason - it just didn't make a good read.

Back on the process of research we read the accounts of the ten students and again I was ticking in the margin as the phrases jumped out of the page. We get a sense of pioneering spirit of PhD research, the frustration of the blind alleys, the long months when nothing gets done on the project at all and the strain of members of the researchers' families. Through it all runs "The Touch of Passion", the spark that inspires the research and will drive it to a conclusion. For the author it is above all else the business of the supervisor to recognise and nurture this spark.

Chapter 6 is entitled "Methodology: a Crumbling Cake", The only certainty for most of the researchers was that any methodology passed down or imposed on them would fail and that their methodology had to emerge from their individual natures and projects. In many cases, this methodology was so personal that their attempts to describe it left this reader looking at a vague shape in a fog.

On managing the PhD, we are offered the comfort a range of styles from the ruthlessly organised to the 'do a bit when you can' and it is a comfort to see that such different styles can all result in success.

Not a book to read for entertainment, to browse through, nor refer to, but after two or three hours of concentrated scanning, I felt that I had been through a very worthwhile experience. I have definitely been informed and assisted and I would warmly recommend this book to anyone struggling with a PhD.

John J Walters

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