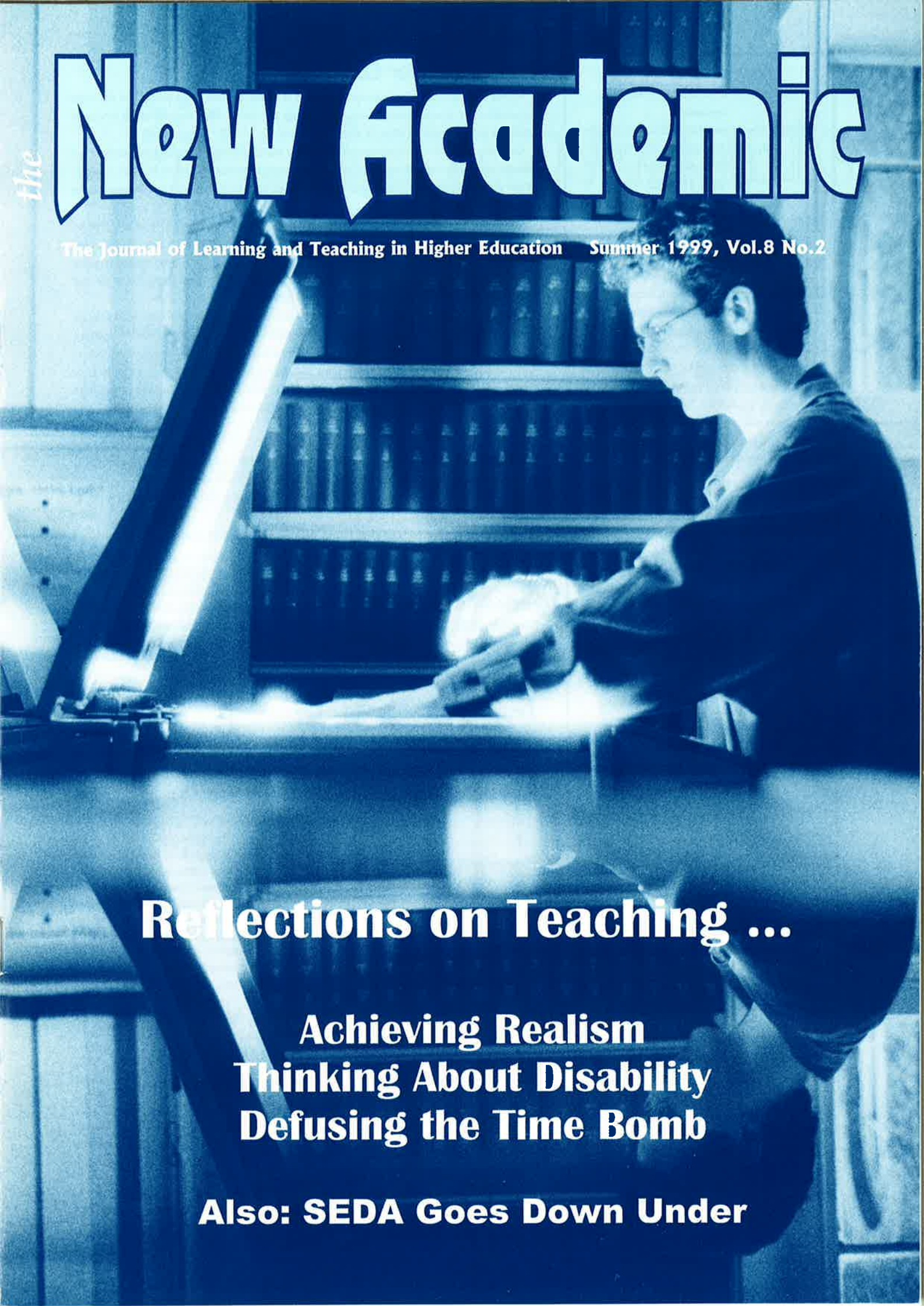

the New Academic

The Journal of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education Summer 1999, Vol.8 No.2

Reflections on Teaching ...

Achieving Realism
Thinking About Disability
Defusing the Time Bomb

Also: SEDA Goes Down Under

SEDA

The Staff and Educational Development Association
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SEDA is a professional association committed to improving all aspects of learning, teaching and training in Higher Education through staff and educational development.
SEDA provides and supports activities, including: national and international support groups and networks; conferences; publications - practical papers, books, a refereed journal, a magazine for teachers in HE; support and accreditation for professional development; research; liaison with other organisations.

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Information for Contributors

We welcome all material of interest to teachers in higher education: the purpose of ***The New Academic*** is to promote good practice in teaching and better understanding of the processes involved in learning in all areas of higher education.

Audience is drawn from educators in all fields and disciplines. You should therefore not assume specialised knowledge, but write clear, straightforward accounts in plain English. When describing projects, please give concrete detail. Papers accepted for publication may be subject to editing.

All material should be submitted in two copies, typewritten on single side of A4, double-spaced, and will not be considered in any other form. Submission of a paper to ***The New Academic*** implies that it has not been published elsewhere *and* that it is not currently being considered for publication by any other editor or publisher. All submissions should be sent direct to Ivan Moore, Editor-in-Chief, c/o SEDA office.

Everyone involved with ***The New Academic*** works on it only part of the time, and so delays in dealing with submissions are inevitable. All papers will be reviewed by at least two people, and expert advice sought where appropriate. If you wish prompt acknowledgement, please enclose stamped addressed envelope: return postage is essential if you wish your script to be returned in the event of non-acceptance. To speed production once your paper has been accepted, you will be asked to send finalised material via e-mail or on floppy disk.

Articles

These should be between 800 and 2000 words. References should be kept to a minimum: where necessary, author's name should be given with date in brackets in text, for example Thatcher (1992). Reference list should be in alphabetical order, in standard academic style, as in the following examples:

Thatcher, M. (1992). How I turned back the tide, *Journal of Marine Studies*, **14**, 123-45.

Thatcher, M. (1992). **Lessons for Canute.** Westminster: Celebrity Press.

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All material to be sent to Book Reviews Editor, who will give guidance: 200 to 400 words. For presentation, please see Books section.

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Contributions to debates are always welcome, and may be of any length up to 800 words (maximum): the shorter, the more likely space will be found. Forum commentary may be on any topic relevant to teachers in HE. All contributions may be subject to editing. Send to Ivan Moore or direct to the Editor.

Acronyms used in *The New Academic*:

APEL	Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning
BTEC	Business and Technical Education Council
CAL	Computer Assisted Learning
CAT	Credit Accumulation and Transfer
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
EHE	Enterprise in Higher Education
FSEDA	Fellow of SEDA
HE	Higher Education
HEFC	Higher Education Funding Council
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Council
HND	Higher National Diploma
IT	Information Technology
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
SEEC	South East England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer
SRHE	Society for Research in Higher Education
THES	Times Higher Education Supplement
UFC	Universities Funding Council

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EDITORIAL

REFLECTIONS ON TEACHING

The overall theme of this issue - as with so many issues of ***The New Academic*** - is our need to reflect on teaching and learning. Just what is it that we want our students to learn? For what purpose? How best can we achieve this? What innovative techniques are available that we have not yet tried?

And what do the students think they are trying to learn? Do we see eye to eye? Or are we working at cross-purposes? Can we help them achieve autonomy? (See our Spring 1999 issue especially on this theme...)

How do we help our students to apply the skills and knowledge they eventually acquire to the problems they face now, and will face in the real world?

ACHIEVING REALISM

Two of our authors address that last question, starting from very different subject areas.

Roy Lowry teaches applied chemistry at Plymouth University, and found that he needed to find a way to ensure his students reviewed all the lecture material presented over their years of study, as well as expanding it with further reading. He sought a way to enable them to evaluate their own knowledge and adapt it to a specific problem.

In his paper, he describes how he set his students the kind of technical problem they might realistically face in industry. Furthermore, he got the students themselves to establish the criteria for success, which they were determined should be as close to reality as reasonably possible. So failure to propose a technique that would solve the (very tricky) problem earned 0%!

Anne Browne found that her students in textile design wanted to be taught "the right answer" when presented with a project development problem. She chose to emphasise the decision-making process itself, and got her students to analyse each step they took in the development of a product. They discovered that they could learn from mistakes, and did not have to be assured of the "correct" decision before they tried out their own ideas.

DEFUSING THE TIME BOMB

In our last issue, writers warned of the hidden dangers involved in the growing numbers of students entering HE via non-traditional pathways: their lack of experience of standard academic assessments could mean increasing failures and drop-outs.

Graham Bishop analyses the objectives of different assessment procedures, and shows that there are inherent contradictions in the requirements of tutors, assessors, students and future employers. His careful analysis of what we might be assessing in different circumstances is essential reading for every teacher - and assessor.

He describes best practice as a kind of balancing act. However, in his view, all conflict can ultimately be resolved by reporting more rather than less. He recommends reporting results of all project assignments in the form of a Profile of transferable skills as an addition to the usual end grade.

THINKING ABOUT DISABILITY

Viv Parker discusses some of the disadvantages imposed on students with disabilities - impaired vision, for example, lack of hearing, needing to use a wheelchair and so on. I vividly recall one term at university when I was on crutches, and the impossibility of negotiating heavy doors to the library without assistance, not to mention miles and miles of stairways, unexpected changes in floor level ...

But she is not so much concerned with the physical environment - which most institutions might reasonably be expected to have put right by now. She is concerned about curriculum design that takes no account of special needs, teaching methods and assessments that disadvantage those with disabilities in ways which - with a bit of imagination - are quite unnecessary. Indeed, she shows that inclusive thinking can actually benefit, not just students with disabilities, but everyone.

NOT FORGETTING...

Patricia Weeks reports that SEDA Teacher Accreditation Scheme has gone down under - to Queensland University of Technology in Australia.

In lighter vein, **Huw Morris** takes a wry look at the Research Assessment Exercise, and suggests how you might raise your department's rating.

All in all, a good issue. Enjoy!

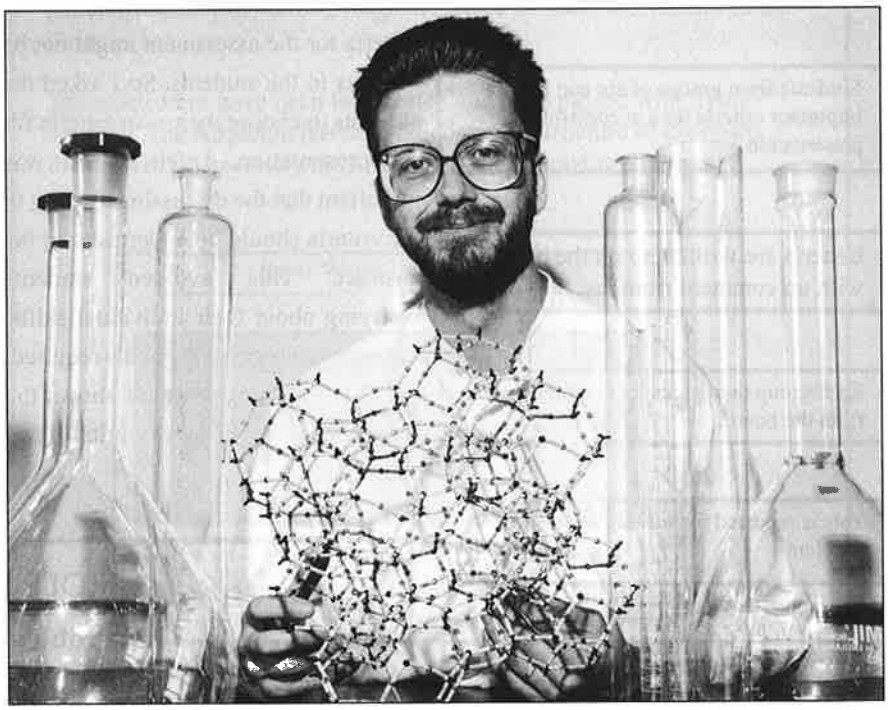
Elizabeth Mapstone

YOU CAN'T SEE THE JOIN

COMBINING TECHNIQUES TO ACHIEVE REALISM

How can students learn to make decisions?
How can they learn to adapt their knowledge to new situations?
And how do they learn to question and criticise their own efforts so that even their mistakes help in the learning process?

***Roy Lowry* describes how he set about creating a problem-solving exercise that would help his students understand that real life may involve applying all the skills and knowledge they have.**



Dr Roy Lowry is a Senior Lecturer in Physical Chemistry in the Department of Environmental Sciences, University of Plymouth

Over the past few years, we have seen considerable interest in implementing new ideas into teaching, and an explosion in the number of books giving hints, tips and models for others to try. In particular, there has been an emphasis on the *key skills* required by a graduate when applying knowledge to a real-life situation in the world of work, and on methods to encourage ownership and the cross-linking of knowledge by the student.

However, when we try out a new technique, it is usually in isolation from other "risk-taking" new approaches. This is so that some form of evaluation can be carried out and/or to "limit the damage" should the technique not work as planned.

Once in employment, however, students discover that several of these key skills may be needed at the same time.

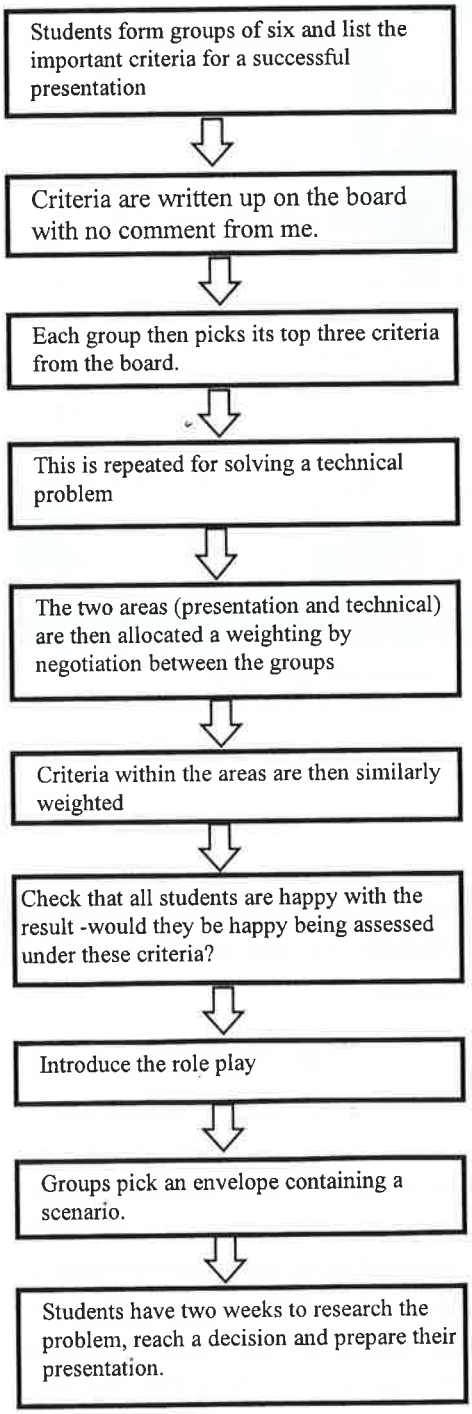
Here I describe how I got students to attempt to solve a realistic problem which demanded application of various key skills along the way. In this example, students perform group work, attempt to solve a real life problem and use role play to present their findings. Students also negotiate the assessment criteria.

THE SETTING

I teach on a series of applied degrees in chemistry at the University of Plymouth. These degrees provide students with the knowledge and skills required in the application of chemical knowledge within industry. However, as science advances there is always pressure to teach more facts and thus

time to emphasise how techniques are used (as opposed to how they work) is limited. In response to this, I wanted to design an exercise that would ensure that the students would review the lecture material, expand it with further reading and evaluate their knowledge in terms of a specific problem.

Flow Diagram of the Process



In addition, I wanted to get the students to think of the consequences of their decisions and so I used a role play exercise. This placed a specific problem in a context in which the students would have to explain and defend their decisions in a presentation. For this, a role-play involving problem-solving in an industrial setting seemed the way forward.

However, I was concerned that the criteria for the assessment might not be obvious to the students. So I asked the students to choose their own criteria for the presentation. I felt that it was important that the discussion relating to the criteria should be undertaken in the abstract. This avoided students worrying about their individual skills, but focused them on the skills required.

The flow diagram here shows the steps followed during the initial (two hour) session.

THE PROBLEMS

Once the criteria had been agreed, I placed the students in groups and gave each group a problem scenario drawn from industrial experience within the department.

The problems were presented to the groups in sealed envelopes with just a fictitious company name on the front. Inside was a set of rules for the role play (see box below), the details of the company and the particular problem that the company faced (see box on next page).

In outline, each group plays the part of an analytical problem-solving team for a different fictitious company. Each company has a particular problem with its product or analytical method and the group must look at a limited range of techniques in order to solve this.

The group must then decide which technique they would use, the data it

ROLE-PLAY RULES

Problem-solving Brief

The rules for this assessment are as follows:

1) you will be assessed as a group i.e. all of you within the group will receive the same mark
2) the details of the problem and the companies concerned are fictitious
3) the chemistry underlying the problem may not be complete - the assessment is of your ability to find a suitable experimental technique to yield the data required to solve the problem, NOT to solve the problem itself
4) the assessment criteria for all groups will be that previously arrived at by the class as a whole
5) It is up to you as a group to divide the work between you and manage your talents appropriately - I will not act as mediator in any disputes!
6) Any questions about this assessment that you need answered must be presented via e-mail (address: RLOWRY@PLYM.AC.UK)
7) Only the following techniques are possible solutions for this assessment: XPS, Auger, STM, AFM, ATR, DRIFT, SERS

Details of the presentations:

ALL groups must have their 20 minute presentations ready by Thursday 4 December. The presentation materials will then be taken in from all the groups to ensure that no group has an advantage.

The order in which the groups give their presentations will be decided by the drawing of company names.

I will play the part of the Managing Director at these presentations!

would yield and how this could be used to solve the problem. Note that getting the data and solving the problem is not part of the assessment.

They must then prepare and give a presentation, detailing the group's analysis of the best way forward.

Assessment is on the basis of the criteria that they have drawn up, and I play the part of the managing director of the company.

THE PERFORMANCE

All of the groups worked well, and the presentations were done extremely well and "in character". Most groups prepared summary reports for the Managing Director to take away (not part of the brief, but a very good idea and sound commercial practice) and kept to time. All presentation materials were very professional and some groups had prepared "hidden" OHP's to answer specific questions should they be asked.

DISCUSSION/ FURTHER WORK

This is the first time that I have attempted anything like this and it went surprisingly well.

The students' criteria were close to what I would have used, except in one area. The students decided that 40% of the available marks should be for the selection of a technique that would give the required data. To quote one student:

"No sliding scale. If the technique would work then 40%. If the technique would not allow the company to solve the problem: 0%."

They went on to explain that they felt that industry would view them this way (backed up by the part-time students) and so they would prefer the role-play to be as realistic as possible.

The materials presented need "tidying up" as many of the questions that the students asked were due to the materials themselves. In particular, one fictitious company name was very close to the real one upon which it was based. The students rang up the company concerned and talked to their chief chemist about the problem - which showed initiative but was not part of the exercise. The company name will be changed!

However, the problems used worked well as examples. This is not too surprising as they are based upon real industrial problems that have been solved within the department.

The students clearly enjoyed the assessment and became very motivated. Indeed, some may well have put in too much time to the detriment of other studies.

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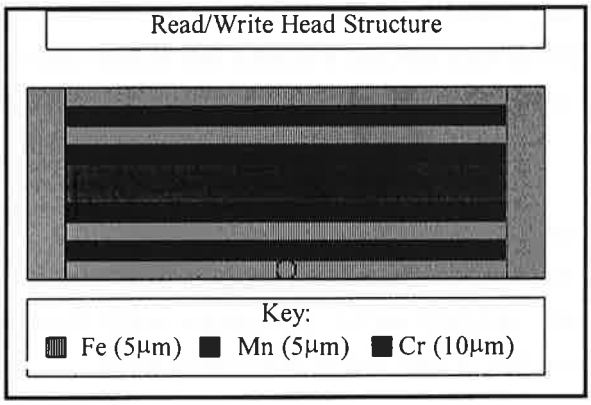
COMPANY AND PROBLEM DETAILS

BIGHEADS LIMITED

The company manufactures read/write heads for computer hard disks. These heads are made of layers of different metals to form the core of an electromagnet.

Over the last few weeks, various manufacturers have returned increasing numbers of head assemblies due to failures. These defective heads do not generate sufficiently strong magnetic fields to store information of the disks.

The electronics have been fully tested and have passed with flying colours. The suspicion has now fallen on the structure of the heads themselves. A correctly made head has the following structure:



The heads are made by sputtering the metals on in layers. The performance of the heads is critically affected by the thickness, nature and order of the layers.

You must decide how to confirm (or not) that the structure of the returned heads conforms with the standard specifications. Incorrect diagnosis will cost £millions in lost sales.

LEARNING BY MAKING DECISIONS

More on achieving realism...

***Anne Browne* found that her students expected to be taught "the right answer" to all the project development problems they were given. They did not realize that they could adapt knowledge they had acquired in different areas, reflect on what they had done before, and turn mistakes into positive steps to learning.**

In the previous article students were studying chemistry ... here they are studying textile design. Whatever your subject area, you may well find ideas and inspiration for your own students here.

Anne M. Browne,
Lecturer in Clothing Technology,
School of Textiles, Heriot-Watt University

Students on a four-year management course, which concentrated on the textile and clothing industries, carried out hands-on product design and development projects. These D&D projects involved the student in the creative task of designing products to a given brief, interpreting the designs to achieve a commercial product and the specification of the products to allow for manufacturing on a larger scale.

Apart from gaining experience on how products are developed and assembled, our aim was that they should also learn the importance of decision-making, of recording and remembering the decisions and of evaluating the whole process.

Theoretically, after a series of decisions has been taken, the student will have a period of time in which to reflect on these decisions. During the reflective period original decisions can be amended and new decisions and directions taken. Decision making is a key factor in the development process of a product and as such has to be made explicit to students so they can use and practise the necessary skills. Necessary decisions ranged from the simple to the more complex as the project developed and had a direct bearing on the quality of the students' learning.

THE PROBLEM

After discussions with students it became clear that they were not learning effectively about the decision making process. It became apparent that when they carried out earlier project work, they had taken a mechanical and surface approach to the learning in order to achieve the desired results, with little thought of the process they undertook.

Gibbs (1995) reported that students vary in their approach to learning from context to context: most students take either a deep or surface approach to learning depending on the subject and how it has been previously taught to them. As they do not reflect on or alter their decisions, their ability to learn from their own errors is inevitably impaired.

Often when encountering a project situation for the first time, students

expect and assume that each stage in the development will follow a rule or that there will be only one solution to a problem. They expect to open a book and find definitive instructions, in easy to follow steps, that would guide them through the project.

When asked to give an evaluation of the projects' successes and failures, students tended to mention items relating to the product and not the process they had gone through.

Students believed that in the product development process there was only one answer, or one correct way of proceeding. They expected the subject matter to be complex and believed that they had to be taught the right answer. They saw the lecturer as the provider of these answers. If the students were not able to proceed as they did not know the answer, they believed that they must have created serious errors and that these errors would result in poor grades.

The majority of students expected to sit back and let the lecturer do all the work. Race (1995) explained that teaching isn't teaching if the students do not learn, it is a spectator sport, but these students intimated that they preferred this scenario. In order for the students to learn they must make decisions independently.

THE SOLUTION

To encourage students to verbalise the decision making processes they undertook, they needed to identify the possible stages involved, as well as an outline of why making decisions was so important when developing a product. This would provide them with a starting point for future projects.

From close discussions the following decision making process was defined:

- Make a decision
- Realise that it is a decision
- Record the decision
- Assess the outcome, i.e. was it a good decision?
- Make another decision.

The students were then asked to consider a simple every day activity and they selected food shopping. They were asked to formulate a series of questions that they might ask themselves when going shopping.They reported that the following questions needed to be asked when making any decision:

- Why should I do this?
- What value is this to me?
- Who can I receive help from?
- Where could there be more information?
- When must this be completed by?
- How can I make sense of all this information?

The use of a simple every day event as an example helped to increase students' awareness of the importance of decision making. They were able to link general concepts from other areas of their lives into their academic endeavours.

The importance of making a decision was further highlighted when students were asked to give written explanations for each decision that they made. It astonished most students to realise how many decisions were necessary when undertaking any activity and particularly when developing a product. They were also surprised at how many good decisions they had made.

The students also learned that the identification of faults and errors in their work would be rewarded just as much as the items that they had completed correctly at the first attempt.

CONCLUSION

Initially the introduction of these concepts was not readily embraced as students found self assessment difficult. They still preferred to get it right first time and avoid the decision making process. They experienced problems when concrete answers were not provided and when they were asked to consider solutions to their own problems.

Student perceptions of a subject are hard to alter. If they have been used to answers being provided in past experiences of product development, they will expect this to be the accepted method of completing a project.

After introducing the concepts of decision making, students were able to identify the fact that they did make decisions and the implications of making them. They were able to record their decisions and reflect on their suitability. Although initially frightened by the new concept, students soon reported the use of them in other areas of their life and studies.

Race (1995) explained that real advances are often made when a plan does not work as expected as this leads to critical reflection and further creativity in the search for new approaches to the situation. Students learned more when they were able to evaluate each stage in the process and be flexible enough to change items to improve the end result. Feedback assisted in the redefining of a decision until objectives had been reached.

References

Gibbs, G. (1995), Research into Student Learning, in Smith, B. & Brown, S. (eds), **Research Teaching and Learning**, Kogan Page, London.

Race, P. (1995), Research - Running Brook or Stagnant Pool? in Smith, B. 7 Brown, S. (eds), **Research Teaching and Learning**, Kogan Page, London.

DEFUSING THE TIME-BOMB

In our last issue, Penny Wolff and Nick Sutcliff warned that increasing numbers of students entering HE with little experience of standard academic assessments could mean that universities find students failing and dropping out.

***Graham Bishop* takes a careful look at what assessment is intended to measure, and analyses the contradictions inherent in combining the results of different assessment methods.**

Graham Bishop
Lecturer, Centre for Modern Languages
The Open University
tel/fax 01993 778518

The last decade has seen increasing numbers of students entering Higher Education. The routes to entering HE are also widening and this is bringing new challenges to the traditional approach to assessment adopted by universities. Wolff and Sutcliffe (1999) point out that *'many ...of these (new) students will have little or no experience of 'traditional' approaches to teaching , learning and assessment'*. They describe this as a *'time bomb'* which could lead to massive student failure and disaffection. They see an urgent need for training academic staff in work-based assessment methods.

The UCAS (1997) report on GNVQ students entering HE also stated that *'students were ill-prepared for the form of assessment often used within HE'*.

The 'traditional' form of assessment referred to here is that which often takes the form of the long academic essay with referencing, and/or unseen examination papers of two to three hours with no, or very limited, use of reference materials allowed. The results are then assessed on a scale which typically allows a Third (or Pass) at about 40% and First at about 70%. The criteria are therefore based on the concept of **discrimination**, i.e. distinguishing between quality of performances on the same test.

Many certification systems outside the academic environment however do not make use of this form of assessing student performance. They are more concerned with competency and differentiation by level. This means that any one task is assessed on a pass/fail basis with a very high level of accuracy being the benchmark for success. Success at one given level gives access to the next level in the scheme. Some HE institutions are now introducing this concept into their assessments. Hurd (1999) cites the University of Central Lancashire (Roberts & Shaw, 1998). The Institution-wide Language Programme is including marks from an assessed evidential portfolios of work submitted by each student in the final grade it awards.

Glasner (1999) asserts that

'Assessment has traditionally been omitted from any discussion of teaching and learning and tagged on to the end of curriculum planning with little reflection.'

The aim of the present article is to look at the main objectives of two of the major forms of assessment and to highlight the contradictions which arise when the two systems are deliberately

combined. The context is that of the modern foreign language courses of the Open University Centre for Modern Languages, but the analysis is applicable more generally.

ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES

In order to be able to select the appropriate mode of assessment for a given course we need to be clear about our aims and to address at least the three questions below:

- what are we testing for: to reveal the quality of performance relative to others in the same subset or with absolute mastery?
- what type of information or feedback are we aiming to provide for the learners?
- how will the eventual evaluative judgement will be used and interpreted by others?

Depending on the answers to the above we must also consider how the test and assessment procedures should be drawn up using criteria which are appropriate to the needs of at least four groups:

1 those delivering the programme (the tutors)
2 those assessing the programme (the university)
3 those who are learning through the programme (the students)
4 those who will need to interpret the result in order to judge whether it reflects their needs as a future employer of the learner.

Although the assessment criteria will not all be in conflict with each other, many will be if they are to reflect the different perspectives of these four groups so that both the periodic and the overall course results provide relevant and appropriate information.

Many of the requirements of the four groups above will coincide or overlap, but some requirements will be individual to a particular group. Tutors and employers may wish to measure grammatical accuracy, though for different reasons. Students may not be so concerned with this, putting the emphasis on communication.

Students and employers may be seeking competence in applied skills of language; the ability to handle the framework or form of the task in which the language is being used may be seen as important as the actual language itself. Tutors on the other hand may not be so concerned with the vehicle or framework within which the language is presented to them - letters, summaries, reports etc - as with the purity and sophistication of the language itself.

In specific areas, all four groups may have the same demands in mind. For example, translation, interpreting and negotiating all require total accuracy, matched by social and cultural skills and background knowledge of the country.

THREE APPROACHES TO ASSESSMENT

Most of our assessment judgements are made on work done under two different sets of conditions which can be broadly defined as:

- formative work, in the sense of tasks completed under relatively unrestricted or even supported conditions (course work, projects, assignments)
- summative work, in the sense of work completed under more controlled and unsupported conditions (examinations, supervised end of course assignments)

These in turn involve three approaches to assessment, each of which has its own aims and objectives. It is necessary to be clear which is being adopted in each case and why. These three approaches may be broadly listed as follows:

1 assessing for competency
2 assessing by differentiation through levels
3 assessing in order to achieve discrimination within a particular level

Assessing for competency

involves using criteria which will indicate whether the student can accomplish the task successfully with a very high degree of accuracy, usually above 90%. Most professional qualifications require this, including post graduate courses in translation and interpreting, for example. In this context, the assessment will take into account in equal measure the form and content of the task as well as the quality of the language. Weakness in one of these elements cannot be off-set by strength in the other.

Assessing by differentiation

usually means that the students are required to take a series of tests at increasing levels of difficulty. In order to pass a level they must display a high degree of competence. Passing allows them to move on to the next level. The level defines the difficulty and is itself the measure of achievement. No rank order of students is needed within the level since the pass mark is so high. Students define their own competence relative to one another by the Level they have achieved in the series.

As we have seen , both the above types of assessment are traditionally associated in the UK more with professional or vocational qualifications than with academic qualifications. It is this situation which is changing and will need to be taken into account by HE if the 'time-bomb' identified by Wolff and Sutcliffe is not to go off.

Assessing in order to achieve discrimination is the more traditional academic way of assessing. A single test, or a restricted range of tests is taken by all candidates. Success in the tests is measured by the percentage of correct responses within the tests, which are designed with an internal gradient of difficulty. All candidates who achieve a minimum percentage in the tests (commonly around 40%), however obtained, are deemed to have passed. Those with higher percentages are given higher grades or percentages. It is quite common in the United Kingdom for the highest grade, at least in arts subjects, to be awarded to students gaining between 70% and 80%. Thus there is a rank order of pass in the results on the same tests.

There are, of course, many intermediate positions and combinations of these three approaches, but the point for our discussion is that the differences between the aims and objectives of these approaches should be clear to those who are adopting them. Setters must be sure that they are using the right approach to achieve what they set out to achieve - measures of discrimination, differentiation or competency. The more combinations of approaches that there are within a single system, the more difficult it is for the end-user to determine the meaning and value of the final overall result.

FURTHER COMPLICATIONS

In addition to the above, the mode of delivery may further complicate the calculation and interpretation of the overall result. Assessment may be in the form of individual modules, which may involve a combination of course work and end of module test, or be purely by end of module examination. These module results will be aggregated to obtain an overall result. Modules themselves may have different values or weightings in the overall scheme which will be taken into account in the calculation.

What is this teacher's assessment intended to measure?

The modular approach may be viewed as a type of periodic summative assessment.

Single end-of-course examinations may, in terms of the interpretation of the overall result, appear to be simpler than modules. Most linear examinations, however, consist of several papers testing different skills and or content areas. The papers may have different weightings - written elements may be worth more that spoken elements for example. Again these weightings will be taken into account , but are subsumed within the overall single letter, grade or percentage with which the overall final result is reported.

Producing a single overall result grade from a diversity of sources and styles of assessment could be seen as disguising the conflicting aims of the assessment and of the teaching, yet this is perhaps the most frequent scenario in the UK and elsewhere. In this scenario the overall result combines the results of summative examinations with those gained during the process of formative continuous assessment or course work.

Thus in the case of the Open University for example, final totals from written and spoken outcomes gained over eight months and carried out under relatively unrestricted conditions are combined with examination results obtained during the three hour examinations and carried out under much more restricted conditions. The two totals may even be weighted differently.

The various aims and objectives of these two modes of delivery are reduced to a single scale of four grades of pass.

Such a system is possibly the most commonly used in the UK and other countries. It is not necessarily flawed, but it is important that the end-users have enough information to be able to interpret it appropriately. At the Centre for Modern Languages the final overall grade reported to the students is

followed up by a profile report based on language skills.

BALANCING ACT...

Overall results for courses of any kind, not just languages, are therefore subject to balances and combinations of at least the following factors, all of which carry with them contradictions and differences in aims:

- assessment of formative course work, often in the form of evidential portfolios
- assessment of summative examinations
- assessment criteria aiming to evaluate competence
- criteria aiming to achieve differentiation by level
- criteria aiming to achieve discrimination within a level
- aggregation of modular results taken over time
- aggregation of several examination 'paper' results taken 'together'
- aggregation of formative course work results and summative examination results

With so many variables at work we might be tempted to call into question the value of reporting success in a course via a single , convenient, overall course result unless considerable supporting profiling accompanies it.

AIMS OF TUTOR VERSUS ASSESSOR

Broadly speaking we can define the aims of formative course work as those oof providing the student with the ndependently, using transferable work and study skills which, if practised, will enable the learner to achieve a high degree of success. There is no intent to make the completion of the task competitive and so no restrictions are placed on the time taken nor on the resources used. The resulting final piece of work must however be the original work of the student synthesizing the information and advice received.

In this sense, course work may mirror closely the conditions under which many people operate in the workplace and foster the development of transferable skills which will be valued by employers and students alike. As with all such work there will be a deadline to keep.

Both the tutor and the assessor wish to determine the quality of this course work via agreed criteria. Where the two differ in their objectives, however, is that whereas the tutor is concerned with encouraging the student to achieve even better quality on the next assignment, the assessor is mainly concerned with making comparisons between performances at particular stages in the course. The assessor needs proof of a common starting point and conditions for all students in order that the comparisons be seen to be 'fair' to all students. The assessor is therefore much more suspicious of formative course work than the tutor since it is difficult to control the working conditions sufficiently for the assessor's purposes.

We may similarly define the aims of examinations as being to provide the student with the tools and knowledge to accomplish a task independently, using study skills and strategies which will enable the learner to achieve a high degree of success, but this time working within constraints of time and resources. There is no conflict here with the aims of course work, but there are differences. The overlap of skills required is considerable, but the external conditions add a different dimension.

It is arguable that such conditions also mirror conditions that often arise in their place of work when conditions are not ideal and deadlines are tight. Working in this way is thus also a valuable transferable skill. In view of these controlled conditions the concerns of the assessor are more easily satisfied and his or her objectives thus satisfied.

Tutors on the other hand may have more ambiguous feelings towards the pressure and often the stress that examinations cause. Although they recognise that the examination may be motivating, they are not always in agreement with the results the students achieve. This may be because the rank order which they have in mind for their learner group reflects the quality of the work they have received throughout the course,which was done under course work conditions. They may not have sufficient evidence to judge how their students would react under examination conditions and so how that rank order might change.

We must not underestimate how motivating during the learning process a deadline and some pressure can be. Monthly assignments are often seen as the glue which keeps courses together and students involved. Examinations can serve a similar function. They are a motivating hurdle to climb over for many and provide a great sense of achievement when successfully completed, arguably giving more satisfaction than regular course work in the final analysis.

In the regular annual surveys carried out by the Open University, many students state clearly that if the course has no final examination then it has no validity in their eyes and, they fear, in the eyes of those outside the university. Others who do not intend to make use of their result in the work place may simply

Do these students and this tutor all see assessments in the same light?

opt not to take the examination, personal satisfaction having been achieved through completion of the course rather than by passing an end-of-course test whose aims are not in accord with their own.

RESOLVING THE CONFLICT

The assessment of formative and summative work does serve conflicting interests or priorities when viewed from the standpoint of the assessor rather than the teacher and the learner. However, the formative and summative assignments themselves serve to encourage and develop skills and strategies which are not so much conflicting as complementary. One way of resolving this clash of interests would be to report results separately in the form of a Profile.

Rather than this taking the form of a profile of skills in a particular discipline, it would take the form of a profile of transferable skills of working under different conditions. Students could be given a grade related to their performance on tasks done under unrestricted conditions and a second grade for performance for work produced under examination conditions. Such a Result Profile would provide the students and their employers with useful and accurately targeted information about the students' abilities under different conditions of work.

The present system of producing a combined, hybrid mark conceals this detailed information and fails to address the central issue that formative and summative assessments have different aims and are the product of different criteria and priorities.

Such profiling of results by transferable skill would also go some way to bridging the gap between academic and vocational qualifications which dominates so much thinking and planning in the United Kingdom at present. It would enable the two major systems of assessment to combine in useful harmony in HE and perhaps go some way to defusing the 'time-bomb' of potential student disaffection and drop-out by making the best use of two systems of assessment, both of which have considerable value.

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HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR RESEARCH RATING

Plans for the Higher Education Sector's next Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) are currently under way. Here, *Huw Morris* takes a tongue-in-cheek look at how you can improve your department's rating in this exercise.

The early 1990s saw expensive restaurants across the country packed with senior University staff wooing high profile researchers with open cheque books. A change in the rules in the mid-1990s meant that you couldn't count the publications of these staff in the next RAE, but this approach to improving things is still seen as a worthwhile investment in some quarters.

Unfortunately, with the transfer market beginning to resemble the world of Premiership football, this option is not open to all institutions. They may not be paying Michael Owen prices, but with top professors going for £70 grand plus research assistants, no teaching, a refurbished office and possibly a purpose-built lab, it is worth asking what you get in return for your money. In the words of one University Finance Director,

"It's very costly and they expect to be treated with kid gloves."

CREATE POSTS

One way of overcoming the transfer market problem is to create a few sham posts. The eminent researcher who got fed up in the eighties and went off to set up her own consultancy outfit probably still craves the recognition of a professorship. Side step the visiting Professorship or visiting fellow route and give her a full professorship. Okay, so she will never come to work and she probably won't want to get her hands dirty with students, but for a few grand you can bung her publications down with the rest of the department's.

GET RID OF STAFF

If you can't afford to improve the nominator, you can always have a go at the denominator. Sack `em, re-grade `em or move them to another department or institution. Sacking them may make them turn nasty, but you can always turn a few lazy lecturers into Teaching Fellows or some other such thing and boost the proportion of research active staff in your department at a stroke. If you can't alter the grading structure, you can move them to the Department of Continuing Education, or send the swine to a network, affiliate or franchise college.

In the meantime, make sure that all your new appointees have recently completed a PhD or similar research project. They're cheap, and with a string of publications in the offing, who cares if they can teach, counsel or administer, let alone talk or maintain eye contact with the students?

You might worry that these steps will distort the nature of the subjects being taught, making them less practical, more specialist and inaccessible to novice students. But if the public want a different education system, they can always teach themselves and we can help them with our new *self-managed learning* schemes. This approach also has the added benefit of increasing the amount of research being undertaken. After all, if you can't increase the number of your research staff you can always increase the number of hours ordinary lecturers have for this activity. Cut the teaching loads in half, send the students to the library, their bed-sits or part-time jobs and double the amount of time available for research.

INCREASE PUBLICATIONS

Having messed about with the numbers of staff, the next thing to do is get serious with the publishing strategy. There are a number of simple steps that can be taken here to boost your rating.

You can get your staff on the editorial boards of the main journals in the field and use their influence to smooth the path to publication for others. In the social sciences there is always a shortage of one legged, dyslexic former polytechnic lecturers on

these boards. Take advantage of the benevolent motivations of the editors of these journals and nominate a few of your own staff for these positions. If you dress the application up in inclusive language the editors will find it difficult to resist these proposals.

If the editors won't play ball, **start your own journal**, but make sure it's cheap, has an impressive sounding name and a distinguished editorial board. The days when University libraries bought every journal under the sun are long gone and as a consequence some of the more expensive publications are being taken off the subscription lists. It is therefore essential to make sure that your publisher will offer a cheap product that can be seen, but not read, by future Research Assessment Panel members.

It is also important to ensure that it sounds good. *The Journal of Hamster Sexing for Computer Nerds* won't really do, but the *International Journal of Mammalian Sexology for Infomaticists* will probably work. Once established, get a few leading lights to sign up for the editorial board. A large cheque and the promise of no work will help here.

DON'T WASTE TIME ON RESEARCH

In the distant past people used to spend several years compiling painstaking analyses of difficult topics and issues in one masterly tome. Today, there is no need to waste your time on these activities. Short cut the circuit. Bypass the research stage. It's costly, time-consuming and really not necessary. You can justify this decision by pointing out that in these post-modern times we know that research is merely a ritual designed to legitimise the arbitrary prejudices of the power elite.

Once you have dispensed with the hard work you can get down to the easy bit - writing lots and lots of words that no one will ever read.

Get an idea, or better still borrow it. If the idea seems particularly worthy, split it up and write three different articles. If that won't work, change the title and have it translated and submitted to one or more overseas journals. This is a particularly useful approach if you need to demonstrate an international reputation in order to get a 5 or 5* rating in the RAE (Newman, 1997). And remember, very few of the assessment panel will be able to translate the title let alone the content of the article.

"Everyone recycles material these days."

As one of my distinguished colleagues has pointed out, it might also be a good idea to come to some agreement with your friends about citing each other's work (Amie et al, 1997). This is particularly advisable if you think that the panel will look at the number of times your work is cited by other researchers.

Another approach is to re-arrange a few paragraphs in one of your articles and send it to different journals. A colleague of mine recently decided to turn down an article she was reviewing because it was the same as one the author had written for another journal. She was subsequently surprised to have her decision over-ruled by an irate editor who pointed out that *"Everyone recycles material these days."*

If you can't be bothered to write the article in the first place, you can always persuade some hapless PhD student to write the paper and put your name first on the list of authors. Explain this decision by saying that the reviewers tend to show a marked preference for material from established university staff - funnily enough they do. When the article is printed and the research assessors finally come to call, you can pretend you did all the work. By this time the PhD student probably won't care about who takes the credit as it won't help them much with their career in the local fast food restaurant.

If you can't persuade a student to write the article for you, get the reviewer to do it instead. Write as much as you can in the hour you have between lectures and quality assurance meetings and then send it off. If there is anything of any note in the article, any reviewer worth their salt will write a long commentary outlining the sources you should have quoted and the arguments which should have been included. If the journal you originally sent the article to won't accept your re-submission, you can always send it to one of the thousands of other new titles.

Try to avoid getting published in journals that anyone actually reads. A long list of publications will impress the assessment panel, but you don't want them to have read pages and pages of your content free prose.

It is also a good idea to avoid wasting your energy on textbooks, television programmes, radio broadcasts, websites or anything that might actually be read or heard by the general public.

Remember, the job of the academic is to make the simple seem difficult and the accessible unobtainable. When there are almost as many writers as readers, the most successful people are

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ACCREDITING UNIVERSITY TEACHERS IN AUSTRALIA:

SEDA

GOES DOWN UNDER!

Patricia Weeks describes how staff at Queensland University of Technology, Australia, decided to look for benchmarks by which teaching staff can be measured and discovered that SEDA offers the best accreditation system worldwide.

Traditionally, at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), here in Brisbane, as elsewhere in HE, lecturers have been hired with more reference to their research ability and expertise in their profession than their teaching ability. It is generally assumed that new academics will be able to teach with very little or even no preparation at all for their teaching role. Most academic staff have received no formal education and training in university teaching. They have in effect learned 'on the job' (Coaldrake & Stedman, 1998, p.90).

Since 1993, the Teaching and Learning Development Unit (TALDU) QUT, has offered, a Graduate Certificate in Education (Higher Education). This course leads to a post-graduate qualification in teaching in HE, and is offered as a one or two-year part-time program comprising four twelve credit point units:

- The Reflective Practitioner;
- Flexible Learning and Teaching in HE;
- HE in Australia: Issues and Contexts;
- Program Design and Evaluation.

The course, which forms one of the strands of the Faculty of Education's Graduate Certificate in Education, is designed to enrich the preparation and professional practice of teachers and is similar to courses offered in the UK.

The Graduate Certificate recognises that, while many teachers in HE are discipline specialists, often they do not have the same degree of experience or expertise in approaches to teaching and learning. The objectives of the course are, therefore, to develop skills in teaching and an awareness of the theory underlying teaching and learning in HE.

BENCHMARKING

In 1995, TALDU embarked on a benchmarking project (Spendolini, 1992) in which we compared ways in which university teachers are prepared for their teaching role worldwide

(Weeks et al, 1996). Benchmarking, which is more familiar in the business world than HE, offered us a rigorous process for comparing and contrasting our programs with those offered as best practice elsewhere.

What we found most interesting in our search for best practice was the work done by SEDA in the United Kingdom. We were aware that, at the same time as we were developing the Graduate Certificate in Education (HE) in Australia, SEDA was developing its accreditation scheme for teachers in HE (Baume & Baume, 1996). As for our benchmarking exercise, SEDA's aims were to assure standards in the profession and to enhance quality. The SEDA accreditation scheme, therefore, was chosen as one benchmark to inform our practice.

REFLECTIONS ON OUR COURSE

Dr Liz Beaty (Chair of the SEDA Teacher Accreditation Scheme), visited QUT to explain the SEDA Teacher Accreditation Scheme and critique our course as a prelude to SEDA recognition. Registration for the SEDA scheme was subsequently one of the major outcomes from the benchmarking project.

We were delighted with the encouraging response we received from the course accreditation team. Our course was deemed to be very thorough and of real academic and practical substance, worthy of dissemination as a model to inspire others. In particular, the accreditation team found the following features interesting and commendable:

- generally relevant, stimulating, current and incisive course materials
- thorough grounding in learning theory and reflective practice
- use of debates on current issues in HE
- conscientious approach to issues of equal opportunity and curriculum relevance for students from different cultures
- the practice of interviewing stakeholders in HE
- excellent lists of references (Claridge, 1997).

Of course, there was also constructive criticism and resultant change during the process. In particular, we amended - to some degree:

- the assessment.
- our teaching approaches.
- the way we monitored and evaluated the course.

Additionally, we decided to offer the course in on-line delivery mode. (This process has since been completed).

QUT's Graduate Certificate is now flourishing and boasts the first Australian SEDA accredited graduates. Two graduates share their reflections on the accreditation process on the opposite page.

As a teaching team we are pleased to have engaged in the benchmarking process and to have received SEDA recognition for the Graduate Certificate in Education (HE).

We appreciated the kind and insightful comments made by the accreditation team; we found the process rigorous, clear and developmental and the SEDA underpinning principles and values helped us to improve the design and delivery of our course.

As a secondary outcome, undertaking the recognition process prompted me, as the course coordinator, to undertake the SEDA Fellowship scheme - a scheme designed for staff and educational developers to demonstrate, in a portfolio, evidence drawn from their work, that they have achieved each of the eleven core objective and four specialisms in a way which is underpinned by seven specified values.

It was the first time I had been formally and rigorously assessed by my peers. It took a lot of work to complete the portfolio but I felt very satisfied and quite excited with the result. I ask others to complete similar tasks for the Graduate Certificate in Education (HE) and I realised that I had never done it myself. The process helped me to identify my strengths and weaknesses. It also enabled me to devise a personal developmental program. The assessment interview was exhausting but made me realise just how much I wanted to succeed and become a SEDA Fellow. I would highly recommend the reflective process to my colleagues in educational development.

ACCREDITATION IN AUSTRALIA

Some of our colleagues thought that we should not be undertaking a UK-based scheme and that we should be spending our time devising an Australian scheme to suit our own context. However, we found the SEDA scheme flexible enough to allow us to address our own context, priorities and resource issues.

In Australia, the debate has begun about the accreditation of university teaching. Currently, for example, the Australian Technology Network (ATN) is looking closely at a similar scheme to accredit the graduate certificates offered by those universities. They are also concentrating on alternative pathways for teachers in HE to become accredited or certified. The HE Research and Development Society of Australasia

PARTICIPANTS' REFLECTIONS

QUT's Graduate Certificate is now flourishing and boasts the first Australian SEDA accredited graduates. Two graduates share their reflections on the accreditation process.

Dr Neville Marsh comments:

My first reaction to seeking SEDA accreditation was abject horror. My instincts told me that my current portfolio would be woefully inadequate for SEDA purposes. However, prompted by the belief that the West Report would come down firmly on the side of national accreditation in Australia for teachers in the tertiary sector, I began the task of revamping my portfolio in line with the SEDA principles and value.

In fact, once I put my mind to it, re-shaping the portfolio was an interesting and refreshing process. I came to realise how much I had moved by undertaking the Graduate Certificate in Education (HE). It was obvious that much of what I had learned in the classroom had been put into practice so there was no shortage of material to exemplify the eight principles and values required by SEDA. I also realised that teaching portfolios are not static things but dynamic - needing regular review and updating to include new material as it becomes available, and reshaping depending on the particular use of the portfolio. The process of preparing a SEDA portfolio also reminded me that some things needed to be done; for example, I had not organised a peer review of my teaching for two years and so this was undertaken.

I found the whole process of SEDA accreditation invigorating, tempered only by the outcome of the West Report (1998) which failed to recommend setting up a national body in Australia analogous to SEDA in the UK. I suppose this reduces the value of SEDA accreditation: it will not become the professional norm for Australian tertiary teachers in the near future, but would, of course, be invaluable if I were to move (back) to Britain.

Karen Theobald reflects on the SEDA accreditation of the Graduate Certificate in Education (HE).

As part of one of the Graduate Certificate units, we were asked to compile a Teaching Portfolio and subsequently asked to expand this if we wished to gain SEDA accreditation.

I was pleased to receive this accreditation and I found the experience of compiling the Teaching Portfolio really valuable. I guess I gained a sense of increased self worth as I realised that I had undertaken a number of initiatives which really valued teaching and assisting students to learn. The portfolio was also helpful for focusing my teaching achievements which I could then exhibit in trying to gain a promotion within my school. I have been able to share my portfolio with a couple of less experienced colleagues and this has assisted them to gain direction and support in their teaching and learning practices.

(HERDSA) has also prepared a discussion paper entitled *"The accreditation of university teachers"* (HERDSA, 1997). There are, it appears to us, a good many reasons why we should be looking at this issue. In particular, we believe that a *"prerequisite for real teaching excellence at the individual level is a trained teaching profession"* (Elton, 1998, p.3).

We are not, in any way, suggesting that all HE institutions in Australia should apply to be recognised by SEDA. However, we think that there is much that the international community of educational developers can learn from the SEDA experience and its accreditation processes.

Although, politically, the accreditation of individual teachers in QUT will have no official currency in Australia, participants in the Graduate Certificate in Education (HE) will have

comprehensive portfolio evidence of their ongoing commitment to improving their teaching and their students' learning.

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those who appear to be saying something profound which no one really understands. In these situations they have to pay you handsomely to explain it to them, even if you have turned the logic of everything back to front.

GET ON THE PANEL

Finally, you can influence the outcome of the assessment by getting your man or woman on the panel.

With aircraft hangers full of neat photocopies of all the articles submitted and a computerised database of all the ISSNs, the assessors will never have time to read or judge the papers.

What's more, with the exercise run by fellow academics, you won't need to worry about some horny-handed son or daughter of toil butting their nose in when your nominee does a deal with the people from Rutland and Sedgemore.

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Huw Morris confesses to being at Kingston University - e-mail: h.morris@kingston.ac.uk

THINKING ABOUT DISABILITY ACCESS TO HE

***Viv Parker* has managed three HEFCE-funded projects to promote access to university for students with disabilities. Here she analyses the problems faced by these students and shows how inclusive thinking about curriculum design, teaching and assessment can benefit everyone.**

In recent years universities in the UK have admitted increasing numbers of students with disabilities and learning difficulties as part of the process of widening access to HE. This was prompted by a series of special initiatives by HEFCE, which initially focused on widening access and more recently on improving the quality of provision. Now more disabled students are in the sector, it is clear that they experience many difficulties in accessing the curriculum in all its aspects. It is also becoming apparent that there is a need to ensure that innovations in learning and teaching enable the learning of all students and do not create new barriers for those with disabilities.

The recommendations concerning disabled students contained within the Dearing Report are currently influencing the work of the Institute for Learning and Teaching (ILT) and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). Developments in these two areas have potentially wide implications for improving the quality of provision for disabled students across the sector as a whole.

The QAA is in the process of issuing a series of **Codes of Practice**, which will inform the procedures for Institutional Audit. One of the first Codes to be developed will be the *"Code of Practice on Policy and Provision for Students with Disabilities"* (Mackenzie, 1999). It will operate by identifying precepts and supporting these by examples of good practice.

The Code will take a holistic approach and its content will be wide-ranging. The QAA intends to publish the Code at the end of 1999 and HEIs will then have a year in which to prepare themselves before QAA visits can explore the extent to which institutions are implementing the Code.

The ILT is developing a **National Framework** for Higher Education Teaching. In the current consultation document (ILT, 1999), teaching outcomes relating to course design have an emphasis on different learning styles and an awareness of the diversity of learning needs. In those outcomes relating to delivery there is a recognition that teaching methods should provide a variety of modes of learning appropriate to the needs of the students.

ILT FAILINGS

There are, however, two aspects of the document, which suggest that it is not fully attuned to the need to ensure that excellence in teaching is fully inclusive of the needs of disabled students. Firstly it presupposes a "medical " model of disability (Hall & Tinklin, 1998, p.6) in that the sole mention of disability is in relation to student support systems and is coupled with "students with personal problems" (ILT, 1999, outcomes 17-20).

Secondly there is an absence of any reference to the importance of ensuring that innovations in teaching and learning and responses to current and anticipated changes in the leaning environment enable the learning of students with disabilities.

One concept, which offers a useful tool for reviewing access to HE, is that of *universal instructional design (UID)*, a term introduced by Silver, Bourke and Strehorn (1998), in the USA. It developed from the concept of universal design as used by architects to describe comprehensive plans to meet the requirements of all individuals using space. Applied to educational environments it *"places accessibility issues as an integral component of all instructional planning"* (Silver et al, p.47). It means that tutors will design into their curriculum, course delivery and learning environments many of the modifications that students with disabilities would typically request. This removes the need for students to identify themselves as disabled and ask for special adjustments to be made. It is also

likely to benefit all students not just students with disabilities as it is often said that effective teaching for students with disabilities is likely to represent good practice for all students.

The study by Silver et al of how teaching staff might define, implement and identify barriers to the implementation of UID in a university setting produced some interesting findings. The strategies listed as definitive of UID for students with disabilities largely amounted to a list of current best practices for promoting active learning, with strategies such as co-operative learning, using a team approach and contextual learning. The main barriers noted were the time required to introduce and implement such approaches, staff "attitudes as barriers" and the fact that most staff are not trained to teach and are not aware of diverse learning needs in HE and, lastly their sense of academic freedom to choose how to teach.

One conclusion of the study was the need for a transformation of the culture of the university to enable the implementation of UID and the fact that its development seems most possible in those sectors of the university with a commitment to "*innovative teaching approaches and self renewal*"(Silver et al, 1998, p.50).

In the UK, the development of innovative teaching methods needs to be matched with an awareness of the principles of UID to ensure that new strategies and systems do not create new barriers to learning. The UK lacks anti-discrimination legislation to enforce, encourage or require access to the curriculum and currently "instructional modification" to meet the needs of disabled students is largely a matter of tutor awareness, willingness or capability where resources are required.

It is important for tutors to consider, when innovating and developing teaching strategies and learning environments, how to maximise access for all students. Some examples of the need for this and possible strategies are discussed below.

SPECIFY LEARNING OUTCOMES

The use of learning outcomes to specify what students will be able to do at the start, and on completion, of a course or unit of study enables tutors and students to identify what the student can and cannot do more clearly than when courses are described purely in terms of activities, processes or tutor intentions. For example a student who could not communicate verbally was, in his final year, presented with the task of making a presentation as an essential part of his assessment. The tutor felt it was an impossible task and would prevent the student gaining his degree, the student felt it should have been impossible for him to be in this position. However, focus on the exact nature of the task and the essential assessed elements clarified that the student could plan and prepare the material and effectively "direct" the delivery of the presentation by a third party and that would meet the requirements. This analysis of the task with the tutor yielded greater clarity about how it could be assessed and helped the tutor to improve his teaching and assessment processes for all the students in the group.

Simulation and role-play strategies that are innovative and stimulating for many students may present insurmountable barriers to others. Students on a counselling course were given role play which required them to communicate back to back and this left a student who communicated only by lip reading with difficulties that the tutors appeared to be unaware of. In small and large groupwork situations this student was excluded by the fact that she could not identify who was speaking in time to focus on their lips. The strategy chosen was to give the hearing impaired student a red flag to raise when she could not hear - an activity she found somewhat stigmatising. An alternative solution might have been for each speaker to self identify to her clearly or for the tutor to indicate each speaker.

Assessments of key skills or core competencies can be carried out in ways, which are enabling or inappropriate and disempowering for students with disabilities. For example communication skills usually include verbal, listening and written skills that may be impossible for a deaf student to demonstrate and some non-verbal skills that are impossible for visually impaired students. As key skills are what employers require, if they are specified, assessed and taught in ways which exclude students with disabilities then those students are being denied not only skills development, and educational qualifications but also employment prospects by the HEIs. Assessment tasks can be revised to enable students with sensory impairments to demonstrate communication competencies and the advice services of national organisations such as the Royal National Institute for the Deaf, Royal National Institute for the Blind or Skill (National Bureau for Students with Disabilities), are a good source of guidance on this.

AUDIO VISUAL AIDS

The use of audio visual aids is widely valued, one reason being that it "*does allow for more than one sense to access information simultaneously which may partly account for the success of CAL in achieving deep*

learning" (Shaw, 1998,p.16). It may require some extra thought and preparation to make this learning available to students who cannot access information in this way because of visual or hearing impairment.

One visually impaired student described the use of OHPs as the "*this and that" problem*. His tutor would put up a diagram and then describe how "this" related to "that" but the student could see none of the OHP slides. More specific descriptions of the visuals by the tutor would reduce this difficulty and help all students for whom the OHP slides were not clearly visible.

Networked or resource-based computers for group and independent study are a very useful teaching and learning aid but they can be disabling in how they are used, the software, the hard ware or the environments in which they are located. The desks, chairs and input devices may be difficult for students with mobility and manual dexterity impairments, the screen may be unsuitable, and the queuing system may make short periods of use, with regular breaks for students who need this because of pain or discomfort, impossible. All these difficulties can be rectified providing tutors are aware of them and offer appropriate support or alternative access routes. If specialist advice is required by tutor or student the National Federation of Access Centres (NFAC), a national network based in HE and FE, can provide this.

The serious problems of access for visually disabled users posed by graphical user interfaces (Petrie & Gill, 1993, p.153) have been recognised for some time by those working with visually impaired students and needs to be widely recognised as IT becomes increasingly important in HE learning environments. DISinHE, a project offering advice on disability and computer and information technology, emphasises how easy it is for Web sites to present barriers to disabled students. In spring 1998 over 70 Web sites aimed at disabled people were analysed and rated against recognised standards of good programming practice. The study found that only 12 scored highly on general accessibility, 44 were found to have considerable accessibility problems and 12 were totally inaccessible (Clarke, 1998, p.8). Given the moves towards increasing use of web sites in HE this finding is worrying, especially as these were web sites targeted at people with disabilities so it seems probable that other web sites will be even less satisfactory in terms of access than these. It is a relatively simple matter to check Web sites using an accessibility checker called Cast Bobby.

In a university one of the main meanings of access must be " access to the curriculum" (Borland & James, 1999, p. 85). Recognition is growing, amongst those providing disability services, of the need to review teaching strategies and learning environments if students with disabilities are to gain equality of access to the HE curriculum. A report by the Scottish Council for Research in Education report, on disabled students (Hall & Tinklin, 1998, p.89), identified the importance for HEI's of raising awareness of barriers created by inappropriate methods, promoting staff development in disability issues and promoting good practice in teaching all students. There is now a need to ensure this awareness is "mainstreamed". A recent workshop co-ordinated by the eQuip Team on access to the curriculum was described in their report (eQuip, 1998) as "*the start of a new development to encourage inclusive thinking on disability in curriculum design*". The purpose of this paper is to suggest that inclusive thinking becomes part of the current mainstream developments in the accreditation and professional development of teachers in HE and in the QA processes by which institutions are encouraged to develop and review their provision for all students.

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BOOKS

EVERYTHING YOU'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT ASSESSMENT* (* BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK)

Planning and Implementing Assessment

Richard Freeman and Roger Lewis
Kogan Page (1998) £19.99
ISBN 0 7494 2087 1

In his 1972 film *'Everything You've Always Wanted to Know about Sex* (*But Were Afraid to Ask)'* Woody Allen brought the viewer right back to basics. Woody explored his sensitive subject (it's one in which no one admits to not knowing what to do) in a humorous manner, but also managed to make some very serious points along the way.

In this book, Freeman and Lewis have also addressed a sensitive subject. All teachers know how to 'do assessments' - just as in Woody's example we all know how to 'do sex'. Woody illustrated that all is not quite so simple as we all think. Freeman and Lewis have done the same for assessment, but inevitably in a more sober and less humorous manner than perhaps Woody would have done.

This is a very practical book that begins by considering, from first principles, issues such as: the purposes of assessment;reliability and validity; assessment criteria; learning outcomes; and feedback.

The second part of the book provides a 'methods toolbox' which gives a review of the characteristics of the various assessment options with the objective of assisting the teacher in the selection of the most appropriate method for the intended purpose.

Parts three, four and five focus in on specific approaches to assessment and provide a useful mix of practical advice and critique. Finally, part six explores a range of assessment issues such as: preparation of learners for assessment; consideration of workloads; cheating, fairness and bias.

Each of the 29 chapters ends with a bullet point list of 'key action points' which provide useful aide memoire of the materials presented.

This is a very useful book - the issues are presented in a very practical and accessible manner. The authors have not focused solely on a particular learning environment and thus it will be a useful resource for teachers throughout education and training. I expect this book to become a standard resource for teachers and an item included in the 'essential reading' lists of a wide range of teacher / lecturer training programmes. I will certainly be bringing it to the attention of colleagues at the University of Luton.

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ADULT WHAT?

Adult Learning: a Reader

edited by Peter Sutherland
Kogan Page (1998) £19.99
ISBN 0 7494 2795 7 (pb)

The ever dependable Peter Sutherland continues his contribution to the under-researched field of adult education by producing a strongly psychologically influenced collection on the characteristics brought by adult students to learning.

Divided into five sections, the book deals in turn with Cognitive Processes, the differentiation between "Learning" and Education, Small Group Learning, Contexts of Learning and the particular factors affecting mature students' motivations and accomplishments at university.

Inevitably, given its nature as a reader, the book is partial in its coverage - it is perhaps disappointing that the contextual section has only two chapters - but, given Sutherland's presumed limitations of space, this should not be taken as a criticism.

There are, indeed, many stimulating ideas in the book and anybody with an interest in adult learning will find much food for thought within its 200 or so pages, for example, Jack Mezirow on Jurgen Habermas, while a reprint, is a fascinating meeting of minds! While at times some of the chapters show their provenance in experimental psychology, and thus the prose is not always of the most limpid, it is worth persevering with.

But, as one progresses through the book, a question arises that was presumably unintended by the authors or by the editor. It is a question long gone from the theory of compulsory education, now that the National Curriculum has de-professionalised academic work in that field. The question concerns what constitutes academic work in adult education itself. Is it a secondary activity, one based on sociology, psychology or, Heaven help us, philosophy? Or is there a possibility, unacknowledged in this book, that the study of adults learning might in fact be a study of curriculum, ie what is learned, by whom and in what contexts and why (in that order)? In other words, is adult learning and adult education a discipline?

Perhaps, given that we do not have,

as yet, a national curriculum for post-compulsory education (although the danger signs of this are clear at both further and higher education levels), adult ducation could take a lead in reclaiming the validity of education *per se* as a valid intellectual activity. And perhaps Peter Sutherland might think that his next Reader might usefully constitute one of a number of starting points for this reclamation.

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KEEPING OUR FINGER ON OUR TEACHING PULSE

Reviewing Your Teaching

Kate Day, Ruth Grant and Dai Hounsell
Centre for Teaching, Learning and Assessment, University of Edinburgh in association with UCoSDA (1998)
£16.00
ISBN: 0 9523956 2 2

Have you ever wished you had some sound, quick ideas for finding out how the various aspects of your teaching are working? This slim handbook is an effective summary of ways of reviewing your practice.

The handbook of 66 pages is simply written and well structured. It covers basic principles well, and incorporates some novel ideas for seeking feedback. While experienced educators will probably have tried most of the methods recommended in this book already, and probably developed others of their own, the book is a fount of ideas for relatively new 'lecturers in universities and colleges', its specified target audience. However it also has relevance for wider tertiary education settings.

The book covers reviewing lecturing, group-based learning, laboratories and fieldwork practicals, project and dissertation supervision, and assignments and assessment. A strength of the book is its provision of 'pro-formas' which can be copied freely for use in one's practice. These grids, checklists and diagrams would help staff to check quickly how their performance in specific areas is affecting their students. The book provides additional, generally up-to-date references for further study.

My criticisms of the book would be that much of the material is common-sense to anybody who has been practising as an effective educator for a reasonable period of time, so I do not recommend it for experienced staff who have already developed effective methods of gaining feedback. Further, there is little material designed to help staff having to teach using predominantly student self-directed methods or distance delivery, fairly common practice in New Zealand tertiary education now. I think the addition of ways of reviewing this emergent type of practice would have contributed additional strengths to the book.

I would, however, commend the authors for the section on reviewing project and dissertation supervision. As I am now in the final stages of doctoral study myself, I can appreciate the wisdom that is distilled into the few pages of this chapter. There are some excellent self-rating checklists for supervisors, and ways of getting feedback from students on their perceptions of the supervision.

Overall, **Reviewing Your Teaching** is a sound basic text that would be invaluable to new staff seeking to check their own performance.

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WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS?

Peer Assessment in Practice

Edited by Sally Brown
SEDA Paper 102 (1998) £14.00
ISBN : 0-946815-9-92

Students Supporting Students

Edited by John Dolan and Andrew J Castley
SEDA Paper 105 (1998) £14.00
ISBN: 1-902435-02-8

Involving students in the management of their own learning has become a well established principle in many areas of UK Higher Education over the past decade and a half. However, involving students in the management of peer learning and

assessment still encroaches on the 'comfort zones' of a significant proportion of the academic community.

There appears to be a wide range of possible reasons for this reluctance to wholeheartedly embrace the involvement of students in these ways. Some of these are located in legitimate concerns about quality, collusion, plagiarism, fairness and the ownership of the outputs. Other concerns may be the more ephemeral and uncomfortable feelings of devolving (or even divesting) the academic's responsibilities towards their students and of somehow not doing one's own job. A dwindling but still significant proportion of students may also have reservations related to their perceptions of defined roles within the learning process.

In reality, these forms of student involvement invariably make much greater demands upon staff time and energy to manage them and are certainly not 'softoptions' in any sense. These two papers seek to address these issues.

'Peer Assessment in Practice' begins with a contribution by Falchikov which contextualises student involvement in feedback and assessment. It is interesting that the author draws attention to both measured and perceived benefits of student involvement for both students and staff which are largely concerned with skill development and learner autonomy.

Innovations in learning sometimes appear to be advocated by enthusiasts who can be uncritical of, or even blind to, the limitations of the process. This collection displays a refreshing honesty in that it attempts to identify and address the likely limitations and difficulties of peer assessment. Contributions on peer review by Pond and ul-Haq and on the lessons and pitfalls of peer assessment by Ritter problematise peer assessment and both have useful suggestions for others using or considering introducing this form of assessment.

Presentations and seminars are a popular choice for the use of peer assessment and Mindham's contribution addresses this particular context. An interesting historical perspective on the use of peer assessment within one institution is provided by Fullerton and Rafiq. The contribution of Sher and Twigg (which escapes mention in the introduction) differs from the other papers in that it provides a case study of peer assessment in the discipline of building and construction. This paper, though insightful, feels as though it belongs elsewhere.

The penultimate chapter by the editor and colleagues at the University of Northumbria provides a balance by giving the student perspective on peer assessment, and the concluding chapter by Race provides practical guidance to complete this well rounded and insightful collection. There is sufficient rigour here for those seeking the theoretical underpinnings of peer assessment whilst practical solutions and helpful advice are also provided for those contemplating the extension of their own 'comfort zone'.

The second paper **'Students Supporting Students'** is divided into two sections. The first deals with the purposes, design and delivery of peer support whilst the second comprises 15 case studies grouped under five themes: induction, subject based and learner skills, peer mentoring, disability support and peer supported pedagogy.

The opening contribution by Donelan and Wallace deals with the underlying philosophy for peer support whilst the second and third contributions by Fazey and Boyle respectively address the practical issues of motivating students to become peer supporters, and the preparation and reward systems for these students. Boyle's contribution also provides brief case studies. The final contribution in this section by the editors is particularly interesting in that it positions peer support in a HE context and argues cogently for its integration.

The second section of case studies is perhaps less satisfactory in that it sacrifices depth of coverage for inclusivity. There is a very wide range of case studies reported in a common format; however, in reading through them, I frequently found myself with appetite whetted, wanting additional detail. Perhaps greater depth on a more constrained collection of case studies might have resolved this. At the start of each study, the editors do provide outline contact details for some case studies at and full contact details for others; a summary table with full contact details, e-mail addresses and web site information could have been particularly helpful.

This minor criticism aside, the paper provides a valuable contribution to the developing literature in this field and as the editors point out, this may be an idea whose time has now arrived.

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