Summer 1993

THE NEW ACADEMIC

volume two number three

The Magazine of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

THIS ISSUE INCLUDES:

APPRAISAL PROCEDURES: A RECIPE FOR MEDIOCRITY?

Ian Hutchings

Objections to particular appraisal schemes in Higher Education may be well-founded. Inherent weaknesses can be identified in a scheme where staff are faced with a set of three or four criteria and are graded in each on a scale from A (outstanding) to D (deficient). Discussion with colleagues indicates that there will be disappointment for any member of staff who fails to obtain at least a B grade in all categories, and an A in some. This disappointment will be exacerbated if, contrary to stated policy, appraisal grades do in fact influence chances of promotion: appraisal schemes may well disavow any relationship with promotion procedures, but who will expect to be promoted following a less-than-glowing appraisal outcome?

Promotion procedures themselves may aggravate this difficulty. At many new universities, candidates for promotion to the Principal Lecturer Grade are invited to convince the interviewing panel of their ability in such areas as Teaching, Scholarship and Academic Effectiveness (the latter including administration). Candidates are often informed that all applicants for promotion to a Principal Lectureship will normally be able to demonstrate their excellence as teachers. No formal statement is made about any requirements to excel in either of the other two categories, though outstanding achievement in one or the other is clearly essential. But, in today's competitive environment, where promotion opportunities are few and PL vacancies are rare, it is unlikely that staff can gain promotion without trying to show outstanding ability in all three areas of activity.

The upshot is that both appraisal and promotion procedures conspire to push the teacher into trying to excel at everything. Few, however, will attain this ideal. The likely effect is that teachers will be propelled into ending up as moderately competent all-rounders. While the description 'Jacks of all trades and masters of none' may seem too harsh, how much longer will teachers be able to avoid deserving just such a label?

To some, this conclusion may appear extreme. But a sporting analogy may illustrate the point. How does a Premier League football club achieve excellence? Certainly not by recruiting a team of all-rounders. Success is built upon the encouragement of teamwork, the recruitment of specialists

Continued on page 2

EDITORIAL

On May 19th 1993 the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) rose like the phoenix from the ashes of the Standing Conference on Educational Development (SCED) and the Staff Development Group of the Society for Research in Higher Education (SRHE/SDG). The two organisations originated in the old Polytechnic and University sectors, so their merger is good sense now that one of the many binary lines in education has been rubbed out. *The New Academic* is the magazine representing SEDA, and is a key forum for straightforward, contemporary and controversial debate about teaching and learning developments in Higher Education. We have at least three audiences: lecturers, staff and educational developers who encourage and support change, and senior management involved in crucial decision making about allocating resources for the support of teaching and learning in Higher Education. Our lead article by Ian Hutchings presents major challenges to all three categories, by way of discussing appraisal and promotion! In addition to thanking all of our contributors, I am taking this opportunity to wish the new chair of SEDA, David Baume, every success in his guiding of the association through the exciting times which lie ahead.

Danny Saunders
Editor,
June 1993

Danny Saunders is the Curriculum Development Manager in the Enterprise Unit at the University of Glamorgan. He has particular interests in student tutoring, portfolios and profiling, and workshops for the development of transferable skills.

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Material for consideration by the Editors should be sent to The Editor, *The New Academic*, c/o SEDA.

Advertising enquiries should be addressed to Leslie MacDonald MA c/o Personnel Department, Old Shire Hall, Durham University, Durham DH1 3HP. (091-374-3159 / Fax 091-374 3740)

(a striker if the team's goal-scoring record is weak; a better goal-keeper if the ball ends up in their net too often), and getting the right blend in the team. A first-class side does not reach that eminence by expecting all its members to be good at everything - no club drops an outstanding goal-keeper because he fails to score any goals!

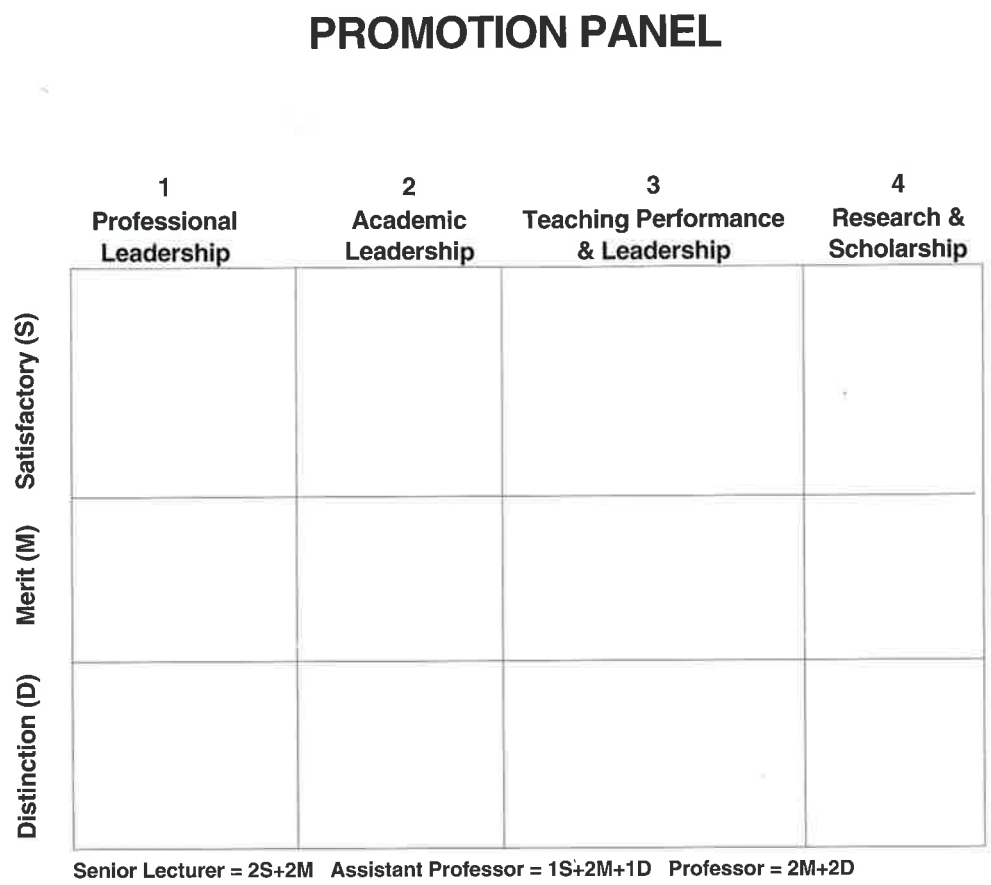
Ignoring teamwork

This highlights another weakness in current appraisal procedures - the failure to pay sufficient attention to the importance of teamwork. Some schemes try to help appraisees answer such questions as 'What is expected of me?'; and 'How am I doing?' (not 'How are *we* doing?'). The aim is to optimise the contribution an individual can make and the satisfaction everyone derives from their work. The main objectives of these kinds of schemes say nothing about teamwork.

The introduction of performance related pay (PRP) will probably compound this problem. Experience of PRP in industry is far from encouraging, according to a survey recently carried out by the Institute of Personnel Management in 850 British firms [1]. The study in question concludes: 'Reward-based performance tended to be overwhelmingly fixed on the individual, while an opposite policy may operate in another part of the organisation where the emphasis was on teamwork and the collective and cooperative nature of the work'; further, 'Complaints of PRP ending up as a demotivator rather than an incentive were commonplace'.

The danger, then, is that current procedures for appraisal (and promotion - and probably PRP) underrate the value of teamwork, and instead encourage

Figure 1



the cult of the all-rounder. Such a policy is unlikely to lead to outstanding performance in any area.

Happily, not all institutions are blind to this danger. Queensland University of Technology's appraisal procedure includes a grading scheme based on four categories of teacher assessment:

- Professional Leadership
- Academic Leadership
- Teaching Performance and Leadership
- Research and Scholarship

While no concrete reference to teamwork is evident here, the importance of the scheme lies less in the categories than in the assessment method. For each of the four categories, staff are graded with a 'Distinction', a 'Merit', or simply 'Satisfactory'. Professors are expected to achieve (at least) two Distinctions and two Merits, Senior lecturers two Merits and two Satisfactories. Individuals are therefore able to specialise in particular categories where they feel most competent, without feeling that they are second-class if in other areas their performance is less outstanding. The pressure to excel at everything is clearly much reduced by such a scheme.

Ultimately, however, the solution to this problem lies not so much in the construction of appropriate procedures, but rather in the development of an appropriate culture. Higher Education should positively encourage an outlook which recognises that successful courses are taught by successful teams; and that successful teams are made up of talented individuals who blend well together and are allowed to play to their strengths, whether those strengths be in research, teaching, or administrative competence respectively. To expect all to be good at everything is a recipe for mediocrity. And if we aim at mediocrity, that is what we shall get.

Reference

1. *Performance Management in the UK - An Analysis of the Issues* (1992) Institute of Personnel Management, September.

Ian Hutchings is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Languages at the Oxford Brookes University

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF STUDENTS' WRITING

Graham Badley

In a recent polemic Graham Gibbs urged 'a total moratorium on the use of essays' as 'one of the simplest ways of improving the quality of students' writing and learning' [1]. I argue that what students in Higher Education actually need is both more essay-writing and more practical support to help them make their writing and their essays more effective.

More essay-writing?

There is some evidence, not least from Gibbs himself [2] that students in Higher Education are already writing fewer essays as a consequence of increased class sizes. As a result of writing 'fewer and less frequent' essays and assignments, student now get:

- less practice at writing
- less preparation for exams
- a smaller proportion of course material studied in depth
- more 'selective negligence'
- fewer actual learning hours
- lack of momentum and pacing to their studying
- more anxiety provoked by rarer essays.

And not only do students now write fewer essays but also they tend to write shorter ones with the further negative consequences of:

- developing different skills
- less emphasis on collating evidence into coherent arguments
- less feedback from their tutors - less learning and less improvement in essay writing.

And yet, if the evidence from a recent study at Harvard [3] is at all relevant, students in Higher Education may actually want more essays and even tend to judge the quality of their courses by the writing demands made upon them. In effect the Harvard study showed that students relate the intellectual challenge of a course to the amount of writing it requires. And, even more to the point, for students there is one academic objective that overshadows everything else - they want to improve their writing.

To be fair to Gibbs he, too, wants to help students improve their writing. But his preferred strategy - a moratorium on essays and an increase in other forms of writing: 'letters, magazine articles for different kinds of audiences, reports to their boss, reviews of progress in projects, justifications for budgets and so on' [1] - deliberately divides off conventional essay writing. Indeed, Gibbs maintains that 'essay writing resembles the forms writing takes outside academia in almost no respects' which is an extraordinary claim. What, of course, he is referring to are those student essays which he characterises as 'incoherent claptrap', 'turgid gibberish', 'obfuscation' or 'rambling' in clear contrast to briefings and reports which seem to encourage 'sensible and understandable prose' and become 'imaginative and incisive'.

The important issue is, however, not to abandon student essay-writing as such but rather to find ways in which students can be helped to master a range of writing skills so that they may become more effective communicators whether they are writing formal essays, reports on projects, or whatever.

Ways to encourage better student writing

Given that worsening staff-student ratios mean that most students in Higher Education will never get the individual tutorial attention so characteristic of the Oxbridge model, what can be done to help students improve the quality of their writing?

Perhaps the most powerful suggestion to come out of the Harvard study is that teachers should encourage student study groups to work together outside the classroom. More specifically students could be encouraged to read and discuss the essays of their classmates. Gibbs and Jenkins [2] also suggest that teachers can 'get students to help themselves' by encouraging them to teach each other, by giving seminars in groups without tutors and by commenting on and marking each other's work. Where students in groups actually do comment on each other's work, as at Harvard, the students 'rave' about the benefits.

Unfortunately, however, though there is plenty of exhortation there is little British evidence that students actually work together by reading and commenting upon each other's essays in quite this way. For example, the chapter on study networks in Gibbs and Jenkins [2] is conspicuously quiet on the idea of using study groups to help students to improve their writing skills. Indeed one of the disadvantages listed in that chapter is that 'members may not share work (they may want a better mark)'. What, perhaps, is needed in

order to help students to help themselves is a version of Peter Elbow's 'teacherless writing class':

> *'It is a class of seven to twelve people. It meets at least once a week. Everyone reads everyone else's writing. Everyone tries to give each writer a sense of how his words were experienced. The goal is for the writer to come as close as possible to being able to see and experience his own words through seven or more people. That's all' [4])*

What Elbow is trying to do, of course, is to get students to take responsibility for the improvement of their own writing skills. Encouraging students to form a 'teacherless' writing group is one powerful way of helping students to improve their writing because:

- they learn to take responsibility for their own writing by becoming the main source for giving feedback to one another
- they learn to write for a particular, real audience of their peers.

However, this does not mean that teachers cannot contribute further to the improvement process. They can, by offering a variety of other strategies.

A developmental view of writing

Possibly the most important of all Peter Elbow's suggestions is to think of writing as a developmental process in which authors start writing at the very beginning - before they know their meaning at all - and encourage their words gradually to change and evolve. It is only at the end that authors know what they really want to say and how they want to say it. He contrasts this holistic approach to writing with 'the commonsense, conventional' view of writing as a two-step process: first you work out what you want to say, then you draw up a plan and begin writing. Here control is maintained, and everything is kept in hand.

Elbow's advice to all writers is to begin writing straightaway and even to 'freewrite', (that is to write quickly without editing). This developmental model of writing encourages students not to worry about knowing what they mean or what they intend 'ahead of time'; it actually encourages students to write without a plan, and to wander and digress.

And if students do come to see writing in this holistic, developmental and organic way then they must also be taught to see that an almost inevitable part of the process is the production of rubbish. If students are encouraged to write their first drafts quickly then they must also be encouraged to realise that they will put down the wrong words and the wrong ideas and the wrong conclusions. Such quick drafting is a way to open up a topic, to get students thinking about it and through it, to overcome 'white-paper phobia' and the writing bloc. It is also of course a lowering of standards, deliberately so, because it is an attempt to stop students as writers from censoring everything they produce.

Editing

The first part of editing is redrafting in which students have to move away from having written quickly for themselves and towards writing more carefully for their readers (their tutor and/or their peer group). Redrafting invariably means becoming much more aware of:

- *the context* - especially the student's subject-discipline which imposes its own content, style, language and voice on the writer;
- *the purpose* - usually student essays require a reasoned argument about a topic based on evidence collected through reading;
- *readers' expectations* - for consistent and logical argument, for clarity and use of evidence;
- *content* - appropriate material which has been structured and presented to support the overall purpose of the topic.

There are useful checklists for redrafting [5], the essence of which is to remind students to focus on whether the essay is intellectually convinc*ing* and whether it *sounds convincing*. An essay is *intellectually convincing* if there is a clear thread of argument running throughout, with the separate parts related logically to one another and with an effective introduction and conclusion. An essay *sounds* convincing if the phrasing is precise and accurate, and if the voice and style are appropriate and consistent.

Other practical editing skills which students can be urged to employ include:

- checking departmental rules on essay presentation and checking instructions for each particular essay;
- checking correct spelling, punctuation and grammar and, of course, legibility;
- checking whether quotations are accurate, acknowledged, correctly set out and fully incorporated into the grammar of the essay itself;
- checking the accuracy and layout of the references/bibliography;
- providing an appropriate synopsis/abstract/summary if necessary [5]

And, of course, it is at the stage of final editing that the best advice of all comes once more into play: getting feedback from others about how the essay reads and sounds. If this can be done in a 'teacherless writing class' so much the better.

Conclusion

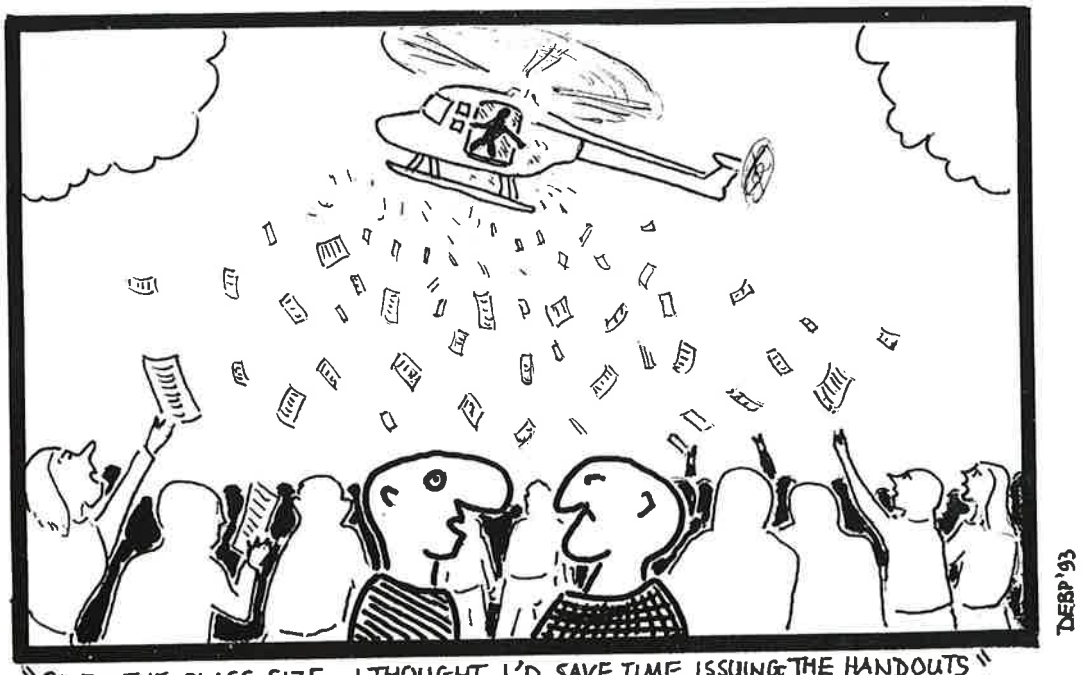
All of this means, I think, that reasonably good student writing comes not from a change of form (which is what Gibbs is, in effect, saying) but rather from a change in emphasis and in strategy. Changing from writing academic essays to writing real-world reports will not necessarily produce changes in student-writing from clap-trap and gibberish to sensible and understandable prose. The improvement, when it comes, is more a result of encouraging students to mend or mop-up, to redraft and to edit. Students need to be shown that the production of clap-trap and gibberish is an almost essential part of the developmental process of writing itself. It is transformed from clap-trap and gibberish into sensible prose when students are shown that their redrafting requires them to focus on reasoned argument, convincing evidence, structured material and clear presentation. Students will become good writers when they are encouraged to produce more fluently and when they learn to edit more fiercely.

This is not to say that learning to write in forms other than the essay is not valuable for students. Indeed, apart from learning about the forms themselves, they are useful to student-writers partly because they often encourage either a freer or a more focused kind of writing. Writing a letter, for example, is often cited as the most obvious way of getting into a difficult essay topic. Gibbs [1] implies that letters, magazine articles, reports, progress reviews, budget justifications, briefing notes, committee papers, manuals and speeches are all much more related to the world outside academia and as such should be employed to encourage students to start "to bridge the gulf between academic life and subsequent work experience". My view is that students should be encouraged both to write (in whatever form) and to edit. Asking for a moratorium on essays may well be a way of opening up a wider range of forms for students to experiment with and develop through. But it might also be seen as an attempt to patronise students, to warn them and their teachers off essays as being too difficult a form for student-writers. Such an approach would not be acceptable at Harvard where every freshman must take a one-semester writing course and where 70% of undergraduates write more than ten essays per year [3]. In our new unified system of mass higher education is there a danger that only students at our elite institutions will be encouraged to take up the challenge of writing essays?

References

1. Gibbs, Graham (1992) 'Down With Essays!', *The New Academic*, Spring, pp.18-19.
2. Gibbs, Graham & Jenkins, Allan (eds) (1992) *Teaching Large Classes in Higher Education*, Kogan Page.
3. Light, Richard, J. (1992) *The Harvard Assessment Seminars Second Report 1992*, Explorations with Students and Faculty about Teaching, Learning and Student Life. Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
4. Elbow, Peter (1973) *Writing Without Teachers*, Oxford University Press.
5. Clanchy, John & Ballard, Brigid (1981) *How to Write Essays - A Practical Guide for Students*, Melbourne, Australia: Longman Cheshire.

Graham Badley is Head of the Centre for Educational Development at Anglia Polytechnic University



Cartoon: Dennis Pollard

Synectics at the University of Surrey

As part of Engineers training and skill development at the University of Surrey, the Departments run courses in Leadership, Negotiation Skills and Communication Skills.

The Department of Chemical and Process Engineering was particularly concerned about its Communication Skills course, wanting to enhance it by including teamwork and problem solving, as the Engineers spend much of their study time on Design Projects and staff found they had to provide more support to get the teams working as teams.

Synectics, as a commercial consultancy working with 'Blue-Chip' companies, had a ready made course, entitled the 'Innovative Teamwork Programme' which covered just these areas, teamwork, communication and problem solving. With a grant from Pegasus* and much support from Synectics staff, we have provided the course for 2nd and 3rd year Engineering students. Using video feedback and techniques for creatively generating ideas, the students found they had techniques for handling team problem solving for their Design Projects. External assessment of their projects by staff from Esso indicated how beneficial the Synectics course had been. Students reported in their projects what techniques they had used, with staff commenting that the support needed was much reduced and that the teamwork was the best they had seen.

There was clearly a need to remodel the course, as a continuous three-day programme was more than the resources of rooms and staff could manage. We have now drafted student and tutor manuals, breaking the course into two parts, one as part of a 'Presentation Skills' course for first year students; the second as a two-day course prior to the Design Projects. After piloting the materials in the Spring Term 1993, we hope to offer them to other universities.

Staff interest in Synectics has widened to other departments and the course has been run at three other universities in the UK. Over 100 staff have now attended some or all of the three-day programme.

Two features of our Synectics programme can be highlighted which seem to be especially valuable to students and staff.

In the video review of the first team problem-solve, participants realise how powerful an influence bits of behaviour have on resolution of a problem. "I thought I was asking a question, but I realise it was a hidden criticism, a rejection of the idea". Or "I said 'I agreed' but I can see that the way I said it meant that I didn't like it".

In the generation of ideas using creative techniques, participants realise that they just need to trust the process and allow judgement of ideas to proceed slowly. They learn that the best solutions sometimes come from crazy ideas.

Academic life tends to require that every statement must be justified and defended. A rigorous approach to thinking is encouraged. This has many good points, but tends to generate a defensiveness and a sense of isolation, with little sharing of ideas 'floating in the back of the head'. The Synectics course offers an additional, complementary set of techniques, which we have found to be of value.

If you would like to know more, contact Graham Rawlinson, Director of Enterprise, at the University of Surrey, on 0483 509344, or write to the Enterprise Team, University of Surrey, Senate House, Guildford, GU2 5XH.

* *Pegasus is an educational charity working in Higher Education to prepare students for the world of work by giving them relevant skills and experience in areas such as time management, problem solving, communication skills and team work.*

LISTINGS

July

4-10 **Management In Universities - An International Seminar, The British Council, 9343.** Brighton. *Courses Department, The British Council, 10 Spring Gardens, London SW1A 2BN; tel: 071 389 4406/4264/4252.*

5 **Responsibilities and Liabilities of Charity Trustees.** London. *Jonathan Hardy, Directory of Social Change, Radius Works, Back Lane, London NW3 1HL. Fee: £60 (for voluntary organ. delegates); £95 (for comm'l delegates). Also: Liverpool 21 Sept, 1993; Nottingham, 26 Oct, 1993; Sheffield, 9 Dec, 1993.*

5-7 **Achieving Curricular Development in Higher Education.** Staff College, Blagdon. *Dr Peter Wright, The Staff College, Blagdon, Bristol, BS18 6RG; tel: 0761 462503; fax: 0761 463104. Fee: £180.*

6-8 **The Fourth Conference on Internationalising Higher Education Partnerships with Business and Industry: Partnerships for Sustainable Growth and Development.** Cambridge. *H + E Associates; Partnerships Conference Office, 18 St John's Close, Saffron Walden, CB11 4AR; tel & fax: 0799 527853. Fees: £499.50 (basic res.), £435 (discount); £430 (basic non-res); £375 (discount non-res).*

6-9 **The Third Cambridge Forum: The 'Highest Quality'.** Cambridge. *Katherine Ashcroft, Conference Secretary, School of Independent Studies, Lonsdale College, Lancaster University, LA1 4YN; fax: 0524 843934. Fees: £585.00.*

8 **The 1992 Charities Act.** London. *Jonathan Hardy, Directory of Social Change, Radius Works, Back Lane, London NW3 1HL. Fee: £60 (for voluntary organ. delegates); £95 (for commercial delegates). Also: Manchester, 28 September, 1993; Birmingham, 29 September, 1993; London 19*

October, 1993; Derby, 12 November, 1993.

10-13 **Sixth International Conference on The First Year Experience.** Boston, USA. *The First Year Experience, University of South Carolina, 1728 College St, Columbia, SC 29208 USA; tel: (803) 777 6029; fax: (803) 777 4699. Fee: US$395-45O (res) US$275 (non-res).*

12-14 **Interviewing Skills for Staff Appraisal (event 93/28/1).** Blagdon, Bristol, *see Staff College 5-7 May. Fee: £230.*

12-15 **Eighteenth International Conference on Improving University Teaching.** Schwabisch Gmund, Germany. *Improving University Teaching, University of Maryland, University College;, University Boulevard at Delphi Road, College Park, MD 20742-1659, USA.*

15 **The 1993 Charities Forum.** London. *Jonathan Hardy, Directory of Social Change, Radius Works, Back Lane, London NW3 1HL. Fee: £65 (for charities & non-profit organisations); £95 for comm'l & statutory org's).*

15-16 **Third European Groupwork Symposium.** Gldsmiths' College, London. *Details from Harold Marchant, Conference Organiser, 70 Endwell Road, London SE4 2ND; tel: 071 639 5333. Fee: £150.00+VAT (res), £125.00+VAT (non-res).*

19-23 **Personal Growth for Managers. (event 93/29/1).** Blagdon, Bristol, *see Staff College 7-9 June. Fee: £400.*

22-23 **'Measure for Measure' Re-assessing student assessment.** Warwick. *Katherine Ashcroft, Conference Secretary, School of Independent Studies, Lonsdale College, Lancaster University, LA1 4YN; tel: 0542 593888; fax: 0524 843934. Fee: £340 inc.*

26-27 **First International Conference on Creative Thinking.** Malta. *Mrs Sandra Mercieca, Coordinator, The Edward de Bono Programme for the Design and Development of Thinking, University of Malta, Msida, Malta; Tel: (0365) 333903 - 333907; fax: (9365) 336450.*

29-31 **Multimedia in Education and Industry.** Savannah, Georgia. *Proposals for papers (by 15 March) and details: Dr Carl Helms, Director, EITL, Clemson University, Box 34190, Clemson, SC29634, USA; tel: (0101) 803 0623; fax: (0101) 656 1202; email: cwhelms@clemson.clemson.edu.*

September

1-3 **Sagset Annual Conference: International Perspectives in Interactive Learning.** Lancashire. *Lisa Witcomb, SAGSET CONFERENCE 1993, FREEPOST, University of Central Lancashire, Preston PR1 2BR; tel: 0772 892255; fax: 0772 892938; Fee: £175 + VAT.*

7-9 **APA/CUA: Staff Management Programme: Module 2 - Interpersonal Skills in Staff Management.** Leicester. *Jean Grier, Senior Administrative Officer, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Edinburgh, 55 George Square, Edinburgh, EH8 9JU; tel: 031 650 4084; fax: 031 650 6512. Fee: £320.*

13-14 **Symposium: Improving Student Learning - Research and Practice.** London. *Call for Papers. The Oxford Centre for Staff Development, Oxford Brookes University, Gipsy Lane, Headington, Oxford OX3 0BP; tel: 0865 750918; fax: 0865 744437. Fees: £145 (res), £115 (non-res).*

15-17 **EuroCall 93: Emancipation Through Learning Technology.** Hull. *Address for Abstracts & Registration: Mrs June Thompson, CTI Centre for Modern Languages, University of Hull, Hull HU6 7RX; tel: 0482 466373; fax: 0482 465991; email: Eurocall@uk.ac.hull. Fees: £199-230 (res); £165-195 (non-res).*

17 **Teaching Method Series, 1993: Workshop 3 (of 4) - Assessment of Large Groups.** *Debbie Lockton, Department of Law, De Montfort University Leicester, The Gateway, Leicester LE1 9BH; tel: 0533 577183. Fee: £175 + VAT (for 4 workshops); £55 + VAT per individual workshop. See W.1 May 7; W.2 June 25; W.4 29 Oct.*

20-22 **The Second Annual Charity Accountants Conference.** Sheffield. *Jonathan Hardy, Conference Organiser, Director of Social Change, Radius Works, Back Lane, London NW3 1HL. Fee: £225 for charities & non-profit organisations (£195 before 31 May); £350 for commercial &*

statutory organisations (£315).

October

4 **Accounting under the Charities Act. London.** (A) *Jonathan Hardy, Directory of Social Change, Radius Works, Back Lane, London NW3 1HL. Fee: £60 (for voluntary organ. delegates); £95 (for comm'l dels).* **Also**: Manchester 6 Oct 1993 (A); Manchester 26 Oct (M); London, 28 Oct (M); London, 24 Nov (A); Birmingham, 29 Nov (A); Birmingham, 20 Nov (M); Leeds, 8 Dec (A); Leeds, 9 Dec (M). A = Charity Accountants; M = Charity Managers (There are separate seminars for charity managers and charity acountants/finance officers).

26-30 **Team Effectiveness and Management Skills.** Chester. *Contact CRAC, Conference Office, Sheraton House, Castle Par, Cambridge CB3 0AX; tel: 0233 460277. Fee: £440 + VAT (res).*

29 **Teaching Method Series 1993: Workshop 4(0f 4) - Maintenance of Quality with Large Student Numbers.** *Debbie Lockton, Department of Law, De Montfort University Leicester, The Gateway, Leicester LE1 9BH; tel: 0533 577183. Fee: £175 + VAT (4 w'shops); £55 + VAT indiv w'shop. See W1 May 7; W2 June 25; W3 17 Sept.*

November

2 **The Duties of a Company Secretary.** London. *Jonathan Hardy, Directory of Social Change, Radius Works, Back Lane, London NW3 1HL. Fee: £35 (for voluntary organ. delegates); £60 (for commercial delegates).* **Also**: Manchester, 30 September 1993.

November

3-5 **Fifth Annual Staff Development Conference for all Staff Developers and Training Officers in Higher Education: Supporting Change in the Enlarged HE Sector - Implications for Training and Development.** Warwick. Further details follow.

10 **Going Concern or Insolvency?** London. *Jonathan Hardy, Directory of Social Change, Radius Works, Back Lane, London NW3 1HL. Fee: £60 (for voluntary organ. delegates); £95 (for commercial delegates).*

30 **Hospitals & Health Authorities.** London. *Jonathan Hardy, Directory of Social Change, Radius Works, Back Lane, London NW3 1HL. Fee: £60 (for voluntary organ. delegates); £95 (for commercial delegates).*

December

SRHE Annual Conference: The Student Experience. York.

Further particulars about these events can be obtained from Dr Haydn Mathias or Lynne Edwards, Academic Staff Development Office, Teaching Support and Media Services: University of Southampton, SO9 5NH; tel: 0703 593784 ext 3784; fax: 0703 593005; email: asd@uk.ac.southampton.

Activities in Self-Instructional Texts

Fred Lockwood

Kogan Page, ISBN 0749407093, £12.95

Too many students to teach? Why not use distance learning techniques and go over to tutorials in print?

Lockwood, Head of the Teaching and Learning Centre at the Open University, draws on research and his own experience to give a clear and thoughtful account of the place of questions and other activities within self-instructional text. He shows that students respond differently to different types of activity, presented in different ways. Indeed, some types of question can impede 'deep' learning. As he helpfully guides reflection upon the design of activities in self-instructional text, it becomes increasingly clear that this is no simple solution to the rise in student numbers. Adopting this approach requires time, money, expertise and the ability to work in teams: things in short supply in pressured times.

P.T. Knight,
Educational Research, Lancaster University

Quality Assurance in Training and Education

Richard Freeman

Kogan Page, 1993, ISBN 0749408685, £14.95

Do you think that Quality Assurance is an industrial technique inappropriate for education and training? Have you tried to adapt an industrial system for your institution but found the terminology an impossible barrier?

Richard Freeman, in this clearly presented, highly readable book, gives a step-by-step guide through the Quality Assurance maze. In particular, he demonstrates that BS5750 is a worthwhile standard for any educational institution concerned about its 'customers'. Industrial jargon is generally avoided, and where used, is illustrated by charts and tables which translate industrial quality standards into educational terms.

Freeman carefully describes the requirement of BS5750, detailing those procedures which are likely to be needed by universities and colleges. He guides the reader through the writing of such procedures and the associated processes involved in Quality Assurance, and realistically estimates the amount of time and work necessary to complete these tasks. Distinctions are made amongst the two best known 'quality systems' and the most appropriate for education is recommended. This is a no-nonsense manual for any institution interested in developing Quality Assurance, which effectively crosses the divide between Further and Higher Education.

Yvonne Hutton,
Lancaster and Morecambe College

Please send books for review to:
Peter Knight, Educational Research,
Lancaster University, Lancaster LA1 4YL.

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS' ORAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS BY STAFF AND PEER GROUPS

Ian E. Hughes and Bryan Large

For several years we have taught and assessed [1,2] communication and presentation skills as an integral part of the Leeds University BSc. Honours Pharmacology degree. First year students are shown the classic errors made in presentations as well as the best basic techniques for oral presentations. Each student then prepares a 5-10 minute presentation to be delivered to a group of 8-10 students and its tutor. The tutor provides formative assessment of each talk and the group discuss their experiences and the criteria for a good presentation. In the second year, each student prepares a 10-15 minute presentation giving the talk in a lecture theatre to the whole class of 30-50 students. Formative assessment is again provided by academic staff.

At the start of the third year the students and their course tutor agree the criteria on which final year presentations are to be assessed and the proportion of marks to be assigned to each criterion [1]. Some students give further presentations during the early part of the year, which are subjected to formative assessment by peers and staff. The culmination of these processes occurs at the end of the second term, when all students give a 10-15 minute presentation based on their final year research projects to an audience comprising their peers (30-50 students), post-graduate students and departmental staff. Each of the talks is assessed summatively both by their peers and by staff, the mark being carried forward to the final degree classification. In all cases the student's communication and presentation skills are being assessed, rather than the scientific content of the presentations.

We report here some of the quantitative data for assessments of 32 final-year student presentations in March 1991. The mean mark (out of 100) awarded by the peer group was 60.0+6.2 and by the seven members of the academic staff was 63.7+7.7 (n=32; mean + standard deviation). The mean values for the two groups are close and the slightly larger standard deviation for the staff group reflects a wider range of marks awarded (44 to 79 compared with 44 to 70).

For each speaker the mean mark awarded for presentation skills by the peer group and that awarded by the academic staff group have been plotted in figure one. Of the top quartile of students as rated by the staff group all eight were among the top quartile as rated by the peer group. Similarly, of the bottom quartile as rated by the staff group, six were placed there by the peer group.

While the mean marks awarded to each student show an impressive agreement between the two groups, there was considerable variation in the mean mark given by individual students, the highest and lowest values being 66.0 and 52.9 respectively. The corresponding values for members of the academic staff were 69.5 and 59.0. Clearly, among both groups there is a wide spread in the perceived standards of the presentations. In order to see if the standard at which students awarded marks was affected by the standard of their own performance (for example, if students who perform well may mark more severely) figure two presents the mean mark given *by each* of the students to their peers plotted against the mean mark awarded *to* the same student. Figure two shows considerable scatter indicating that students dissociate their marking standard from their own standard of performance very effectively.

These data reveal good correlation between the mean marks awarded to each student by the staff group and by the peer group. This concordance is reinforced by the excellent correspondence between the two groups of markers in those students appearing in the top and bottom quartiles. The overall means calculated from the marks awarded by the two groups are also close. These data taken together indicate that the student group as a whole can be trained to assess oral communication and presentation skills to the same standards as those employed by staff members. The lack of correspondence (ie. large scatter) between the marks awarded by students to their peers and their own communication skills strongly suggests that these students can make a reasoned assessment independent of their own level of skill and should therefore be in a position to assess their own performance when preparing oral communications in the future [1].

The considerable differences in mean values from

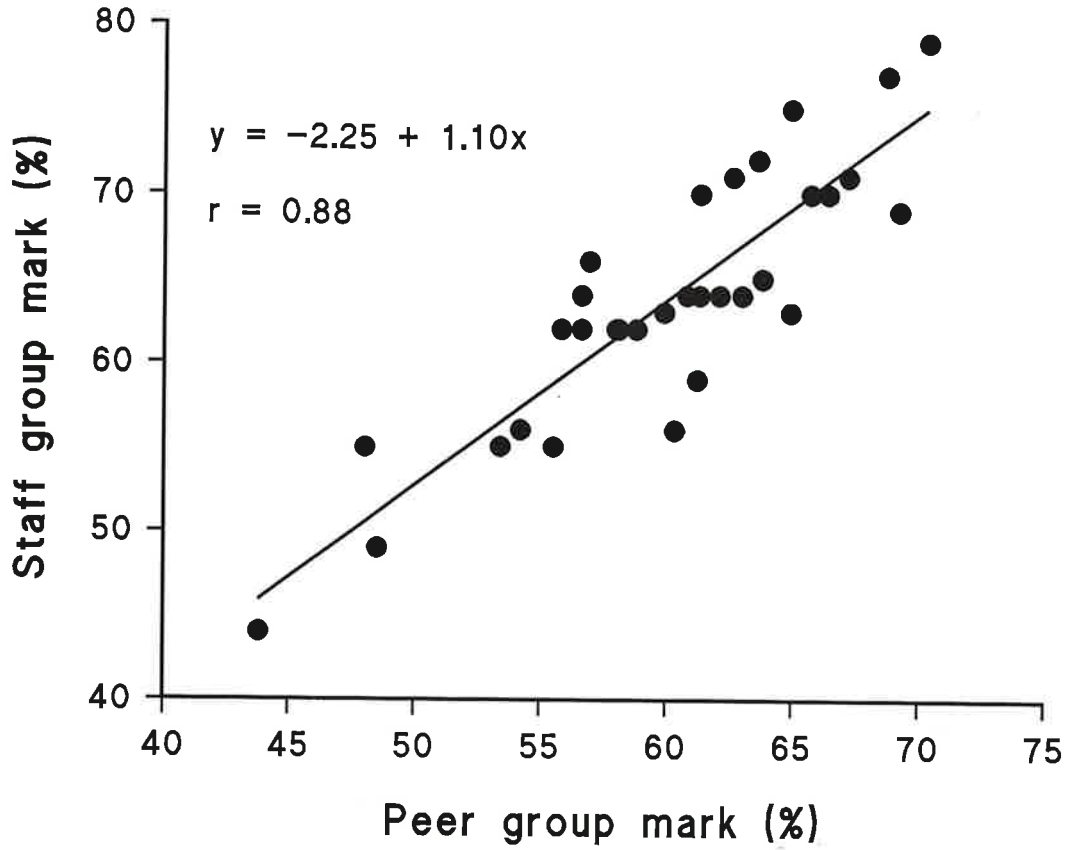


Figure 1. For each presentation the mean mark (%) awarded by the staff group has been plotted against the mean mark awarded by the peer group. The correlation coefficient (r) is highly significant statistically (P<0.001).

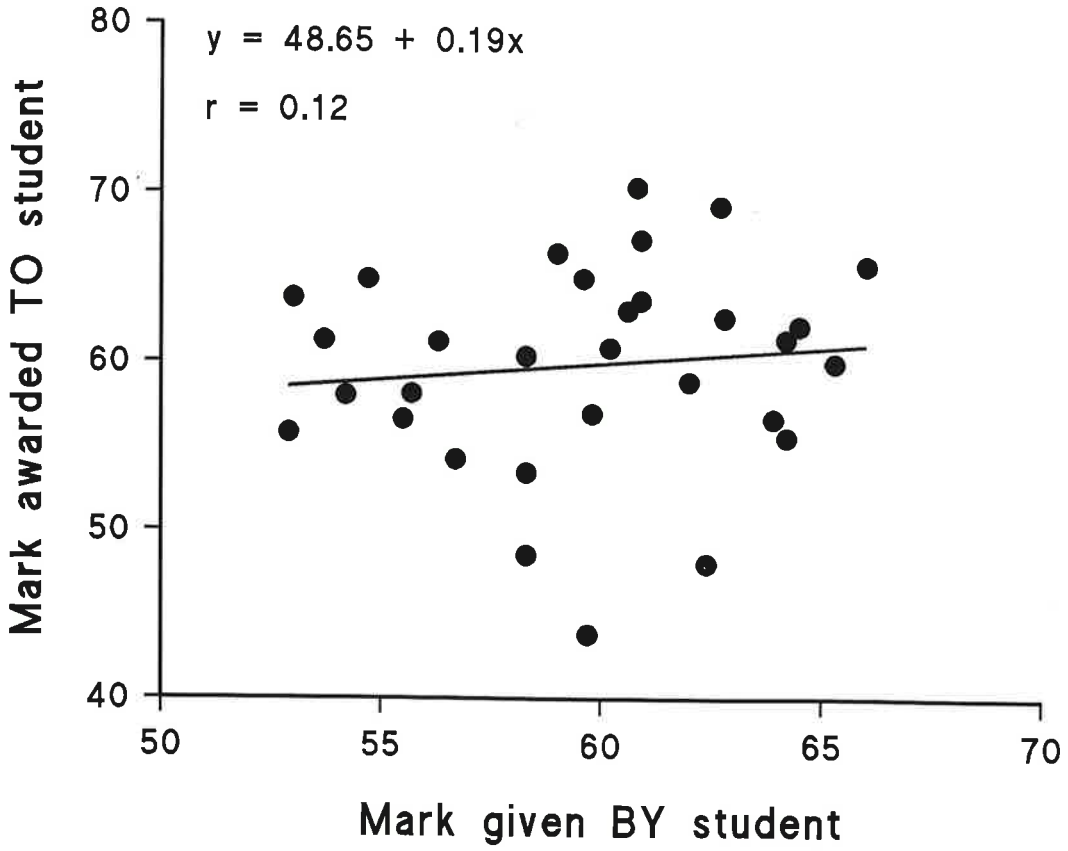


Figure 2. The mean mark awarded by the peer group to each presenter has been plotted against the mean mark given by that presenter to the other presentations of the peer group. The correlation coefficient (r) is not significant statistically (P>0.1).

Figure 3. Assessment Criteria

Criteria agreed by students (each equally weighted)

- the way the talk is introduced;
- the structure of the talk;
- visual aids;
- clarity and audibility;
- discussion and conclusions;
- handling of questions.

Criteria used by staff (each equally weighted)

- Was the subject adequately introduced?
- Were the findings explained cogently?
- Was the talk suitably completed?
- Was it delivered without being read?
- Were any conclusions drawn?
- Was the talk illustrated satisfactorily?
- Was it well structured?
- Did the student speak clearly?
- Did the student answer questions well?
- Was an impression given of familiarity with the material?

individual markers warrants comment. In spite of using agreed marking criteria (figure three), assessments of individual presentations varied considerably among students and, to a lesser degree, among staff. It must be appreciated however that a voice which can be easily heard at the front of the lecture theatre may be inaudible at the rear. Similarly OHP transparencies may be clear close to but unreadable from a distance. Therefore the quality of a presentation may be perceived as very different depending on the position of the assessor in the lecture theatre. Furthermore the marking criteria were agreed by the students some six months before the presentations were given. Although there was considerable discussion of the elements to be assessed under each heading while agreement was being reached the passage of time may have blunted memories. Inevitably however some variability will remain; certain criteria are common (for example, audibility) but others (for example, speed of delivery; hand gestures) are very dependent on personal preference.

In conclusion, the above data demonstrate that students can be trained to assess presentation skills, to apply appropriate standards to be dissociate these standards from their own abilities as presenters. Conversation with our students suggests they believe the development of this critical assessment facility will improve their own performance in future presentations by making them more aware of their strengths and weaknesses and of good and bad practice.

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PROCTORIALS: A STUDENT VIEW

Petronella Ericson and Naomi Cohen

What is education about? In the past, it has often been equated with mere mindless memorisation of the words and arguments of a teacher, without much question or challenge. Yet we surely do not spend millions of pounds and years of our lives on education merely to turn out unthinking, passive and compliant machines. The idea of education must be to make people think, not to enslave their intellects. To achieve this, we must actively foster a different approach to learning - one that encourages the students to work things out for themselves, to question received wisdom, and to seek enlightenment through discussion and debate.

During the past year, the Philosophy Department at Leeds University has been using a new method of teaching that aims to do precisely these things. The results have been impressive, and we are writing this article as students involved in the scheme.

The setup

The idea was that while the first-year undergraduates would continue to attend conventional lectures and tutorials, they would also hold weekly 'seminars' amongst themselves to discuss questions and problems arising from the lecture topics. Since this approach was new to the students, the meetings had to be structured by the course leaders, attendance records had to be kept, and some form of encouragement or guidance had to be available at the individual meetings. One possibility was to put members of staff in charge of these things, but this would be to risk returning to a conventional student-teacher format instead of the open discussion that was envisaged. It would be much better if the meetings could be 'led' by more advanced students.

Accordingly, a call went out among third-year students for 'proctors' and the student meetings were called as 'proctorials'. Each proctor was assigned a group of around ten students, and this group remained his or her responsibility throughout two terms.

The trial

At the briefing meeting for proctors, we were told that their role was to facilitate discussion, not to act as teachers or to 'lecture' the students. In fact, many proctors found it necessary to take quite an active role in the early stages, leading the discussion and attempting to draw in the students by direct questions and challenges. At each meeting, at least one student would act as scribe, taking brief notes on the points made during the discussion. These were then taken as the starting-point for the tutorial later in the week. After the first few meetings, the students got used to the discussion format and contributed more readily, and it became possible to have a student perform the role of 'chairperson'. This in turn relegated the proctor to a much more marginal role.

Problems - and how to solve them

These are some reports from proctors and some of their favoured solutions.

1. *One student does all the talking*
   this was a gift if no one else seemed inclined to say anything, but became a problem if it prevented other students from contributing. One solution was to ask such students to act as chair or scribe, since this meant they had to seek opinions from the group.
2. *Students that do not speak*
   by contrast, some students were reluctant to speak at all, either because they were shy, or because they did not like to say anything they were unsure about, or because they were simply not interested. In the first two cases, we had to be alert to any sign that they might want to speak and respond to it promptly - this encouraged the students and increased their confidence. The free discussion format generally worked well for these students: for instance, one female student who at the beginning of the year could hardly bring herself to say a word was by the end of the second term chairing meetings with great poise and enthusiasm.
3. *No one speaks*
   this familiar situation really was nerve-racking for the proctor. Sometimes the students had not understood what the problem was, or were simply confused: in such cases, some judicious explanation from the proctor was in order, and usually helped. The proctor should not be afraid to admit ignorance, though - it often gave the students the confidence to speak out about their confusion or concern. Sometimes the prepared discussion sheets were not sufficiently detailed or structured to precipitate or sustain discussion.

Sometimes the students simply felt they had nothing to say, or were plain bored. Ways of dealing with this included challenging them by making a controversial statement, or trying to 'draw' one or two who usually talked. However, proctors must remember that if the group does not talk, this is not necessarily any reflection on them. They must remind themselves - and the students - that the proctorial can only work if the students themselves make a real effort.

The lowdown - did it really work?

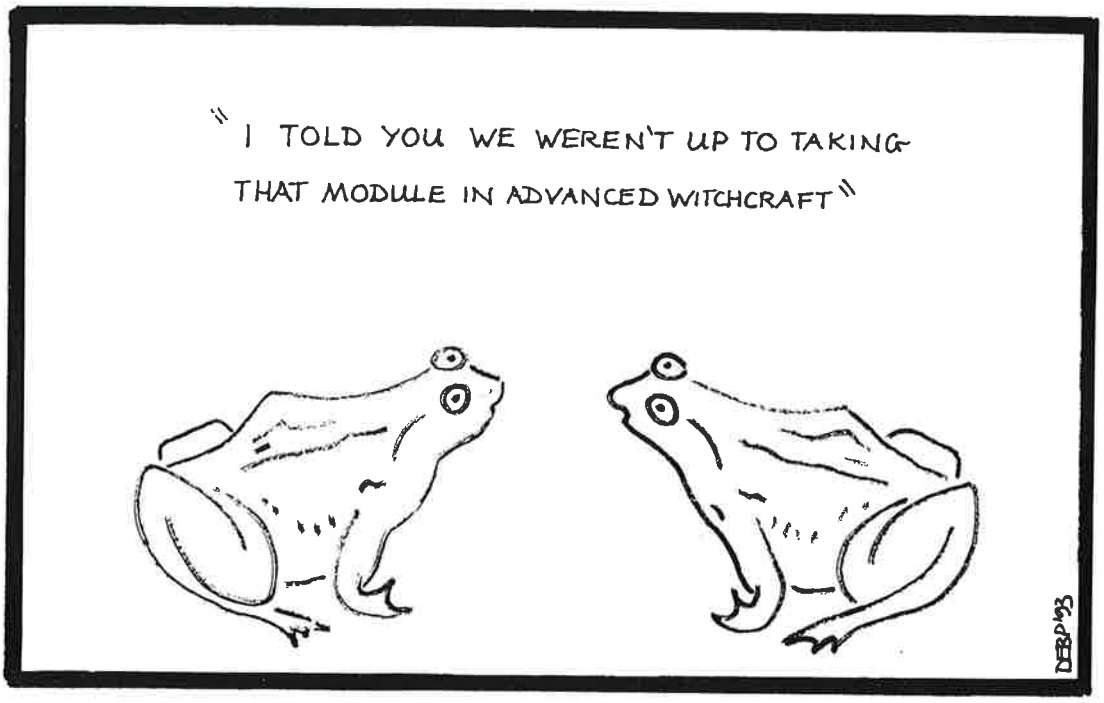
In the event, the students usually did make that effort, and the proctorials were a decided success. During the course of the year we found that they encouraged discussion and active engagement with the subject, fostered community spirit within the group, and led to a loss of self-consciousness and an emphasis on sharing and involvement rather than competition. They also undermined the departmental hierarchy; in particular, students would often tell the proctor things they felt unable to 'come out with' in front of members of staff - including criticism of the course - and the proctor could then pass on the message. Close liaison between proctor and tutor is clearly very important and where it was lacking the proctors were rather out on a limb.

The only area where the value of the proctorial system was doubtful was the course in elementary logic. The students saw little to discuss; any difficulties they had tended to be technical, and so should really be brought up at the tutorial rather than the proctorial, and proctors who were themselves poor at logic felt very uncomfortable trying to get a discussion going. At times the students were able to work on set problems in smaller groups, which meant they would share each other's knowledge and which also seemed to draw the group as whole closer together. By and large, however, logic may be better taught by conventional methods.

An eye to the future

There can be no doubt that proctorials are here to stay. They provide that ideal basis for learning: a questioning approach and a forum for open discussion. Nor is philosophy the only subject that could be experimented with in this way - all courses, including those in the nature sciences, would benefit tremendously from adopting the proctorial system. Education, especially higher education, should not be about learning by rote and mindless recitation of notes that have neither been understood nor questioned. Rather, it should be about personal growth, open-minded discussion, unprejudiced investigation, and the realisation that one may be mistaken; this is as true of the sciences as of the arts. The proctorial system, although not the answer to every problem, is a decisive step in the right direction.

Petronella Ericson and Naomi Cohen were final year philosophy students at the University of Leeds during the 1991-2 academic session. The first author is now studying for her PhD, and is also a first year tutor.



Cartoon: Dennis Pollard

THE ROLE OF WOMEN STAFF DEVELOPERS IN DEVELOPING TEACHING SKILLS THROUGH TEACHING OBSERVATIONS

Hazel Fullerton

'What's so special about women staff developers?' I asked a group of new lecturers on my course - five, women, seven men. There was a momentary and fairly rare silence.

Gradually momentum built up. Initial responses were:

'There's none'.
'It depends more on the developer's personality'.
'It's more a matter of style of communication'.
'Well it's more a matter of the behaviour of that individual'.

An almost imperceptible shift took us towards:

'Well, in some circumstances it may be different'.
'Maybe I feel less exposed in some situations'.

Ah-ha exposed! When do they feel exposed? There was no doubt that it is when their own teaching is being observed.

Men felt that perhaps they were less in competition with a woman observer, less afraid to identify any of their own deficiencies, and that there was less need to prove themselves.

It was a male course member who said:

'To have to go through that sort of situation, to take risks, you have to have a very safe environment. There needs to be a gentleness, encouragement, good humour and a feeling that things won't count against you. It's a mother figure environment, whereas a father figure is associated with authoritarianism and discipline'.

We all know that these are stereotypes but nonetheless such stereotypes infiltrate us all, and to some degree (not small) they are reflected in the academic community.

Reflecting on my 'mother role', I realised that my interactions with and aspirations for a new staff member are very much the same as those I have for my child. Namely, that I want to encourage enquiring, resourceful independence. I want them to have as many different opportunities as possible. I'll explain the situations and the background things and encourage them to reach their own conclusions. If things don't turn out as anticipated, I'll help them identify the successful bits to build on. I'll do a lot of listening. I want to protect them from the vagaries of outlandish fortune, from Deans and even from themselves. I'll try to get them to develop purposeful strategies and yes, no doubt about it, I fuss a bit and bully a bit too.

Evidence

Our Certificate in Education course had run for many years and each course member has four teaching observations throughout it. So all the reports from all of these sessions are on record. These observations and those from the induction course have been conducted by three women and five men. I soon realised that it would need a proper discourse analyst to analyse these reports adequately, but I could identify some generalities.

The most obvious of these was the observer's tone of communication in these written records. Generally the male observers were more impersonal, the women more personal. Two of the men actually wrote in the third person whereas the women addressed the observer directly. Women used 'you' twice as often as men did. They also asked questions where a male observer was more likely to make a direct suggestion or observation. Women more frequently referred to points which had arisen in their joint discussion.

So, I was moving towards some very tentative generalisations.

- that women staff developers tend to be more approachable and may encourage change through creating a secure environment in which staff can take risks
- that by using a process which is generally more personal, more affective, they may be more conducive to a reflective attitude to future development

The next question was whether there is anything in the literature which supports any of these points of view. I was astonished to find a sociolinguist [1] strongly confirming my tentative findings. I discovered that there is even an existing terminology for it - 'genderlects'.

Wall and Barry [2], found that students expect more of women lecturers. They expect her to be more *nurturing* and devote more time to her students outside class contact time. They have more praise for male lecturers than a female who actually devotes more time to them, because the woman is, after all, just doing what's expected, while the man is doing more than is expected.

Tannen [1], personally recalls a graduate student calling her at home on a Sunday because she didn't want to bother her (male) dissertation director at that time and Macke [3] discovered that when students judged professors, 'generating more discussion' was taken as a sign of incompetence - only if the professor was a female!

Questions

How does this relate to interim findings by Loder [4], that personal characteristics of lecturers are the factors most inhibiting to effective learning? What other implications does all this have for staff developers? There are implications here for teacher appraisal including observation of classroom practice. Who is going to do it? Line managers are predominantly male. Will they share the prejudices of the students in Macke's findings? Will this disadvantage female staff? Will the potential for improving teaching, inherent in the appraisal system, be lost if the whole process lurches into a judgemental rather than a developmental process?

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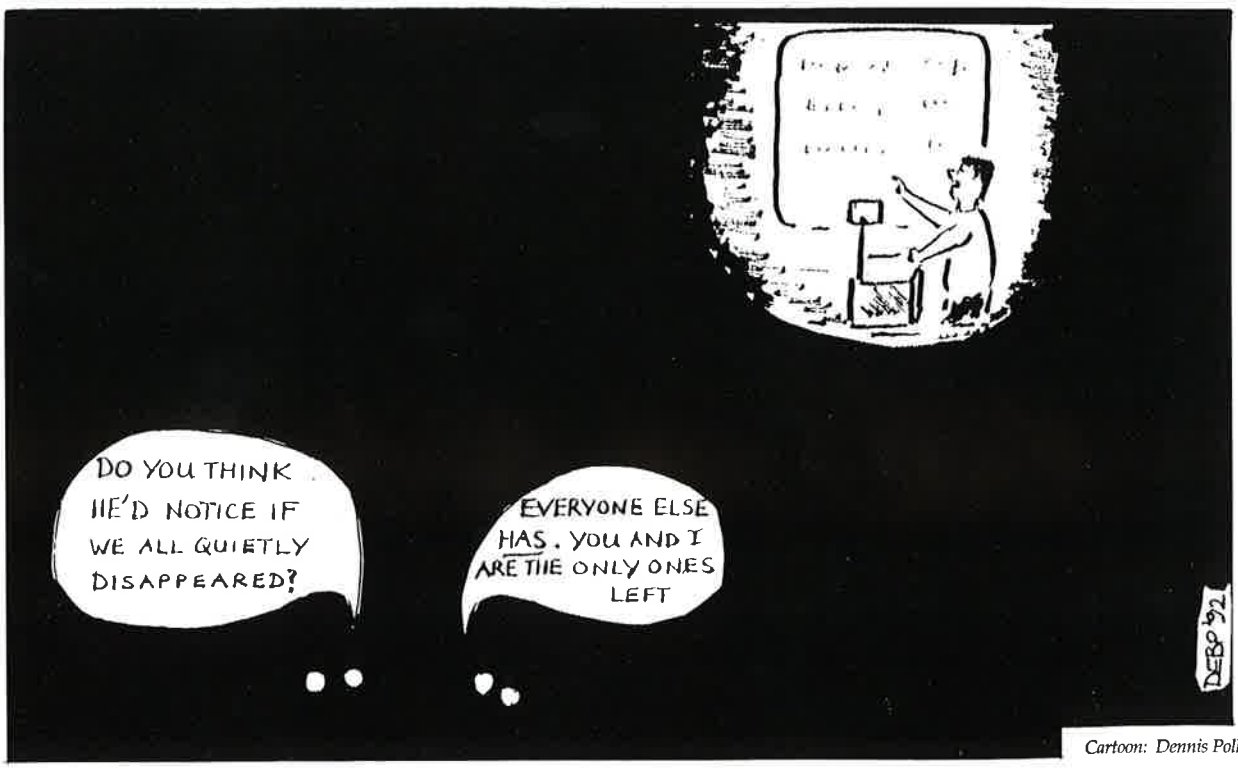
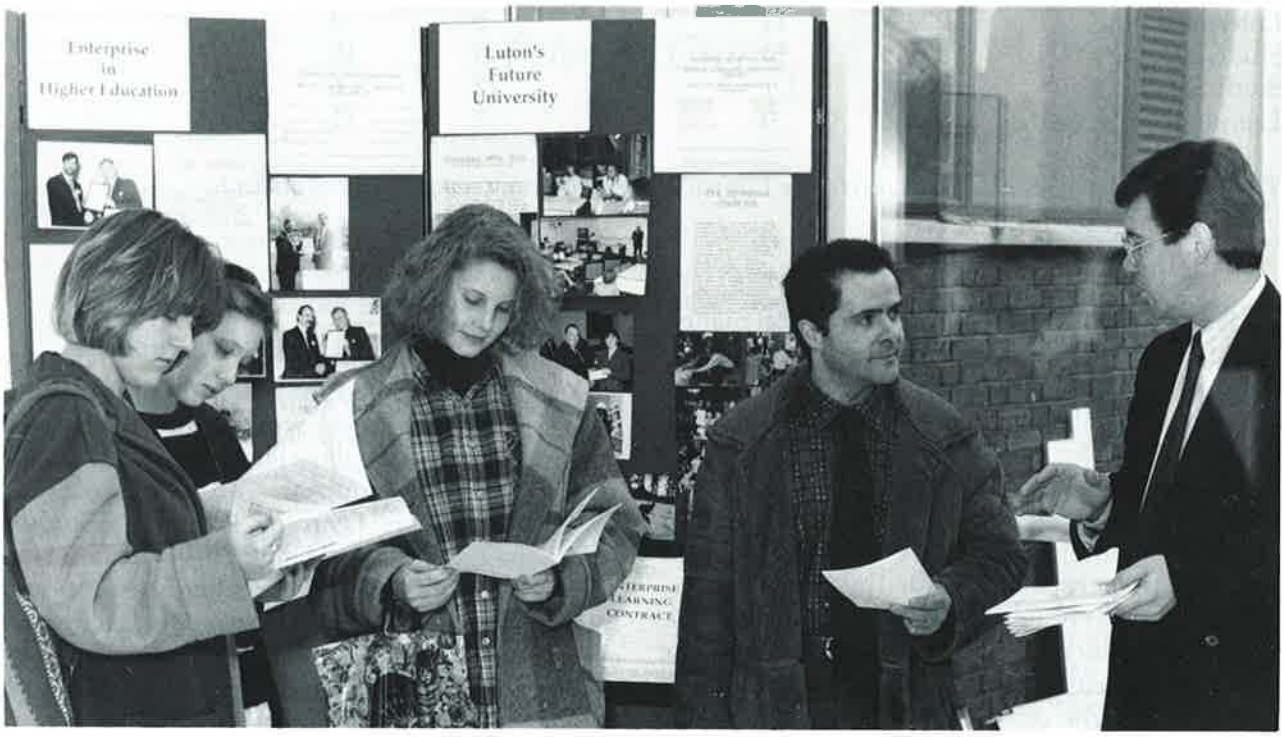
Hazel Fullerton is the Academic Staff Development Coordinator within Continuing Education at the University of Plymouth where observations of teaching play an important role in the SEDA accredited course she runs for new lecturers. The institution is introducing a peer observation system for all teaching staff. A longer version of this article will be included in a SEDA paper 'Women in Higher Education 2' in Spring 1993.



Cartoon: Dennis Pollard

COPING WITH STUDENT INDUCTION IN THE NINETIES

Lee Crystal



On right, Gordon Weller, Enterprise Development Manager, with students at induction.

In the 'good old days' student induction was something course tutors organised for about 20 students. Sometimes this meant a well defined programme lasting several days. Sometimes it was a quick visit to the library and a few hazy instructions about what to do if there are 'problems'.

Now we have hundreds of students, course 'managers' and modular programmes encompassing fields, options and electives. A personal tutor scheme helps, but, even with this system, the size of most student groups means individuals have to take greater responsibility than ever before for their own learning and their personal lives.

How to induce?

In 1992 Luton College of Higher Education decided to pilot a new approach to getting students off to a good start and provide a central programme of induction for its modular students. Because of pressures on staff time, the offer from the Enterprise Unit to organise this was greeted with a sigh of relief. The Student Union agreed to co-operate and as a first step carried out a survey of what current students felt could be useful to 'freshers'. Topics selected were Managing your Money, Student Services (especially counselling and accommodation), Student Union, Learning Resources (library and computer centre) and the Enterprise Initiative. New students were advised by post that there would be an induction week before teaching started.

A presentation on each topic was devised and offered on a number of occasions at specified times. Those wishing to attend sessions were able to book and issued with a ticket for admission. A booking desk operated all week in the main reception area and was staffed by second and third year students. Some tutors chose to make block bookings and tell students to attend, others left attendance to students own discretion.

In addition, each topic area ran a stand with information. This was staffed for the whole week between 9.00 a.m. and 4.30 p.m. The stands were constantly busy and provided the opportunity for one to one conversations between students and staff from particular areas.

The programme of presentations left plenty of spare time, even for students who chose to attend all six. The intervals were timetabled by faculties with meetings with personal and subject tutors who were responsible for organising activities for their own

Student Rating of Induction Presentations in Order of Preference
1 (most favourable) to 6 (least favourable)

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Managing Your Money	6	3	5	4	6	19
Student Services	7	14	17	11	3	1
Enterprise Unit	22	14	7	8	2	6
Student Union	10	13	5	5	18	1
Study Skills	4	1	13	12	6	8
Learning Resources	18	8	7	7	11	3

Totals do not sum to 78, as some sections of the Evaluation forms were not completed by all students.

students. These generally included practical matters such as finalising option choices and ice-breaker group work. All tutors were issued with a book of induction activities which they could use if they chose to do so. Some did, others preferred to devise their own activities as they had done in the past. This scheme also left students unscheduled time in which they could meet informally, buy books, finalise their accommodation, explore Luton and generally settle in.

The inclusion of Enterprise as an induction topic was an innovation for the College. Each Enterprise presentation included an input from a local employer, sixteen in all, who stressed the need for developing personal transferable skills as well as subject knowledge. Students were also encouraged to consider participating in an optional career development module, to help prepare them for the job market and also to participate in a negotiated contract for skills development.

Using employer input and emphasising the need to prepare from week one of year one for a future career was positively received. Students ar very alive to the effects of the recession and seem appreciative of college initiatives to help them deal with the highly competitive job market.

Did it work?

Evaluation forms were handed out to all participants. 1,300 students attended the induction presentations and 78 evaluation forms were returned. Feedback was generally positive albeit limited to a small sample size. The most popular and well received presentations were Learning Resources, Student Union and Enterprise in Higher Education.

The common induction programme was also well received by staff. For those embattled in dealing with systems for a totally new modular structure for larger numbers than ever before, having one issue dealt with for them was a slight alleviation of pressure.

What happens next year?

While there is general agreement that student centred, college wide induction worked well this year with 1,300 students we are now considering how we cope with upwards of 4,000 students next year. Induction must be dealt with before teaching starts, as once lecturers are in progress there is no space available for large presentations. Do we run more presentations? Use video? Hire the Albert Hall? Please share your experiences or ideas. We would like to hear how others do it.

Dr Lee Crystal is a Chartered Psychologist and Head of Enterprise at Luton College of Higher Education. Research interests include self concept change, equal opportunities in work placement and appraisal and evaluation techniques.

TWENTY TIPS FOR RUNNING STAFF DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS

Peter McCrorie

1. Carry out a survey of all the staff you are targeting, asking what staff development activities they would like to participate in; include suggested topics of your own.

2. Select the workshop most likely to succeed. This could be based on numbers of people showing interest, or might target a particular department or Faculty which has expressed interest in having a workshop on an issue of concern to them.

3. Select a good time/times for the workshop. Avoid clashes with regular monthly meetings, school mid-term holidays, etc. Poll several dates round possible participants.

4. Inform staff of the selected date/dates in good time. Busy people need a lot of notice. It is, however, essential to check with participants one or two weeks prior to the workshop in case any have changed their minds or made other appointments. If necessary, re-negotiate a new date.

5. Offer bribes!

6. Be careful in your selection of the person or persons who run the workshop. Choose someone the staff can identify with (for example, if running a workshop for a Geography department, involve a geographer in running the workshop). Involve someone high up in the hierarchy who might encourage greater participation (for example, Dean of Faculty) or get in an outsider whom the staff have heard of and whom they would respect.

7. When it comes to running a session, make sure you do a good job. People will tell others what they thought of it. If it is badly run, the number of takers the next time round will drop; if it is well run, the numbers will increase. Build up a good reputation for yourselves.
NB: This will require careful preparation. 'Off the cuff' workshops are rarely successful.

8. Make the workshop as participative as possible. There is nothing worse than listening to somebody droning on for 2 or 3 hours. The more people put in, the more they will get out. Participation can be on an individual basis, in pairs, in small groups or in large group discussions. Use audio-visual material wherever it is appropriate. Design the workshop towards a specific end, for example, if your workshop is on assessment, end up with the participants designing an assessment; if the workshop is on presentation skills, end up with the participants giving a presentation.

9. Always evaluate any workshop you put on. This is the only way you can find out what has gone well and what needs to be changed for future sessions.

10. Possible suggestions for improving attendance, particularly of those who show considerable reluctance towards staff development, include:

    Get the college to write into all new contracts that staff are required to attend specific staff development activities. The full backing of Senior Management is crucial for successful staff development.

    Offer courses on how to teach a particular skill, for example, if you want to run a course on communication skills, invite appropriate members of staff to attend a course on how to teach communication skills to students. The training programme would be a replica of the course the students themselves would go through. Thus, in the process of training the staff how to teach communication skills, the

staff themselves undergo a training process as well.

'Tried but failed'. Often staff participate in a new course without having been able to attend the training sessions specific for that course. Quite often, halfway through the course the staff find that it is not as easy as they thought, and begin to realise the importance of pretraining. You can then run a workshop in response to their request for training.

'Supply and demand'. Sometimes the staff encounter a particular problem in teaching and come to you for guidance. For example, this summer, over 100 of students failed their examinations. Staff requested a workshop on assessment - they were uncertain whether the high failure rate was due to lack of work by the students or poor assessment procedures by the staff.

11. Encourage staff development through a deep approach rather than a surface approach. A surface approach is event-driven and reactive. A deep approach involves institutional commitment and is a long-term process. Start, for example, with recruitment and selection of staff, followed by an induction process for new staff and a long-term portfolio of staff development activities (see no.12).

12. A 'Staff Development Profile' or 'Staff Record of Achievement' is worth introducing. Providing there is encouragement and commitment from senior management, all members of staff could have a programme of staff development built into their longterm career development structure. Over a period of years, they would be able to build up a variety of skills. Some recognition for, or accreditation of, the profile would be necessary.

13. There could be some link to a staff appraisal scheme and possibly also to promotions. However, it is important that it is not merely attendance at staff development workshops that is recognised and recorded; putting the ideas into practice is what really matters.

14. Encourage Senior Management to take up educational research and give it a similar status to other academic research - especially when it comes to promotion.

15. Is it perhaps best to ignore the 'no-hopers'?.

16. Try 'unusual' staff development events, for example, a breakfast session.

17. Tailor-make your workshops for individual departments or faculties.

18. Sometimes getting participants to prepare something in advance of the workshop is of value, providing it is not so daunting that it frightens people off.

19. Sometimes it is essential to hold staff development workshops off-campus. If the staff development activity is held away from the workplace, the likelihood of interruption is considerably reduced.

20. Workshops may not be appropriate for all members of staff. One-to-one sessions, attendance at teaching sessions, video-taping of teaching sessions are alternative methods of staff development.

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Dear Editor,

Metacognition in Practice

Harvey and Burrows [1] suggest that an approach focusing on empowering students is 'an altogether "dangerous" process for professional academics'. Metacognition is the fourth perspective identified by the authors. This focuses on developing critical thinking whereby students are encouraged to challenge their existing beliefs, beliefs of others, and to create their own 'knowledge' and apply it.

A group of us at the University of Humberside are particularly interested in developing this perspective and over the last two years have attempted to achieve metacognitive results with our business studies students. We encourage students to perceive 'management' as something that happens all around them 'here and now', as well as being abstract to them in organisations 'out there'. So, for example, the seminar group is regarded as a 'live' learning resource - an 'organisation' which they can relate to and which mirrors the complexity of organisations 'out there'. Students are encouraged to become more sensitive to managerial issues such as communication, working in groups and leadership - processes that occur within the group itself. Problems arising within the seminar (for example, perceived lack of reading or non-attendance) are not ignored but are placed on the agenda in order to be 'managed' by the group. Students are encouraged to become involved in the decision-making processes in relation to sharing reading and ideas (a process often ignored) if the tutor's 'managerial prerogative' or 'right to manage' remains unquestioned.

As a course team we are aware that we too have managerial responsibilities. We have attempted therefore to create an environment in which empowerment is facilitated in the way we have described. An important further responsibility is the practical problem of resource requirements. A strategy we have adopted for managing resources has been the production of a course reader. This includes a wide range of extracts from authors such as E. Berne, A. Blumberg, E.Goffman, R.D. Laing, G. Morgan, R. Pascale. A literary focus is also used to explore managerial issues of uncertainty, contradiction and ambiguity. Novelists such as J. Fowles, F. Kafka, D. Lessing and R. Pirsig are thus recommended. Readings are chosen [2] with the purpose of encouraging students to 'make connections' between the 'here and now' and management 'out there'. The link is then made between this heightened sensitivity to events and the benefits of such an approach by complementing this with an awareness of 'meta-qualities' (managerial skills such as self-knowledge, balanced learning habits, mental agility and creativity) through to 'basic knowledge and information skills' (command of basic facts, relevant professional understanding). The intention of such an approach is to prepare students for the 'real theory' of management as 'social and political in character' [3].

We are currently producing a workbook which we see as a shared responsibility with students in that their ideas and contributions inform our practice. Such a learning approach can be encapsulated in Schon's reflective practitioner model [4] whereby students have the opportunity to create their own 'knowledge' and practice as they proceed. Students are also asked to keep an experiential diary in which they record learning issues important to them. This mechanism is intended to increase reflective and analytical skills.

While it is not our intention here to take a position on the social and political issues surrounding empowerment, we suggest that metacognition offers a 'rewarding' rather than perhaps a 'dangerous' process for the practitioner and student. In moving away from didactic and prescriptive models perhaps we must acknowledge 'what we do not know' thus enabling us to be freer to engage in more honest and open exchanges in which we and our students have the chance to develop. We would like to hear from other practitioners who are interested in developing these ideas.

Jane Thompson and Vince Dispenza
Humberside Business School

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TO CENTRALISE OR NOT TO CENTRALISE?

Dennis James

Most of us would, if asked to explain what educational development and support services are, produce a list containing some of the following:

- Curriculum design support
- Development of assessment methodologies
- Staff development and consultancy
- Development of open and independent learning
- Media/audio-visual facilities
- Computing facilities & programming
- Books/journals and access to databases

We might replace this kind of categorisation by classifying services as *professional support* (staff training and consultancy for example but also bibliographic and data services) and *material support* (provision of hardware, materials and production facilities for example). This is a distinction that is useful, in part, because it helps us see that the material support categories are becoming less and less watertight. Digital teaching and learning, desk-top Do-It-Yourself production of everything from OHP transparencies to computer based learning and automated assessment, networking of resources, and other developments, all blur the distinction between audio visual services, information services and computing services. Indeed, all these material services are ever more clearly concerned with the same basic processes - that is storing, retrieving, manipulating and presenting information.

Adopting this perspective naturally leads us to expect that the conceptual integration of these services might go ahead but we would not, I hope, confuse this process with geographical centralisation. We should make an effort to avoid the kind of concrete thinking which considers this issue strictly in terms of the management of hardware and facilities. Likewise we focus exclusively on where things should be put, rather than what they should be.

Why restructure?

This is a time of change in HE, with pressures to modularise, handle larger groups, introduce more individual and independent learning, rationalise assessment strategies, and conform to national quality standards. We are prompted to reorganise our services to accommodate these changes. In order to do this, however, we need to understand not only what these pressures are but also how they will change the pattern of support needs within our institutions, otherwise any decision taken might turn out to be less than optimal.

Many institutions do attempt to predict future needs like this and express their convictions in the form of documents concerned with relevant strategic planning. Such a plan will attempt to identify how course provision, in terms of categories of courses and modes of delivery, is likely to change in the foreseeable future. It will also identify implications for what kind of support services will need to be provided and how their development is to be scheduled. Experience suggests that attempts to structure or restructure services without this background result in arrangements that are effectively arbitrary, even though they are typically presented with a rationale based on criteria from the field of corporate management.

How to decide?

I am suggesting we must look deeper than the superficially obvious options for choice, which are usually based either on *geography* (for example, services should be located where the staff need to use them) or on *resourcing considerations* (for example, centralisation will avoid replication of expensive staff and kit).

In fact the real justification for examining this issue now is related more to the existence of a number of trends, more or less inexorable, which are becoming increasingly apparent. Already mentioned are the technology based developments, including:

- The desk top revolution, with many erstwhile specialist functions now able to be performed, cost-effectively, by individual members of staff.
- The move towards digital information handling and presentation techniques.
- The networking of information access and the resulting pressure to store and transmit information in compatible formats.

Also very significant, however, are the implications of external factors with mainly politico-economic derivation. These include:

- The increased use of nationally imposed strategies for standardised delivery and assessment at all

levels of education.

- The possibility that the new, larger, university sector will have to accept the idea of extreme forms of specialisation if competition develops to the point of threatening the viability of some institutions.

The existence of all these trends makes the present context a complex one and should convince us to redefine what services are appropriate before looking at how and where they are to be provided. To do this effectively two things are necessary:

First a useful model of the services provision which properly describes its complexity and, in particular, recognises the different nature of professional and material services.

Second a Development Plan for the institution which provides the predictive framework within which support service provision has to be conceived and provided.

Attempting to progress without these is like navigating a ship, not only without any charts but without any idea of where we want to go. The only merit of this situation is the possibility of claiming that wherever we happened to end up was indeed our intended destination.

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