

EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

The Magazine of the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA)



Issue 20.2

June 2019 ISSN 1469-3267

£10.00 Cover price (UK only)

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SEDA

Woburn House,
20 - 24 Tavistock Square
London WC1H 9HF
Tel 020 7380 6767
Fax 020 7387 2655
Email office@seda.ac.uk

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Continuing Professional Development: What do award-winning academics do?

Helen King, University of the West of England

Introduction: Self-determined learning and development – A characteristic of expertise

Throughout its history, a key purpose for educational development has been to support continuing professional development (CPD) for higher education practitioners. Reflective Practice, in particular, is utilised as a model for developing teaching (Saroyan and Trigwell, 2015) and might be considered a tenet of the profession. Reflective Practice as a concept has been considered in different ways by a range of theorists (Schön, 1982; Moon, 2001). However, there is less in the literature in terms of an empirically-based framework for how teachers in higher education actually learn from and in their practice.

An interest in 'Ways of Thinking and Practising' (WTP) in the disciplines (e.g. McCune and Hounsell, 2005) led me to explore the literature on expertise and expert performance (e.g. Ericsson *et al.*, 2006). Using these concepts within educational development sessions to support academics in thinking deeply about the nature of their disciplines (King, 2013), I began to consider what might be the WTP or characteristics of expert performance in teaching in higher education. If we can better understand these WTP and expertise characteristics this may then help inform the enhancement of educational development activities (Kreber *et al.*, 2005; Saroyan and Trigwell, 2015).

A key characteristic of expert performance is self-determined, continuous learning and development through a process of 'Deliberate Practice' (Ericsson *et al.*, 1993) or 'Progressive Problem Solving' (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1993), which are similar in concept to Reflective Practice (see Table 1). These concepts have been explored empirically to identify how they are expressed in a broad range of professions, including athletics, music, the arts and business (van de Wiel *et al.*, 2004). It has been suggested that if these processes can be specified for a particular field, then professional development activities which align to them are likely to lead to improvements in performance (Ericsson, 2017). In this sense, therefore, expertise might be considered a continuous process which begins early on in one's career, rather than just a peak of performance to be attained at a later stage. Indeed Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993, pp. 18-19) talk about 'expert careers' rather than expert performance. This notion of expertise, as a continuous process of learning and development in order to better one's own practice, sits more comfortably with the values of educational development than that of excellence which implies a static point that is reached by surpassing others (King, 2017).

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Individual subscriptions are £40 sterling per year (4 issues) within the UK. Overseas subscribers should add £5 sterling postage and packing for delivery within the EU or £8 sterling for the rest of the world.

Packs of 10 copies (each copy containing 4 issues) are available for £290 sterling.

All orders should be sent to the SEDA Office, either with payment or official order.

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Researching 'expert' teachers in higher education

In 2004, I published an article in this magazine, entitled 'Continuing Professional Development in Higher Education: what do academics do?', based on 192 responses to a questionnaire sent to Earth Science academics across the UK (King, 2004). Whilst this and other similar research has explored what academics do in relation to professional development, the lived experience of enhancing practice is less well documented. Information on CPD tends to be a list of activities to be engaged with rather than perspectives on how development is integrated into professional practice. In my experience, colleagues who are required to articulate their CPD in applications for National Teaching Fellowships or Fellowships of the Higher Education Academy, for example, sometimes struggle to move beyond this description of activities in order to consider how they are integrated with and inform their practice.

In 2018, I received a SEDA Small Grant to explore the professional learning of expert teachers in higher education and, hence, to begin to articulate real-life examples of CPD in action. As the characteristics of expertise in teaching in higher education are yet to be defined, I used holding a National Teaching Fellowship (NTF) as a proxy and a starting point for developing such a definition. Following approval from the University of the West of England's Research Ethics Committee, I interviewed nine self-selected NTFs from the 2015-17 cohorts in order to hear their experiences and approaches to learning how to teach and continuing to develop their teaching practice. The interviewees came from a range of disciplines – physics, computing science, psychology, phonetics, pharmacology, academic skills, biosciences and nursing – with between 15 and 43 years' experience of teaching in higher education.

Self-determined learning and development: The lived experience of NTF holders

I took three different approaches in the interviews in order to explore the three models of learning and development: 1) asking the interviewee to tell their story of learning to teach and developing their teaching (to see if an approach reminiscent of Progressive Problem Solving was present); 2) asking what Reflective Practice meant to them; and 3) describing the features of Deliberate Practice and inviting comment. Drawing from these interviews, Table 1 suggests how each of the theoretical models might be applied to an approach to developing teaching in higher education. Text in *italics* are direct quotes or paraphrases from the interview transcripts.

The concept of 'practice' explicitly features in two of the models. Practice in the sense of 'rehearsal' can happen when trying out a new technology, running through a session plan or practising explaining a concept, but unlike sports or music, mostly the rehearsal is the performance. This is what we do as practitioners. As Schön noted (1982, p. 60):

'The word "practice" is ambiguous. When we speak of a lawyer's practice, we mean the kinds of things [they do]...When we speak of someone practicing the piano, however, we mean the repetitive or experimental activity by which [they try] to increase their proficiency...But professional practice also includes an element of repetition. A professional practitioner is a specialist who encounters certain types of situations again and again... As a practitioner experiences many variations of a small number of types of cases, he is able to "practice" his practice.'

Similarly, Stigler and Miller (2018, pp. 447-448) suggest that, for a teacher, 'daily experiences in the classroom can become a site for deliberate practice'.

Individuals who adopt these models or versions of them do not necessarily do so in a conscious or structured way. Rather the models provide a convenient means of illustrating what professional development looks like for teaching in higher education, which can be useful for colleagues to consider and plan their CPD and for educational developers to consider and plan their strategies for supporting it.

	<i>Progressive problem solving</i>	<i>Reflective practice</i>	<i>Deliberate practice</i>
<i>Theoretical model</i>	<p><i>'What makes it an expert career is that it is pursued [through] addressing and re-addressing, with cumulative skills and wisdom, the constructive problems of the job, rather than reducing the dimensions of the job to what one is already accustomed to doing.'</i> (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1993, p. 18). Characteristics of progressive problem solving include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solving problems at increasingly more complex levels • Incorporating already mastered skills into advanced procedures • Working at the edge of competence with, potentially, an element of risk 	<p>Reflective practice explains how professionals meet the challenges of their work with a kind of improvisation that is improved through practice.</p> <p><i>'When someone reflects-in-action, [they become] a researcher in the practice context'</i> (Schön, 1982, p. 68).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In action: intuition, reading the room, improvisation • On action: critically thinking about teaching • As action: effectively preparing for teaching 	<p>This is purposeful and systematic. While regular practice might include mindless repetitions, deliberate practice requires focused attention, it builds on pre-existing knowledge and skills and is conducted with the specific goal of improving performance. Conditions for optimal learning and improvement include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time: many hours of practice • Focus: repetition of the same or similar tasks, with a particular emphasis on difficult aspects • Feedback on performance • Motivation to attend to the task and exert effort to improve performance
<i>Applied process in Teaching in HE</i>	<p>Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993) suggest that the opposite of expertise is problem reduction: attempting to solve problems using accustomed processes. In HE we might see this as a lecturer teaching a class in the same way for years, being unable or unwilling to try an alternative approach, and blaming the students when they perform badly in assessment or provide negative feedback.</p> <p>Progressive problem solving is the continuous evolution of our teaching approaches. It might be the small but regular tweaking of individual sessions, and/or a larger-scale shift to a new pedagogy. Looking back over time, a significant change is seen, often starting from a transactional, didactic, notes- and structure-based approach and moving towards one that is more transformative, facilitated, improvised and dialogic.</p>	<p>Reflective practice is the purposeful and deliberate (Rogers, 2001) process of thinking about teaching and making adjustments to improve. Sometimes it is a slow process that happens over months or even years, other times it can be an almost instantaneous improvisation.</p> <p><i>'Reflective practice is a kind of metacognition: it's thinking about your own thinking, and you're thinking about the thinking of your students, and you're trying to pull that together. Reflection on practice is about the planning beforehand, it's thinking about the pedagogy and what is appropriate for the content, it's the evaluation that comes after, and the tweaking and evolution that happens over years. I think a lot of reflection happens in the shower and when I'm driving. It's not always a formalised thing. But also, reflective practice is being forgiving of yourself and knowing that it's not always going to be perfect. Sometimes you have a bad day, sometimes you can't make your teaching better, and sometimes you just have to be good enough.'</i></p>	<p>Developing one's teaching practice takes time: it evolves through small or large adjustments over many years of experience, and development needs to be prioritised as an integral part of one's role.</p> <p><i>'In deliberate purposeful practice of teaching I'm looking constantly for feedback from the students. I'll plan in to ask questions about that, I'll set this activity, how will I know that they're with me? If it's problem-based learning you can walk round them and know, but what is that going to tell me, how will I know that this is good practice and that I'm not hitting the wrong notes all the time?'</i></p>
<p>Common and integral to each of these models, as they are applied to teaching in HE, are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A strong purpose and motivation: initially to feel more confident and not look foolish, and later with the goal of enhancing all students' learning and the desire not to stagnate or be bored • The need for a strong evidence base and rationale for any changes made. Evidence comes from student feedback, self-reflection, peer observations, literature, conference and workshop participation, opportunities for sharing practice, conversations about teaching, pedagogic research and many other sources and activities. 			

Table 1 Suggestions for how the theoretical models might be manifest as applied processes for developing teaching expertise in higher education

So, CPD, what do award-winning academics do?

These three models provide ways of conceptualising CPD and legitimising it as an integral part of professional/expert practice. By using these as a starting point and asking the interviewees about how they learned to teach and developed their teaching, I was able to understand how development activities were integrated into their practice. This led to much more interesting and powerful insights into the CPD process than my 2004 questionnaire asking just about activities. The many different formal and informal activities that colleagues engage with are not surprising: formal courses, conferences, workshops, reading, reflecting, enquiry (evaluation and research), external examining, and so on. The most popular types of activities in my original questionnaire – talking about teaching, and learning from others – are also clearly featured in the interviews.

The NTF winners in my research all demonstrated CPD as a process of change informed by various formal and informal development activities. Hence, I suggest a reframing of the definition of CPD away from a list of activities, as follows:

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for higher education practitioners is a self-determined and purposeful process of evolution of teaching and learning approaches, informed by evidence gathered from a range of activities.

Recommendations

Revisiting the recommendations I suggested 15 years ago, I would argue that all of these points still hold and are affirmed and reinforced by this new research and from my experience over the last decade or so:

- 1) ‘Professional development for all elements of the academic role (including teaching and research) should be considered as an integral part of professional life *and, as such, professional development for teaching should be part of institutional structures and reward policies in parity with that for research*
- 2) Professional development should be self-directed and planned within the relevant context, *and staff should be supported in enhancing their understanding of their own preferred approaches to learning and needs in order to make the most of available opportunities for developing their practice*
- 3) *There should be recognition of and support for the complex nature of professional development which occurs in a variety of learning settings and is informed by evidence gathered through many different formal and informal activities*
- 4) The collaborative nature of professional development should be enhanced, *allowing for and supporting interactions between colleagues within departments, between different disciplines, and across different institutions, and between all those who teach and support learning.*’ (Adapted from King, 2004: 4-5)

Next steps: Educational development and the characteristics of expertise in teaching in HE

I have begun to use summaries of my research interviews within our PGCAPP programme to introduce discussions on CPD, and as part of a workshop for more experienced staff on developing expertise in teaching in HE. The notion of self-directed, professional learning being an integrated part of the process of expertise has been well received and this, together with the different approach to conceptualising CPD, has been useful to aid professional development planning and thinking about how to go about making improvements in teaching and learning.

A self-determined and purposeful approach to learning and development, whether it is considered as Deliberate Practice, Progressive Problem Solving, Reflective Practice or something else, is just one dimension of the characteristics of expertise. Emerging from my research is also a view of two other dimensions which I set out below (Table 2) mapped to the generic characteristics of expertise. These three dimensions interact and integrate dynamically with each other embodied within the teacher to differing extents depending on their experience and approach to their profession.

Characteristics of expertise in teaching in HE	Generic characteristics of expertise
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedagogic content knowledge: curriculum content and how to teach it (Shulman, 1986) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge and skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artistry of teaching: authentic, improvisatory and creative (Schön, 1982) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem solving: addressing increasingly complex problems • Bigger picture view: enhanced organisation and mental representations of knowledge • Pattern recognition: perceptions of relevant information in the environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-determined and purposeful approaches to learning and development: e.g. deliberate practice, progressive problem solving or reflective practice 	

Table 2 Two other dimensions

The next steps for my work are to develop more resources and guidance, for teachers and educational developers in higher education, around these concepts of self-determined and purposeful approaches to learning and development, and to begin to explore the notion of Artistry and what this looks like in teaching in higher education.

Acknowledgements

With many thanks to my nine interviewees for their time, honesty and insights, to Prof. Kyriaki Anagnostopoulou (Bath Spa University) for bouncing ideas around with me, and to SEDA for the small grant which enabled this research to take place.

Summary case studies of each interview, for use under a Creative Commons licence, are available on my website: <https://drhelenking.wordpress.com/expertise-workshop-resources/>

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Dr Helen King NTF PFHEA SFSEDA (helen5.king@uwe.ac.uk) is the Associate Director of Academic Practice at the University of the West of England, Bristol.

A day in the life of a programme leader

– The game

Steve Outram, Higher Education Consultant

Background

In April 2018, while sorting through some old files, I came across an old copy of 'The Dean's Dilemma'. This is a board game developed by the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching at the CASS Business School (2005-2010). Playing the game entails one person assuming the role of a dean and the other players assuming the different roles that a dean might encounter such as a finance director or head of quality

assurance. Each of these 'roles' present the putative dean with an issue which they have to resolve. At the end of the issues being raised the dean has to declare what decisions they have taken. One of the players has the role of observer and at the end of the round gives feedback, as do all the players, on how well the dean performed and how they might have done it differently.

This rediscovery coincided with a couple of SEDA Jiscmail emails focusing on the role of the programme leader, so I suggested to the list that there was a potential for adapting

this game to become 'The Programme Leader's Dilemma' and invited colleagues to send their suggestions for the main issues and challenges faced by programme leaders to me and I would attempt the adaptation. This is the outcome.

The response was immediate. The email I sent out clearly touched a nerve. Within minutes I received a large number of suggestions as well as a lot of interest in the idea:

'This does sound interesting and something with which we are currently grappling.'

'This sounds a great initiative and I would be very interested to know more about the final output.'

'Great idea. We have recently conducted an undergraduate programme review...and we have been trying to strengthen the role of the programme director. So I am particularly interested in this topic.'

This is, of course, no surprise. As Sam Ellis and Alison Nimmo state in a recent SEDA Special:

'In light of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), and other policy instruments, in many institutions the role of the PL is being re-examined and reasserted.' (Ellis and Nimmo, 2018)

Issues and challenges

Although there was some diversity in the replies colleagues sent, there was one issue that was mentioned by almost everyone (and is a theme throughout the SEDA Special) and stands apart from the others – namely, having a great deal of responsibility (and an expanding list of responsibilities) without power or authority:

'Lateral, and sometimes inverted leadership is an issue regularly faced. Someone else mentioned "lions without teeth" but to formalise it a PL often has to make leadership, and sometimes pseudo-managerial decisions, regarding colleagues without having formal line management responsibilities. Moreover, sometimes these leadership/management decisions go up the food chain. Sometimes to the top!'

The role conflict and confusion this position creates manifests itself in a number of ways. Like departmental heads, programme leaders have to be 'Janus-faced': on the one hand facing upwards to address the 'new managerialist' agenda of internal and external accountability measured through a variety of outputs; the marketisation of higher education and the need to recruit ever more students; a greater emphasis on efficiency to enable the institution to 'do more with less' and demonstrate value for money; and to become more enterprising and entrepreneurial (Mercer, 2009):

'My dilemma as prog lead for a PGCLTHE is how far I work "for the man"? In disputes – e.g. strikes – do I support my team or the senior management line (I faced this directly at a previous HEI).'

'I was a programme leader for many years. My biggest dilemma was always to do with who I was representing at any one moment: staff, students or management.'

Conversely, there is a need for programme leaders to face the other way towards colleagues and towards students, each with their own set of demands. A concern that was raised several times in relation to both staff and students was that of consistency:

'Consistent approach needed to academic staff recruitment, competence and capacity development.'

'Consistency of personal tutoring/some tutors offering what may be perceived as more support than others (i.e. faster response to emails, more F2F sessions, open door policy).'

'Consistency of teaching, assessment and moderation across not only a suite of modules but for some PLs a suite of courses.'

Several other concerns were also raised in relation to working with academic staff on their programmes. These include:

'Team members failing to meet departmental deadlines, again in a situation where the PL has not line management authority.'

'One dilemma I think is quite common is having to persuade and wield an element of control (often without power...) over senior academics, professors, those much older or with a lot of experience.'

'One of the key issues we have encountered is that programme leaders/directors have insufficient intellectual ownership and resulting control over the curriculum as there is a high degree of course level ownership by course convenors which means that programme directors/leaders feel they do not have the power to ask their colleagues to change things. So a dilemma resulting from this could be around looking to diversify assessment across a programme but not having the right/power to ask colleagues to change their assessment methods on individual courses.'

'Persuading others of the need for change.'

Similarly, there were other concerns raised in relation to students:

'Responding appropriately to students with an increasingly worrying array of personal needs, mental health problems and practical traumas such as homelessness.'

'Equity of student experience at all levels from seminar group work that takes place after a lead lecturer – to perceived differences that may occur due to the nature of the subject.'

'What to do with a student who is unfit to study (health etc).'

'What to do with a student who is at risk of leaving.'

'What to do with a student who is struggling financially.'

'What to do with a student who is being harassed by other students.'

And, of course, respondents raised a number of concerns in relation to course management and administration:

'Allocating students to personal academic tutors, balancing the wish to allocate to all staff fairly with the knowledge that some colleagues dedicate a lot of time and care to the role whilst others do not.'

'Other dilemmas would I think be around "data" – so pressure to not only recruit in these difficult times of fees and the populous dip – but also to retain students once on course.'

'PLs needing to have good knowledge of policy, strategy and institutional requirements to be able to answer questions (up and down the chain of command) especially as these relate to QA and QE.'

'Working to institutionally set targets which are not contextualised to the programme.'

'Not enough input into admissions policy: accepting students with right points but not right subjects (e.g. accepting students into accounting without a good grade in maths).'

'Overcrowding leading to low satisfaction.'

'Assuring the quality of feedback/consistency of teaching methods across the programme.'

Developing the Programme Leader game

The original Dean's Dilemma game has at its heart a dean being confronted by a number of roles and practising how to negotiate to get the best outcomes for their faculties or schools at the same time as gaining an understanding of the issues facing the other colleagues such as a finance director or estates director. It is clear from the very powerful statements made by the respondents (above) that this does not perfectly translate into the role of a programme manager or director. More often than not, they do not have the position or authority to undertake these negotiations – that is the central issue! The Programme Leader game, therefore, has been adapted to take account of these issues in the following way. The objectives of the game are to give a programme leader (or person about to become a programme leader) experience of some of these important issues, experience of managing a meeting with diverse interests and being able to prioritise issues. The game is for six people and opens with the following statement:

Allocating Roles

Players throw a dice to allocate the six roles for the first round. The first person to throw a 1 takes on the role of Programme Leader. The remaining roles are allocated clockwise in this order: Experienced Tutor; Professional Services; Student; Head of Department; Independent Observer. Players display the identity card for their role. For subsequent rounds, roles are transferred one place to the right. After six rounds everyone has had a turn at being Programme Leader.

This is followed by the game's vignette:

Background

Because formal programme meetings are so infrequent and ineffective, the Programme Leader has introduced a system where a sub-committee comprising the roles that have just been allocated meet every Monday morning for one hour to identify any concerns that colleagues might have.

The Rules of the Game are straightforward:

In front of each player there are cards, face down, that contain concerns. Each player takes the top card and informs the Programme Leader what their current concern is.

The game comprises six concern cards for each role. As the game progresses so each person playing as 'Programme Leader' has different concerns to address:

The person with the Programme Leader role now addresses each of the concerns presented. It is not expected that solutions will be found straight away – rather, the PL has the task of creating an action plan that engages with each concern seeking trade-offs and consensus.

The person undertaking the Professional Services role has the responsibility for expressing the concern of whichever respective professional service is being represented. The Observer role has the following instruction:

‘The role of the observer is to evaluate how well the PL managed the meeting – their facilitations skills; ability to recognise important and urgent

concerns; ability to work appropriately with different colleagues and decide actions.’

In the Dean’s Dilemma game, the instruction was for each observer to give written feedback – in the Programme Leader game, the first pilots with colleagues in Scotland were clear in their preference that feedback should be verbal and that everyone could contribute.

The respective concerns that each role presents are:

<i>Head of Department</i>	
You have a concern that this programme is not recruiting to target and want the Programme Leader to prepare a new recruitment strategy.	The University is keen to do well in the next Teaching Excellence Framework round and you want to know what the Programme Leader intends to do about it.
You have a concern that the Department has had its budget reduced which means that any new or replacement posts are frozen. This programme is already short of a member of staff to teach a core module.	Learner analytics reveal that students on this programme spend less time logged on to the University’s VLE and less time logged into the library than any other course and you have been asked for an explanation by the Dean.
You have a concern that this programme has inconsistent personal tutoring with some tutors conscientiously seeing students and others not.	The University is considering abolishing its modular system and returning to programmes or courses as the locus of learning. This programme is being considered to ‘pilot’ the changes and you want to know what the Programme Leader thinks.

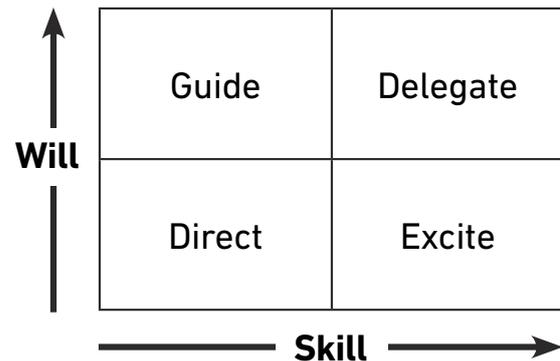
<i>Professional Services</i>	
Quality – The NSS results for this programme are OK apart from feedback to students and you would like to know what plans there are to improve these results.	As a member of the IT Department, you have informed the Programme Leader that they can no longer afford the licences for an important piece of programme software and the Department must pay for them themselves.
The Careers Service has responsibility for monitoring graduate employment and wants to know what plans the programme has to enhance employability.	The Programme Annual Monitoring Report revealed that the results for this programme were not as good as last year’s and you have asked the Programme Leader what they are doing about it.
The International Office would like to know what plans the programme has to increase the recruitment of overseas students.	As a member of Estates, you have informed the Programme Leader that you need to know what classroom usage the programme will need next year in order to implement a ‘flipped classroom’ approach to teaching.

<i>Experienced Tutor</i>	
As an experienced academic you are open to new suggestions about change but wary of anything that looks ‘fadish’...such as the introduction of ‘flipped teaching’ that has just been proposed.	You acknowledge the need to discuss things but consider a lot of meetings to be a waste of precious research time such as this one! You don’t want to sabotage it but you would like it to end swiftly.
As an experienced tutor you would like to offer constructive, critical advice to the Programme Leader such as listening to what students say but not seeing them as partners.	As an experienced tutor you value the role of assessment for student learning but are concerned about the proposal to introduce synoptic, capstone assessment.
As an experienced tutor you are concerned that students are now being ‘spoon fed’.	As an experienced tutor you are concerned about the time that is being spent talking about ‘teaching excellence’ and the effect that has on the curriculum such as a renewed focus on employability.

Student	
As a programme representative, you are aware of another student who has just been made homeless.	You are concerned about some students being bullied by students from another programme.
You have been asked to express concern that students on one module have reported they are doing less well than students on all other modules.	You would like to know what plans the programme has to enhance student engagement.
You have been asked by students to report that the new attendance requirement has been inconsistently applied by teaching staff and what will be done about it.	Some students have reported that the whole notion of peer-supported learning and the 'flipped classroom' approach is taking away the responsibility that tutors have to deliver teaching.

In the first pilot of the game there were also concern cards for the role of Programme Leader. The rule was that the programme leader did not disclose their concern, it was the task of the other participants to identify what it was. This did not work. No-one was able to spot what was concerning the programme leader! In subsequent sessions the idea of a programme leader's concerns being addressed was retained but delivered through coaching. Having worked through all of the rounds of the game's participants would select a programme leader concern card. Having selected a programme leader concern card, the players were split into pairs and introduced to the simple GROW coaching tool where G = goal; R = reality – where are you now?; O = what options do you have?; and W = what are you going to do next? This new way of ending the game has proved to be very successful and two further tools have been added for use where appropriate – the Skill/Will Matrix to aid decision-making in relation to what approach to take with a colleague or student, and the STOP coaching tool (Hill, 2004).

The Skill/Will Matrix ensures that there is a match between the coach's style of interaction and the readiness for a particular task of the person being coached:



The STOP tool enables an individual to consciously reflect on what is going on within any particular action in order to progress it:

- Step back
- Think
- Organise your thoughts
- Proceed.

The Programme Leader concerns that participants present for coaching are:

Programme Leader	
You have a concern that you have responsibility without power and need to demonstrate your authority.	You have a concern that you are losing your own credibility as an academic and you need to maintain your own career.
You have a concern about role ambiguity – whether to support your colleagues or management in any disagreement.	You are concerned that you are not able to influence and persuade others in programme matters.
You are keen to show fairness to all in relation to your programme.	You are the Programme Leader and you are concerned that you are being treated as the programme manager or administrator.

The game has now been piloted a number of times and all of the participants have reported it was both helpful and fun: helpful in enabling colleagues to identify and rehearse their responses to typical concerns and, most of all, participants found the game to be validating – it was reassuring to appreciate that the dilemmas they had were common to the role. On a couple of occasions, indeed, at least one participant became completely immersed in the role they were enacting. Good time-keeping, as ever, is crucial and

the game typically takes two hours to work through. It is also important to add that each time I have introduced the game it has been in a day-long workshop that also provides skills development and solutions for the concerns and dilemmas introduced. Sessions that have been found to be particularly helpful include: Managing up; How to have difficult conversations; Influencing skills; Facilitation skills (including managing meetings); and Prioritising.

I would like to thank all the people who responded to the email request in April 2018 and those who were involved in the pilots. If anyone would like to have a copy of the slides to introduce the game and templates for the cards, please email me. Of course, you can add your concerns to the game and at least one participant reported they were going to adapt it for use with students. And do let me know how it goes if you do try it.

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Steve Outram (steveoutram@protonmail.com) is a Higher Education Consultant.

Challenging assumptions of experiential and active learning for first year and upper year students: The Centre for Teaching and Learning and Sociology pilot project at Trent University

Robyne Hanley-Dafoe and **Gillian Balfour**, Trent University, Canada

Introduction

Experiential learning has been described by Puri (2018) as the next educational wave of the future. Universities are responding by strategically rebranding previous programming and establishing new offerings to meet this forecasting. In 2014, the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) and the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) released reports on experiential learning as a key learning outcome. Universities and colleges have been expected to integrate authentic work-related learning into course designs and learning assessments. While definitions of experiential learning are diverse, such opportunities are increasingly being wedded to institutional resources and strategic planning. Another trend within education is how to include more active learning pedagogy into undergraduate classes. The traditional lecture approach has been challenged to adapt to a more student-centred focus (Meguid and Collins, 2017). Prince (2004) proposes that many staff in faculties view active learning as a radical change from traditional teaching practices which promotes a strong faculty following from those who adopt this approach to teaching. Prince defines active learning 'as any instructional methods that engage students in the learning process. In short, active learning requires students to do meaningful learning activities and think about what they are doing' (p. 223).

Research on active learning practices continues to support the benefits of this technique as a sound pedagogical approach for student learning and engagement. For the purpose of our

SOCI (Sociology) 1002 project, each active learning technique used in the course also involved group discussions. Smith *et al.* (2009) argued that group discussions are extremely valuable for engaging students. However, feedback collected from the sample students in our research project suggested that they strongly disliked group discussions. This article considers how students understand and respond to these experiential and active learning opportunities and how these experiences differed between fourth year and first year students in the same pilot project.

Course re-design

Professor Gillian Balfour and Senior Educational Developer Robyne Hanley-Dafoe worked on a collaborative pedagogical course re-design project exploring student engagement and large lecture innovations in a first year sociology course, while also providing experiential education opportunities for upper year students. Upper year sociology students were recruited to serve as student ambassadors to offer peer-led support for students in SOCI 1002 (Exploring Social Worlds). Each week, the student ambassadors attended the three-hour lecture and supported active learning exercises and course-embedded assessments such as graffiti round tables, sticky sorts, exam review questions, and guided reflection lines of inquiry. The goal was to sort first year students into groups of twenty for each ambassador. Within the small groups of first year students, the ambassadors provided direction, support, and immediate preliminary feedback as the students completed the work during the lecture period.

Unlike a traditional lecture, students were presented with the course content via a PowerPoint presentation in advance of each class (flipped class design model) and were asked to watch it prior to attending. Once in class, the majority of the class time was designed to provide opportunities to complete the group activities. The group activities were submitted as an assessment and grades were assigned for each submission in the form of a group mark. The upper year student ambassadors were present to support the group discussions and to provide direction on the assignments, but did not mark the submissions. Therefore, in this project the experiential education component was designed for the upper year students, and the active learning component was designed for the first year students.

Results

The pilot project consisted of 335 students, and 110 participated (N=110) in a post-course follow-up questionnaire administered through Qualtrics. Participation was voluntary, and no incentives were provided. The response rate was 33%. Two key themes from the first year students' perceptions emerged that were unexpected by the researchers: 1) the degree of student resistance to active learning because it deviated from the established norm of lecturing, and 2) the impact of student perceptions of peers'

contributions or lack thereof (free-riding) as it related to group assessments. We came upon an additional key finding related to the upper year students, who served as ambassadors, which we did not expect. Interestingly, the main purpose was to test a variety of strategies for engaging first year students in large lecture halls; however, it was evident that the upper year student benefited the most. This is in alignment with research on the value of experiential education opportunities, as previously mentioned – however, we did not anticipate the ambassadors reporting such impactful outcomes from how they interacted within the course.

As previously mentioned, two main themes persisted through the data. The first theme from the student self-report on the Qualtrics post-course survey was that students recognised that the active learning pedagogy deviated from the traditional lecture format that they were more familiar with. While some did report liking the course design, specifically the active learning components, the majority did not like how the course was designed and how lecture time was used. It was evident from the comments that students did not like the flip class component and appeared to resent being expected to work on course materials outside of class. Table 1, below, highlights the qualitative feedback from students pertaining to their perceptions of the active learning work and course design.

Different format:

'Very different from other classes I have been in.'

'Last semester's courses were structured better – knew what to expect.'

Positive:

'The discussion groups really helped me to understand and make you think about the information.'

'I really enjoyed this take on lecture styles, but I would recommend giving students more time to work on the activities.'

'This set-up provided the opportunity to bounce ideas off others and keeps you on track. It was very useful, and I would be pleased if my future courses had this set-up.'

Resistance:

'The online lectures were an ineffective way to transfer information to the class. In-person lectures are what I'm paying for, if I wanted to watch my lectures online, I would've signed up for an online class.'

'I didn't feel the online lectures were helpful or necessary. This class was very time consuming and if I wanted an online class, I would have taken one. I also did not find the group aspect helpful at all, if anything it was distracting and did not help to discuss course material.'

Table 1 Recognising it was non-traditional pedagogy – Positives and resistance to active learning (flip class design with course-embedded active learning)

The second finding from the survey results suggests that students did not like taking part in group work as part of the course assessment. This is a challenging point to unpack. Research suggests that for group work in university-level courses to have credibility with students, and therefore participation and value addedness, students need to be given

marks for participating or for the product the group creates (King and Behnke, 2005). However, in our study, the practice of putting grades towards the group work created significant frustration. Table 2 presents a highlight of the student feedback related to their frustration with group work reported on the survey.

'I wish individual students were held more accountable for their actions versus getting free marks for others' hard work and in some cases contributing negatively and therefore lowering the group's overall grade.'

"Free riders" was a big problem doing group activities. There are people who lead and contribute and others who say nothing or say something not related to the course.'

'Group activities would have been more effective if they were individual, it's not fair to make us entrust our grades to other incompetent and undedicated first year students.'

'There should be a peer evaluation because it is not fair when two people in the group do all of the work all of the time and are the only ones to contribute and everyone gets the same mark.'

'My group mates thought my contributions were too complicated and never included them!'

'I was actually dreading the group work but after the first class I realised I really enjoyed it. As a mature student I was worried I wasn't going to "fit in" but that fear left quickly.'

Table 2 Frustration with group work and assessment reported by students

As demonstrated in Table 2, students did not like group work that held any grade value. These findings are similar to Lobo (2017) who surveyed over 400 undergraduate students and found that although most students agreed that group discussions were valuable, only 25% thought that group discussions positively influenced their grades in a course, and 75% thought group assessments hindered their grades. Interestingly, Clinton and Kelly (2017) reported similar findings to Lobo but concluded that the vast majority of students reportedly held negative attitudes towards

participating in group discussions.

The third finding yielded promising results in our study to support the value of incorporating experiential learning opportunities embedded within courses. Despite the challenges reported by the first year students with this pilot course, the upper year students, who served as student ambassadors, reported the most positive outcomes and benefits (Table 3).

'Thank you so much for giving us the confidence to engage with students and an amazing learning opportunity. I learned a lot from the students and loved being able to support them and watch them grow over the semester. You taught us how to handle difficult students, but also to trust in our abilities and pushed us to challenge ourselves and go outside of our comfort zone.'

'This has been a tremendous learning experience, and it's been fun to interact with the students and to gain a perspective that I had not had before. It's also been nice to see my time at Trent come full circle, ending up back in the same lecture theatre for first-year sociology.'

'Joining in on this class has really been a highlight of my final year!'

'As a student ambassador, it allowed me to build on to my resumé, and provided me with many skills and lessons that I will use in my future both professionally and personally.'

Table 3 Benefits from participating as student ambassadors – fourth year sociology

Discussion

For our study, we wanted to explore students' experience with active learning pedagogy in a large first year course as a means of increasing student engagement. What we found was that students did not appear to like active learning, specifically flipped class design and group discussions. Our results suggest that incorporating active learning needs to be carefully considered when modifying course design in large first year classes. Although some students did report benefiting from active learning practices, the majority reported that it hindered their learning and grade potential.

Our findings can be extended to introduce the themes of Prince and Weimer's (2017) work. These researchers

discussed how the fear of student resistance prevents many instructors from incorporating active learning techniques in their classes. The professor of this pilot course could echo these concerns and observations. Student evaluations indicated a high level of resistance to the course design and in some cases directed their frustration to the professor as evident by the course evaluations. Moreover, in this research project, we observed high levels of student resistance behaviour not only towards the professors but towards their classmates. During the active learning component, such as group discussions, we observed students sitting away from other group members, or engaging in off-task behaviour during group work such as being on mobile devices or using a computer. As previously mentioned, student evaluation data

also demonstrated high levels of student resistance to group discussions and even used language like ‘free-riders’, referring to classmates. Although group discussions and working in-groups are typical academic and workplace competencies, it was evident that the majority of students in our project did not want to collaborate with their peers. Interesting to note, the student feedback suggested that the students found the content of the course engaging – learning about current social policy and legal challenges such as workplace safety, responding to violent crime, over-incarceration of indigenous people, and the refugee crisis, were reported to be high interest topics. However, the student response data did suggest high levels of mistrust of other students, inability to achieve tasks in a short-period time, and dislike of working with others for combined grades.

The students also resisted the independent learning that was required, and reported in their course evaluations, preferring to be lectured to by the professor. This finding is consistent with Lobo’s (2017) work which states that students may prefer listening passively to lectures versus participating in active learning opportunities. McCardle *et al.* (2017) explained that many students in first year university courses often receive little guidance on how to use their time outside of class to prepare them for lectures. As a result of this, many students simply show up to lectures and expect to be told everything and may resist having to engage in the learning process. Based on the student feedback, it was evident that many of the students preferred lecturing and it was clear that some students did experience challenges of being prepared for class so as to complete the active learning assignments.

As previously stated, higher education is being challenged to provide high quality teaching experiences that incorporate active learning as a means of experiential hands-on learning. Group work and collaborative dialoguing are widely accepted as sound pedagogical approaches to use in the university classroom (Fox-Cardamone and Rue, 2002). Research suggests that group work is believed to help prepare graduates for contemporary workplaces which value teamwork and collaboration. However, students appear to resist opportunities for collaboration when it is associated with grades.

Recommendations and way-forwarding

How can faculty implement active learning components into their large first year courses based on the lessons we learned and what would we do differently next time?:

- 1) Students need to be taught how to interact with and how to navigate innovative course designs
- 2) Professors need to be able to provide context to their teaching evaluations when new pedagogies are introduced in their courses
- 3) Physical space must be considered when incorporating active learning techniques in a large class

- 4) Trying more than one or two innovative pedagogical approaches in one course may not be ideal
- 5) Consideration should be given to how student absenteeism and student accommodations are managed in courses with high levels of active learning and course-embedded assessments
- 6) Grade allotment for group collaborations should be carefully considered
- 7) Upper year students can benefit by serving as student ambassadors in large first year courses. This can provide an experiential education opportunity to programmes that have limited options available to their upper year students.

Conclusion

As with most innovations or changes to traditional teaching in the classroom, the rewards discussed in the literature also come with potential risks. Our results suggest that certain considerations should be explored prior to using this course design approach, especially in large first year courses and perhaps small changes, with only one or two approaches, should be incorporated. Students need explicit support on how to interact and navigate courses that require active learning participation, especially when grades are associated with this work and the grade value needs to be carefully considered. Too much grade weighting appears to negatively influence higher group cohesion and collaboration. In our case, we used 40% which appeared to create added competitiveness and frustrations for when working with others. Physical space created additional challenges. The lecture was offered in a traditional theatre-style seating with non-moveable chairs. Students could not readily work with others. This contributed to students being able to engage in resistant behaviour such as turning away or having their backs to other students. We also need to consider how to best support students who require accommodations and how to manage student absenteeism. Despite the challenges with this course design pilot project, the highlight was that our results supported the use of upper year, undergraduate students, as Student Ambassadors. This role not only provided an experiential education opportunity in their undergraduate programme, but it also served as an event that contributed to job readiness and future academic pursuits.

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Dr Robyne Hanley-Dafoe (robbynehanley@trentu.ca; [@rhanleydafoe](https://twitter.com/rhanleydafoe)) is a Senior Educational Developer and Education Instructor and **Dr Gillian Balfour** (gillianbalfour@trentu.ca) is Associate Dean, Teaching and Learning, and a Sociology Professor, both at Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario, Canada.

Engaging learners in learning in Higher Education

Nicola Clarke and Karen McGrath, Birmingham City University

The diverse nature of the Higher Education sector means academic staff need to be equipped with the skills and tools to engage all learners. For example, on the one hand lecturers are engaging in critical debate and discussion, generating rich dialogue in the classroom setting whilst, on the other hand, they are facilitating learning outside of the classroom environment through such media as online forums, virtual learning environments and pastoral care in their roles as personal tutors. This piece discusses the complexities of student engagement and highlights the need to create a space for staff to develop the sense of self and confidence in the use of personality in the facilitation of learning and learner engagement in higher education. We suggest that a community of practice, where there is a shared sense of belonging with the common purpose of sharing knowledge, offering support, and the sharing of good practice, will allow staff to develop the confidence needed to engage learners.

Due to the multifactorial way in which staff gain employment in Higher Education (HE), we can reasonably assume that some arrive without the skillset required to engage learners. In our experience, staff narrative has drawn our attention to a lack of confidence in their teaching skills and their

ability to facilitate learner engagement. The rise in course fees, changes in the way that university courses are paid for, and changes to entry requirements, all appear to have altered, for some students at least, the perception of their role within the HE environment. Coupled with the quality and innovation of teaching being affected by the rise in demands of the lecturing role, the, at times, static nature of the learning environment, and the larger student cohort sizes, it would seem that the quality of teaching and the students' expectations and motivations for engaging in HE-level study are impacting on teaching and learning.

Prior to the changes to HE funding, it was recognised that teaching in HE was not without its difficulties when it came to student engagement and collaboration in the classroom. Healey *et al.* (2014, p.15) suggested that, 'as a concept, "student engagement" is ambiguous and contested', and it could be offered that, from our experience of listening to and engaging with the narratives of staff, there is a frame of reference that is subjective in nature that determines how, as individuals, we define and view student engagement. For the purposes of this article we will be using the Healey *et al.* (2014, p. 15) definition of student engagement which alludes to 'the way in which students invest time and energy in their own learning'.

In this article, we consider the ways in which we have supported staff to have a voice in reflecting on teaching and learning, in particular, student engagement. The classroom engagement workshop was developed in response to a request to provide a 'hints and tips' session on learner engagement. The workshop created an arena that offered staff the opportunity to share narratives of their experiences of student engagement within the classroom/lecture theatre environment. However, the complexity of issues raised was unexpected and multifactorial; the need for a place that would allow staff an environment for discussion, support and potential solutions was evident and, as a result, we organised a number of facilitated learner-engagement workshops.

We have worked in Higher Education (HE) for a combined period of over two decades, our backgrounds including Mental Health Nursing (substance misuse) and many years of working in Further Education (FE) and Initial Teacher Training (ITT). These experiences have been instrumental in developing transferable skills useful in student engagement and classroom management. The nature of these environments, which at times can be challenging, has necessitated the development of effective interpersonal skills, understanding of the use of 'self' within the classroom and clinical settings, and the confidence, then, to utilise these skills in HE. The move for both authors into full-time HE and the experiences that resulted highlighted the usefulness of past experience, and the recognition of how the use of 'self/personality' in previous roles was an essential and effective tool that needed to be applied in order not only to manage and 'own' the classroom environment in HE, but also to engender engagement within the students. Being experienced reflective practitioners also reinforced the confidence needed to reflect on our own teaching practices, allowing development as academics (Clarke, 2017).

Our backgrounds provided a bridge between Education and Health, where professional standards dictate professionalism and can offer support in relation to the expectations of student engagement in the classroom. The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), the Nursing and Midwifery Council's code of conduct (2015), and the emergence of the 6 Cs (Care, Compassion, Competence, Communication, Courage, Commitment) (Department of Health, 2012), that underpin the Leading Change-Adding Value framework (NHS England, 2016), all seek to provide a framework of professionalism and a shared set of ideologies for nurses, midwives, health visitors and allied health professions against the backdrop of fundamental, care-transforming, inquiries, such as the Francis Inquiry (2013).

Meanwhile, in ITT, the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012) and the Professional Standards for Teachers (Education and Training Foundation, 2014) clearly set out the expectations, values and responsibilities that trainee teachers have to uphold. These values provide a useful resource and framework for staff and students to reflect upon the engagement within the learning environment.

The student engagement workshops ensued as a result of a new project we had set up, where the underlying premise was to celebrate and, most importantly, share excellence in teaching, learning and assessment practices across the university, and to create an environment for safe reflection on our own teaching practices. Schneider, in the 90s, had already highlighted the need for staff to examine their own lecturing practices and the contribution this made towards engagement in the classroom (Schneider, 1998); indeed, we had already recognised some of the inconsistencies in teaching practices as a result of student feedback, which included advice that deviated from assessment briefs and poorly-formulated learning outcomes. We realised factors such as these could potentially contribute towards student dissatisfaction and affect learner experience engagement and, ultimately, the feedback in the NSS. Biggs and Tang (2011) and McPherson *et al.* (2003) advised that student engagement is inextricably linked to staff and that placing responsibility for engagement solely upon the student is not appropriate, with Biggs and Tang (2011) reinforcing the need to address our own teaching practices to support more effective learning.

The student engagement workshops led to the creation of an e-forum for staff to support the ongoing work, whereby good teaching practices could be shared, ideas developed and support gained; we called this forum the 'Staff Exchange Forum' (SEF). We envisaged that the forum would facilitate the organic emergence of a community of practice in which, potentially, staff would develop a sense of identity as a staff group. This would in turn engender a sense of belonging and the creation of an environment where non-judgemental peer support could be gained and knowledge created and transferred, all emerging from the members of the forum holding a shared sense of responsibility towards their teaching practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Roberts (2006) advised us that communities of practice cannot be established or formed, but they can spontaneously emerge as a result of bringing people together.

Our own networks had previously identified numerous examples of good practice across the University. However, HE staff are often too busy to share the excellent practice that occurs in the classroom and, in our experience, apart from end-of-module evaluations, this type of understated excellence often goes unnoticed, or perhaps not acknowledged. As a result of the SEF project, we became by chance the champions of learner engagement offering tricks, tips and strategies to staff across the university, where we have observed a potential further community of practice develop, emerging from a shared need for support for learner engagement.

As previously highlighted, staff entering HE do so from a diverse range of backgrounds that are not necessarily related to teaching, and are usually appointed to lecturing posts as a result of their expertise in their subject area of practice or industry. However, there are the wider skills and attributes

needed for working with an audience. Teaching/lecturing in HE is akin to being on a stage, whereby using the personality in the creation of a climate for student engagement and learning, particularly where lecturers could at times be teaching more than 300 students, is crucial. This climate is one of safety, wherein potentially contentious and emotive topics can be discussed and debated; students can feel the enthusiasm from the lecturer and in turn become enthused themselves; boundaries are created and the genuineness of the lecturer engenders respect within the student for the academic environment (Pierson, 1998; Rogers, 1967).

It was during our first engagement workshop, 'Tips, Tricks and Strategies for Managing Learner Engagement!', that staff lacking confidence in creating the climate for learning became apparent. Initially, we offered one workshop, but then took it out across a number of faculties in the university. The aim was to provide space and time for staff to come together and reflect upon their experiences of teaching/lecturing. Clarke (2014, 2017) discusses the importance of reflection for nurses as a way of analysing our experiences in order to support the enhancing of self-awareness and emotional intelligence in the practitioner, thus strengthening the promotion of safety and excellence in the care environment – but this is also important for lecturers, teachers and other practitioners.

To enable the rich reflective discussion to occur within this session, we perceived our role in this workshop as using aspects of Socratic dialogue (Wells, 1997; Ciarrochi and Bailey, 2008), offering guided reflection, allowing staff to explore and analyse their experiences. To support this, the content for the first session was carefully considered and aspects of it drawn from activities undertaken as standard practice with trainee teachers on a Post-Graduate Certificate in Education Post-Compulsory Education and Training (PGCE PCET) course; yet in staff sessions we began by asking participants to share experiences.

In order to engender a desire to reflect on and share their experiences and tacit knowledge, we wanted to create a climate for pervasive learning, a learning that is not an accumulation of facts but a learning that interpenetrates and effects a change within the person (Rogers, 1967), a type of learning that is supported by the reflective process. To create this climate, we embodied attitudinal qualities appropriate to the situation that Rogers (1967, pp. 1-18, cited in Kirschenbaum and Henderson, 1989) felt characterised a learning environment and facilitator of learning:

- Contact with Problems: issues for discussion needed to be part of the staff's reality in order to promote engagement with the subject under discussion
- Realness of the Facilitator: genuineness on our behalf
- Empathy: individuals need to feel they are being heard and accurately understood in an environment that is free from judgement.

Offering guided reflection and creating the climate that enabled the staff to share in those first workshops allowed for the emergence of shared experiences that the staff perceived to be alone in. What we envisaged as a simple hints, tips and tricks session was like opening a Pandora's box of learner engagement. The rich discussions in these sessions also identified the lack of confidence some staff had in engaging students from diverse backgrounds.

Our starting point for the first workshop was discussing our own working definition of learner engagement compared with the staff's definition. The notion of the classroom or lecture theatre being comparable to a stage then became the focus for further discussion. It could be argued that for the majority of lecturers in HE, who have to retain the attention of extremely large groups in a lecture theatre, or engender enthusiasm for more difficult and what could potentially be perceived as 'dry' subjects, that stage does, indeed, necessitate 'a performance' in order to establish and maintain student engagement. Consequently, the workshop incorporates discussions and activities that promote the use of 'self' aimed at making a strong first impression, using body language and tone of voice, establishing ground rules and spatial anchoring (Vizard, 2012), all of which are tools for managing the learning environment. The workshop then moved into an exploration of active learning and supporting the staff to reflect on their own teaching practices and whether how they teach engenders engagement within the students. Staff reviewed their teaching to determine if they gave students responsibility for their own learning and whether they were able to support the creation of a sense of pride and professionalism within the student.

The reception and interest in the workshops surprised us. We had based the workshop on what we accept and internalise as our own normality and frame of reference, in relation to our practice. Of interest, given the particular educational context, staff felt they were not skilled enough in engendering motivation to learn in the students, and not confident about enhancing learner engagement. The aim was to create a safe environment for staff to critically reflect on their own teaching experiences and, through discourse, share practices; creating a community of practice seems to be fundamental to this process.

In conclusion, we would suggest that there is no definitive answer to the problem of ensuring learner engagement and the creation and maintenance of effective learning environments. However, we suggest that training for teaching in HE needs to incorporate reflection on, and the 'how to' of the use of the 'self' and the creation of the learning climate within the classroom setting. We also propose that ongoing support to groups and individuals, alongside continued workshops to promote the emergence of a community of practice, is offered. We hope our endeavours will prevent staff from feeling overwhelmed by the contents of Pandora's box.

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Dr Nicola Clarke is a Senior Lecturer, Professional Navigator, Academic Advisor and a SEDA Accredited Doctoral Supervisor in the School of Nursing and Midwifery at Birmingham City University.

Karen McGrath PF HEA is Programme Director for the PGCE Post-Compulsory Education and Training and the UCET Post 16 Chair in the School of Education and Social Work at Birmingham City University.

The Educational Developments Committee

We welcome four new members of the Committee. **Dr Helen Carmichael** is the Deputy Director of the University of Southampton's Centre for Higher Education Practice; **Dr Marios Hadjianastasis** is the Programme Lead for the PGCHE at the University of Birmingham; **Charles Neame** was a senior academic developer at Manchester Metropolitan University and **Dr Virendra Mistry** is the Editor of *Innovations in Practice* at the Teaching and Learning Academy at Liverpool John Moores University.

We also warmly thank **Carole Davis**, the Head of Academic Development and an Associate Professor at Warsash School of Maritime Science and Engineering, Solent University, for her work on the Committee. She is stepping down (or up?) to become SEDA's Vice-Chair.

Challenges of introducing a new inter-institutional peer observation of teaching scheme

Catherine Bovill, University of Edinburgh, and **Catriona Cunningham**, University of Stirling

At the beginning of 2017, at one of the Scottish Higher Educational Developers' (SHED) network meetings, we introduced the idea of establishing a new inter-institutional peer observation of teaching (POT) scheme for educational developers. We proposed a POT scheme to encourage members of the educational development community in Scotland to benefit from learning and teaching development and support opportunities from across the range of higher education institutions and colleagues. Research evidence suggests that there is great benefit to be had from observing others' teaching practices, having your own teaching observed, and having informal conversations about teaching and learning (see for example Gosling, 2005; Peel, 2005; Roxå and Mårtensson, 2009). What we hoped to achieve was a broadening of perspectives that comes from looking outside one's own institution, as well as affording those in educational development roles the opportunity to undertake personal development, which we so often encourage others to do.

Guiding principles

We gathered colleagues' responses to our suggested inter-institutional POT scheme and took these ideas into account in designing some guiding principles to underpin the scheme:

- POT is *optional*; no member of the SHED community should feel pressured to participate
- *Inter-institutional* POT is encouraged but this does not detract from or prevent anyone from undertaking observations/mentorship with colleagues in their own institution
- POT can *focus* on face-to-face, blended or online teaching, course and programme documentation or other forms of peer review and discussion of teaching. Choose to focus on whatever aspect of teaching you think you would most benefit from feedback/mentoring on
- Try to be observed, and observe someone else in the SHED community *once a year* to enable regular feedback and discussion, but without the commitment being too onerous
- *Minimise unnecessary travel* by building upon existing visits you make to other institutions
- *Choose who will observe you, and who you will observe.* You may wish to change your observation pairing each year to experience different forms of teaching and advice across

different institutions, or you may wish to stick to the same observation pairing over several years in order to develop a mutual mentorship-type arrangement. This is completely up to you. However, if you are new to the Scottish educational development scene or are struggling to find someone to pair up with, please feel free to contact us for suggestions of people you could approach.

Practicalities

We provided information about how to carry out the observation for those new to POT. We emphasised that the three typical stages of POT (pre-observation, observation and post-observation) are not always adhered to, particularly where you choose to review course documentation or online teaching, but they form a useful framework for POT meetings that can be adapted for different kinds of POT. We encouraged colleagues to consider undertaking the first briefing meeting by phone, email or Skype, where the observation was likely to take place in another institution.

We explained that although there was no formal requirement to complete paperwork as part of the SHED POT scheme, colleagues often find it useful to record feedback from an observation as well as discussions that take place as a result of observations. We provided some sample forms that colleagues could use if they wished to, as the basis for discussions and personal reflection.

Implementation of the scheme (warts and all)

At a presentation at the International Symposium for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) Conference in Bergen in October 2018, Nancy Chick and Peter Felten argued eloquently for the importance of telling honest stories of our work so that colleagues can learn from our mistakes as well as our successes. All too often we write sanitised versions of our work for public consumption in journals. We attempt here to provide an honest account of the challenges we have faced in establishing this POT scheme.

We started the 2017-2018 academic year enthusiastically, looking forward to hearing about how colleagues had progressed with their observations, and to taking part in the scheme ourselves. As the year progressed, we became aware that very few of our colleagues had completed observations and so we reminded everyone about the scheme at another SHED meeting (with about 20 attendees) and also on the

SHED network mailing list (of 155 people). Author one was also facing problems arranging an observation. She had approached a colleague at a neighbouring institution hoping to observe a specific piece of work, but this had been completed by the time she contacted this colleague in October of the academic year. Following this, conversations with another colleague to try to arrange an observation did not work out, as busy schedules meant that finding mutually suitable dates proved difficult. As the level of busyness rose, it was difficult to prioritise the SHED POT. Meanwhile author two managed to complete an observation pairing with a colleague from another institution and found the experience to be very useful.

Having been given ethical approval to carry out an evaluation of the scheme, and having received a SEDA Research and Evaluation Small Grant to evaluate the scheme, we were keen to get feedback from those who had managed to complete observations and discussion of practice. We sent out an evaluation questionnaire in July 2018 followed by several reminders, but we received only three responses (one of whom had completed POT and two of whom had not completed POT). We were puzzled as to why we had such a poor response given that there had been a good deal of initial enthusiasm from SHED colleagues when we first proposed the scheme. In order to try to make enhancements to the scheme prior to the 2018-19 academic year and in order to see if we could uncover why so few people were completing observations, we asked colleagues to complete an additional questionnaire at a SHED meeting, and gathered feedback on paper from eight colleagues who provided some insight into some of the challenges that colleagues faced in completing an inter-institutional peer observation.

Seven of the eight colleagues who completed the questionnaire did not carry out a POT. Perhaps unsurprisingly, time constraints was one of the most cited reasons why colleagues had not completed an observation. However, there were two other key factors mentioned by colleagues that were slightly less expected. Several colleagues mentioned 'changing jobs', 'work-related stress, my job was made redundant' and 'disruption in team' as reasons why they didn't complete an observation. Another set of responses focused on lack of confidence or opportunity in particular roles to undertake an observation, e.g. 'My role doesn't have any opportunities for peer review. This may be my misunderstanding however!', 'I wasn't a SHED member/working in academic development', 'unsure how to do it' and 'anxious about people coming and not finding it valuable'. These responses were valuable in helping us to try to ensure that we offer a range of support for colleagues in the coming year.

Implications for the POT scheme

These comments, as well as our own experiences, tell an interesting story about the role of an educational developer.

The implication is that even in a group as small and collegiate as the Scottish higher educational developers, it is difficult to prioritise our own development. It also implies that the fast pace of change in the sector and the increasing levels of uncertainty in our landscape, both institutionally and politically, are challenging what we can do.

First of all we tried to relaunch the scheme early in the academic year to ensure people had as much time as possible to organise an observation. Secondly, we are perhaps more realistic in our expectations of those whose roles are undergoing change or stressful reorganisation. The third set of comments helped us to reiterate where colleagues can find the guidance document for more information and also about how we can offer further help to support colleagues to find others to observe/be observed by, and how to get the most from this opportunity. We have also reminded colleagues of the variety of different elements of teaching that can be observed.

We hope to be able to feedback to SEDA colleagues on further development of, and higher levels of participation in, this scheme in 2018-19. We plan to share useful lessons and developmental outcomes by the end of 2019. Our aim in relating this honest story of the challenges we have faced in implementing this new POT scheme may not paint an idyllic picture of the life of an educational developer in Scotland. However, we hope it can encourage colleagues to take the time to listen to, and learn from, our peers to help deepen understanding of our work.

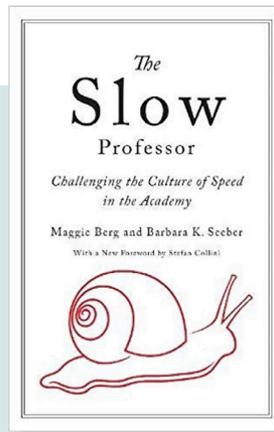
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- Dr Catherine Bovill** (catherine.bovill@ed.ac.uk) is a Senior Lecturer in Student Engagement, Institute for Academic Development, at the University of Edinburgh.
- Dr Catriona Cunningham** (catriona.cunningham@stir.ac.uk) is Academic Development Partner, Academic Development, at the University of Stirling.

Book Review

The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy

by Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber
136 pages
University of Toronto Press, 2017
ISBN-10: 1487521855
ISBN-13: 978-1487521851



This book title sounds like a joke, 'did you hear the one about the slow professor?', however, it is not and the back-cover reviews go into raptures ('thrilling', 'a must-read' and 'beguiling'). Thrilling seems a little too far but this small 90-page easy-read of a book is intriguing.

There are only four sections excluding the introduction and a conclusion; the first tackles time management in general terms rejecting the notion of tight scheduling and proposing the requirement for timelessness. That is, time for thinking and creativity.

The second section, 'pedagogy and pleasure', I felt was rather more practical with consideration of simple ways in which we might enjoy teaching. The practical advice on offer here would sit very well within an induction programme on teaching for new academic staff and as a refresher for more experienced staff, who perhaps could benefit from a pause and re-

examination of what they are doing before, during and after teaching sessions.

The third section deals with 'research and understanding' and in it, the authors argue for more time for reflective enquiry and suggests that 'social critique is at risk in the corporate university' (p. 62). This brings to mind the requirement of New Zealand universities (embodied in law) to be 'the critic and conscience of society' (see the 1989 Education Act, section 162.4(a)). Again practical advice is provided that seeks to 'challenge the internalisation of corporate language' (p. 64) and is offered in the form of eight affirmations to 'alter my own internal dialogue about research' (p. 64). Of these, the note that we judge rather than measure research (attributed to Stefan Collini) is particularly pithy and immediate.

'Collegiality and community' is the fourth section and it considers broadly academic culture and the need for us

to support emotionally our colleagues. We, the authors argue, need to build communities. 'A supportive environment...can actually reduce our perceptions of stress caused by... corporate context' (p. 83).

The conclusion reflects on the two authors' experience of writing the book as an example of a clearly enjoyable collegiate experience. They sum this up by noting that the collaboration was 'about thinking together' via, I believe, although unstated, scholarly conversations (see Haigh, 2005, for more about this).

There is much to enjoy in this book and there is practical advice to bring to bear on your own work context, but above all this book 'resonates'.

'Slow professors act with purpose, cultivating emotional and intellectual resilience to the effects of corporatisation of higher education' (p. 90). Long live the slow professor.

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Dr Peter Gossman is a Principal Lecturer and Course Leader for the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, in the Institute of Education at the University of Worcester.

Implementing a principled, strategic and enhancement-led institutional approach to programme curriculum development

John Dermo, University of Salford

Introduction

In recent years, a number of universities across the HE sector have sought to introduce institutional frameworks for curriculum design which aim to encourage innovation, to enhance the quality of the learning experience, to articulate the institutional distinctiveness of taught provision on offer, and to

provide a sound pedagogic basis for programme design.

Educational and Academic Developers play a central role in such initiatives, but face a number of significant challenges, particularly in trying to balance top-down strategic institutional priorities with bottom-up departmental and programme needs. In addition, it is vital to encourage buy-in

from a variety of stakeholders, especially programme teams, as well as keeping the focus on principled enhancement and transformation, all the time aligning work with existing quality assurance structures and processes (O'Neill, 2015; Fung, 2017).

This article provides a reflective account of a recent highly successful institutional curriculum enhancement initiative at the University of Salford. In this process, a set of curriculum design principles were first developed, in close alignment with institutional strategy, then every university programme was benchmarked against this theoretical framework, leading on to a series of developmental workshops in which programme teams evidenced their current adherence to the principles, before finally generating programme action plans to lead on to future enhancement.

Throughout, it was important that the main focus would remain on curriculum enhancement, based on sound pedagogic practice. Moreover, the process had to be perceived to be owned by the programme teams within academic schools, so that curriculum design could be informed by expertise within each subject discipline area (Adams and Brown, 2006; Moon, 2002; Toohey, 1999), rather than being seen as a centrally driven process of compliance. In addition, this work needed to be integrated within existing administrative processes and deliverable within a limited 18-month time-frame using existing resources.

The 'ICZ readiness' curriculum design project

Since 2016, the University of Salford's single strategic priority has been the development of new ways and means for students, staff and industry partners to co-create, experiment and learn together within interdisciplinary 'Industry Collaboration Zones', or ICZs (University of Salford, 2016). The focus here has been the creation of an institutional culture founded on co-production, experimentation, creativity, collaboration, integrating learning and engagement with industry and promoting sustainability and social responsibility. As part of this strategic initiative, the University was committed to transforming its taught curriculum to ensure that every programme was 'ICZ ready', able to demonstrate how the curriculum was aligned to these principles, translating the institutional strategy into curriculum design in time for the 2018-19 academic year (Quality and Enhancement Office, University of Salford, 2017).

For the Academic Developers at the university this was an opportunity to take advantage of this initiative to drive principled curriculum change across a period of a little over one year. The ethos of this project was informed by a number of key principles. First, this was a finite, time-constrained project which was a priority for the team for one academic year, and needed to be delivered and incorporated into practice, so that there was no ongoing resource for the educational development team. Second, it was critical that the project was owned by the academic

schools and programme teams, not perceived as a top-down imposition or as a centralised review or audit. Rather, this was to be a collegial, reflective process, creating space and time to set up an opportunity to share and enhance practice, managed, driven and signed off by Associate Deans and programme leaders within the schools, but facilitated by Academic Developers along the way. Third, this was to be an opportunity for programme teams to fast-track changes to their curriculum, with no additional burden in terms of quality assurance processes and associated paperwork.

Developing principles and benchmarking

The first step was for Academic Developers to work with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (student experience) and Associate Deans (Academic) from all the schools across the university to agree on a suitable list of evidence-informed design principles to underpin the process. These had all to be firmly rooted in the educational literature, but also closely and directly related to the institutional vision, with its close links to industry, professional values and attributes. Extensive consultation and discussion enabled the team to agree on the following list of ten principles:

- 1) The programme is inclusive
- 2) The curriculum and delivery are co-created
- 3) Learning is active and collaborative
- 4) Learning is real-world and experiential
- 5) The programme is digitally fluent
- 6) Learners are autonomous
- 7) Assessment is authentic
- 8) Education is for ethical behaviour
- 9) The curriculum is research-informed
- 10) There is a clear path to the professional.

Once these principles had been established and disseminated, a reflective process of benchmarking could take place: programme leaders first met with their teams to engage in in-depth discussions on how their existing curriculum demonstrated these principles, answering a series of questions about these principles and capturing the outcome of their discussions on an online form.

Next, school-based critical friends (selected by the Associate Dean and prepared and trained by Academic Developers) met with each programme leader to reflect on the outcome of this initial team discussion, and decide on the most appropriate pathway through the curriculum review process. Together the critical friend and programme leader would agree to select 'Self Review', 'Peer Review' or 'Full Review', depending on how closely the programme was aligned to the ten principles, and how much further development was required.

Programmes requiring Self Review (127 of them) then engaged with a single half-day workshop, facilitated by two or three Academic Developers. The 35 programmes that elected to take the Peer Review pathway also took part in the first workshop, but were additionally offered a second peer

review workshop later in the year; here they discussed and reflected on progress with other programme teams following that pathway, again facilitated by Academic Developers. The six programme teams that chose the Full Review pathway also had bespoke development sessions with Academic Developers, tailored to address specific challenges and solutions with their teaching and assessment strategy.

Development workshops

The half-day core development workshops formed the heart of this curriculum design process. Thirty-three such workshops took place across a one-year period, attended by over 630 participants, approximately three-quarters of the university's total teaching staff. The workshops were inspired by the 'Carpe Diem' and 'CALeRO' processes for transforming curriculum design (Salmon and Wright, 2014), and the aim was to provide a space for programme teams to discuss and reflect on their curriculum, bringing together key programme members to discuss and implement change. There was an expectation that module leaders and key members of the teaching team would participate in the full session. Large rooms were booked, with tables laid out for groupwork, and refreshments provided. Half-day slots were advertised across the year, with teams signing up based on their availability, resulting in most sessions having a number of programme teams in attendance, usually reflecting a broad range of disciplines. Having these large collaborative sessions enabled the Academic Developers to encourage a creative, collegial atmosphere in the room, conducive for fruitful discussion around curriculum design themes. The intention was to create a different kind of working space from the usual meeting setting, where discussion could focus on pedagogy and innovation, rather than the all-too-often more mundane meeting agenda, driven by administrative concerns and the week-by-week practicalities of programme delivery.

Because the programme teams were already familiar with the design principles, only a brief introduction from the academic developers was necessary, with a little discussion for clarification, particularly in the earlier workshops. It was important that these were not 'training' workshops in curriculum design, but a space for 'development', where the teams could work together and enhance the curriculum. The main role of the Academic Developer was to facilitate the activities that the programme teams took part in during the workshop.

First, each programme team was asked to map out the key events in the student journey through the programme on a very large sheet of paper (e.g. modules, assessments, placements, induction, trips, projects etc.). Next, the programme team was asked to identify points in the programme where the ten design principles could be evidenced, indicating these with adhesive post-it notes, coloured to correspond to the ten different themes. The teams were then provided with three adhesive gold stars to highlight examples of best practice, and red dots to indicate gaps and action points for the future. At this stage, teams were invited to share their timelines with the other

programme teams in the room and share their programme with colleagues from other departments and schools.

At the end of the workshop session, programme leaders were asked to take a photograph of their poster for future reference, and action points were noted, to be subsequently added to the ongoing Programme Action Log, which is maintained by every programme leader as part of the ongoing Programme Monitoring and Enhancement Procedure. The programme leader was now in a position to return to the online notes taken in the initial team discussion and with the critical friend, and make any necessary changes. At this point the relevant school Associate Dean could access this and sign off on the programme.

It should be noted that during this academic year, the Periodic Programme Review and Re-approval process was put on hold so that attention could be devoted to this curriculum redesign process. In addition, the ten design principles have been written into the ongoing programme review documentation, so that henceforth it now becomes an ongoing part of the process of approval and review. Moving forward, programme teams consider ICZ readiness and curriculum design issues alongside other considerations. New programmes also undergo a modified version of the workshop with an Academic Developer.

What we have learned

The process can be considered a success for a number of key reasons. After the workshop, online qualitative feedback surveys were sent out to participants for comments: the 100 responses were overwhelmingly positive, pointing out that, above all else, the participants had mostly appreciated that it was a team activity, where they had a chance to engage with colleagues, also the opportunity to network and share practice with other programme teams. This was particularly rewarding, because the main principle of the sessions had been that this was a creative, productive space for curriculum transformation to take place, rather than a traditional 'training session' in curriculum development.

Another important positive point was that the process managed to reach and involve so many of the teaching staff at the university. Indeed, the very success of the project relied heavily on participation. From the outset, we were keen to stress that participation was essential: if just a couple of people showed up representing a much larger team, they were politely asked to book on another available slot. The success also relied on the support of senior management within schools and across the institution, who sent out a clear message that this was a university priority. It has been noted that we might have widened participation for the workshops, to include students, professional bodies and employers, professional support staff, and other groups; whilst this would certainly have led to a richer experience, our priority was to make sure that teaching staff were in attendance. Of course, we did encourage these wider discussions to take place within the team at a later date.

Much of the success of the curriculum design initiative can surely be attributed to its original ethos. Throughout, it was made clear that the process and all decision-making was owned by the academic school and directed by the programme team themselves. Academic Developers were there to facilitate the activities, and to encourage discussion around the ten design principles, drawing in evidence and examples from the educational literature; however, it was for the programme team to apply these principles in the context of their own discipline.

The curriculum design process has left a considerable legacy. Ongoing curriculum development is now embedded into the institutional programme proposal quality processes, and we have now collected a valuable archive of good teaching and learning practice across the institution. The process has also enabled us to identify a need for further work around digital fluency, authentic assessment and work-based learning. In the following academic year, the Academic Developers are building on the successes of the ICZ readiness workshops to provide further spaces and opportunities for collaboration and learning within programme teams around these areas.

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John Dermo (j.m.s.dermo@salford.ac.uk) is an Academic Developer within the Quality and Enhancement Office at the University of Salford.

A dialogic collaborative approach to developing academic literacy among postgraduate students

Jamie Murphy, Namrata Rao, Joseph Maslen and Alex Owen, Liverpool Hope University

Introduction

There are a number of difficulties facing postgraduate students at university that present a challenge to their learning. They are likely to be at a stage of their professional and personal lives where responsibilities and commitments can have an impact on the efficiency of their study and their ability to fully engage. Furthermore, whilst undergraduate study is a three-year course, allowing for a certain element of 'bedding in' for new students, postgraduate study often comprises one year of intensive study, necessitating students to be confident in their ability to study from the outset of their course. Postgraduate students often study a subject out of interest, but this does not ensure that the student has the prerequisite specialist understanding of the subject or academic study skills for Masters level study. Additionally, it cannot be assumed that every student has transitioned seamlessly from undergraduate to postgraduate level. Many have taken a hiatus from higher education, possibly leading to a lack of confidence and understanding in their academic abilities. However, it

is inappropriate to argue that postgraduate students must start anew as they have done at the beginning of their undergraduate course, as that would ignore the (possibly neglected) skills and qualities that they already possess.

This article presents an intervention used with postgraduate students to support them in their academic writing, which involved a collaborative ongoing dialogue between staff and students mediated by a student intern.

Context

The study was carried out in a newer university in the Northwest of England. To accommodate the personal and professional needs of the students (many working as school teachers), the classes for the postgraduate programmes in this particular setting are arranged in the evenings. Whilst the postgraduate students are admitted onto Masters programmes on the basis of their undergraduate degree classification (with an expectation that they have achieved a

minimum 2.1 degree classification) and personal statement, often they lack the required level of, or confidence in, their academic literacy. Also, advice outside classes from tutors, librarians and writing mentors is much less available during the evenings. This leads to many postgraduate students feeling less supported in relation to academic literacy and study skills. This concern was identified in the course evaluation surveys that showed a clear desire among many postgraduate students for more support in their academic skills development, particularly in relation to critical analysis, structuring essays and referencing. These key areas of development were also highlighted in follow-up surveys and focus group interviews.

This student voice became the early inspiration to consider how students could be supported in a way that was better suited to their needs, as well as being mindful of their personal and professional circumstances. The efforts to alleviate such concerns and enhance the student learning experience ultimately led to the intervention detailed in this paper, namely a dialogic collaborative process for developing study guides for the postgraduate students to support the development of their academic literacy.

Dialogic collaborative approach to academic skills development

Inspired by the understanding of effective staff-students partnership as outlined by the QAA (2012), the approach sought to foster a genuinely student-mediated partnership between students and staff. It was based on 'the values of openness, trust and honesty, agreed shared goals and values, and regular communication between partners' (QAA, 2012, p. 5). A student intern worked in partnership with staff and students to develop a sustainable approach for academic support for students. The creation of the guide involved a step-by-step process where both staff and students were consulted at each stage.

The process involved:

- Identifying the areas of need* – This involved careful scrutiny of the generalised course evaluation surveys (2016), followed by a more focused survey at the end of the academic term (2017) identifying the academic literacy skills with which the students felt they needed particular support. This was followed by a further focused survey undertaken with the incoming cohort in September 2017, requesting that students rate the areas of support identified by the previous cohort in order of priority and identify any other areas of academic skills/literacy with which they felt they needed support.
- Staff input to support academic skills/literacy* – Following the student feedback, staff voluntarily delivered sessions on the four areas of academic literacy which the students had identified (referencing, plagiarism, structuring essays and critical reading). Each session was followed by an evaluation

survey to obtain feedback on the session, along with the offer for the students to obtain further one-to-one advice from writing mentors. All the resources and feedback from the sessions, along with advice from the writing mentors, were collated and made available via the virtual learning environment (Moodle).

- Packaging of the academic literacy resources into academic skills guides by the student intern* – A student intern was appointed in January 2018 to develop the resources into guides. The process of the development of each guide followed a cyclical process.

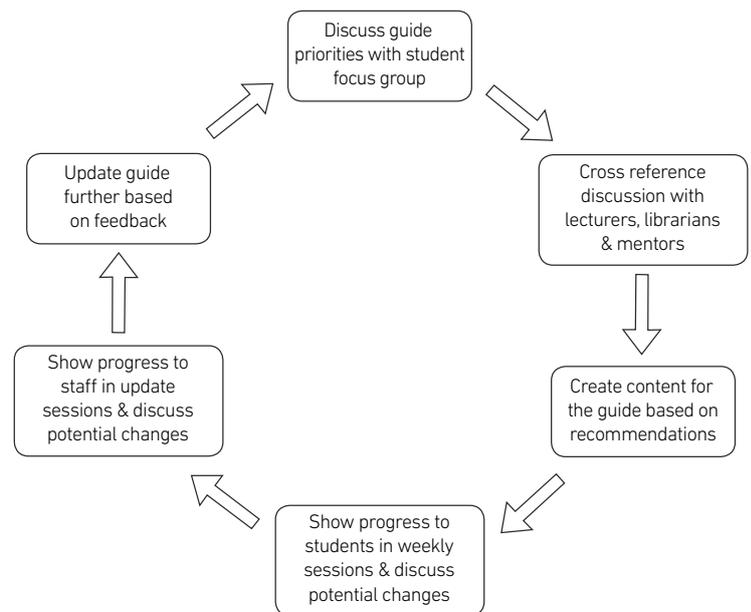


Figure 1 Process of academic literacy/skills guides development for postgraduate students

The process (Figure 1) started with the intern consulting a focus group of students who had recently enrolled on the postgraduate programmes to ascertain the areas where they felt they needed support and what resources they felt they would like in the guides. This was followed by further consultation with the tutors who had delivered the various academic literacy sessions to identify what resources were already available and what resources they considered would be particularly useful. A draft version of the study guides advising students on the various academic literacy skills was developed. The resources were both created by the intern and drawn from free online open-access resources.

The intern then shared these with students from the focus group to gain an understanding of how useful these resources would be. The focus group consisted of five postgraduate students who had started the course recently (in the January 2018 term). Often these discussions would be on a one-to-one basis due to the differing nature of the students' schedules. Then the intern liaised with five tutors who had delivered the academic literacy sessions, as well as the faculty librarians, to secure further feedback on the guides. These were then revised in light of the student and staff feedback.

The draft version of the guides was shared with all students in the cohort and feedback was obtained via an online survey. The student intern also showcased these guides at the university-wide Academic Literacies Community of Practice (CoP) to obtain further feedback from staff from across the university. These versions were also shared with all the tutors who had been involved in advising the intern in the developmental stages. This feedback from the wider student and staff community was then assimilated to produce the final guides, which were presented at the university-wide learning and teaching day to showcase the work and facilitate university-wide dissemination.

Reasons for the success of the dialogic process of development of study guides

The success of this project was due to the ongoing communication and collaboration of a wide range of parties. This was informed by the principles of the 'pedagogy of partnership' (Peters, 2016). The perspectives of a varied range of staff associated with supporting academic literacy skills development (tutors, librarians, writing mentors), and those of students themselves, were sought throughout the process:

'A strength of partnership working is the recognition that our diversity is a strength because it brings together a vast range of experience, knowledge and understanding from which we can learn...Students and tutors do not have to be working together in groups all the time but there has to be a sense of collective purpose and of pooling our ideas.' (Peters, 2016, p. 9)

The students in the focus group met with the intern once a week to discuss the inclusion of potential resources and to assess the general quality of the guides as they were updated. The meetings were informal and on a one-to-one basis, with the intention of encouraging the students to be more forthright with their honest thoughts and concerns. While the one-on-one approach worked well for all of students involved, it was also highlighted that, as this was largely a dialogic approach, meeting the students as a group might also have been beneficial to invoke more discussion and debate. One of the interviewees from the student focus group, reflecting on the process, commented: 'One-on-one worked. Groups up to about four might work as well'. However, while each student in the focus group was studying the same subject, they all varied in terms of the times they were available to meet.

This scheduling difficulty again draws attention to the need for the guides among postgraduate students. The complex issues surrounding scheduling, and the difficulty in ensuring sufficient time for student/staff liaison, are a recurring issue among not only students but staff too (McConnell, 2016). This highlights the evolving nature of modern-day postgraduate study and its potential pitfalls with regards to consistent communication and partnership.

To ensure the outcome of the project and to alleviate the concern regarding time coordination among students and academics, the intern sought to act as an intermediary by relaying ideas between both groups when time constraints did not allow them to meet. A staff interviewee, who was also consulted in the process of the development of the guides, acknowledged that as the intern was very recently a student they were able to understand and empathise with the student perspective, ensuring their opinions and concerns were properly heard and validated.

As highlighted in Figure 1, after discussing potential changes to the guides with the students from the focus group, the intern then made adjustments. The next stage involved informal meetings with the academic tutors. At these meetings, a dialogic rapport was established to understand the tutor perspective concerning the content of the guides. While the students were able to provide first-hand experience of their accounts regarding what should be included in the guides, the tutors were able to provide an overview ensuring consistency by drawing from trends they had noticed over numerous years across varied cohorts of students.

Once the tutors had made their suggestions, similar to the student focus group, the intern would then make the appropriate changes. This process helped articulate the organic, supple blend of differing perspectives that were invoked in the creation of the guides, via constant, informal, inclusive conversation. The intern would then meet with the students the following week, and the process would continue, slowly fine-tuning the guides through a collaborative, informal, dialogic process. The nature of this process ensured that the guides that were produced were grounded firmly in the ethos of communication and constructive discourse.

In keeping with the intermediary focus that the intern was able to maintain, the peer academic writing mentors at the University were also consulted in the creation of the guides. In a similar guise to the intern, they were able to offer a perspective in terms of the development of the guides that lay somewhere in the middle, being both postgraduate students and academic writing mentors.

Implications for practice

Bovill and Felten (2016) state that communication between student and staff is something that is hard to get right, regardless of the intentions. They note that this process of communication and partnership between staff and student is still relatively new in the culture of higher education and, as a result, is hard to turn from theory into practice. Concerns over time constraints can be alleviated by employing an intermediary who, vitally, is able to be flexible with their time. An interviewee, who was one of the staff members involved in the process, commented: 'If you weren't doing this, this would be the kind of thing that gets dropped on one of our desks, and you want to give it your full attention

and effort, but you never can because you're busy doing other things'. Imperatively, the onus has been to ensure that the opinions of both the student and staff were given the proper attention they warranted and that all involved in the collaboration truly felt the inclusive nature of the practice. As Bovill and Felten (2016) note, this is something that can be hard to capture, regardless of intentions, and a major reason is time constraints.

The process of collaboration between the intern, the postgraduate students and staff through a dialogical approach proved to be popular with all involved. Staff and student alike found the process of working with the intern to be straightforward and simple. The mere inclusion of an intern as an intermediary between student and staff helped avoid the potential issues that Bovill and Felten (2016) illuminate. As time and flexibility often seem to be the biggest issue regarding communication and collaboration between staff and student, we can suggest that in similar future endeavours, such as the creation of postgraduate study guides, the use of an intern, or peer academic mentor, should be considered. The ability to have somebody available who is flexible and can circumnavigate the issues regarding time and placement is valuable in the accrual of input from various sources. Additionally, this intervention is key to ensuring the mediation of input from student and staff, to reassure participants that their opinion is noted and valued.

Vitality, it is the consistency of the dialogue and the involvement of a student intermediary, 'the student intern', which proved the most valuable aspect, rather than any particular characteristic. The 'pedagogy of partnership' (Peters, 2016) lying at the heart of this intervention formed the very essence for its success; namely, the shared understanding that student academic skills need to be developed through a collaborative and constant dialogue leading to the co-construction of academic skills support resources. This can be undertaken by a student intern in collaboration with students and tutors whilst engaging in a collaborative ongoing reflection concerning the resources produced. An accrual of feedback on a consistent basis

will undoubtedly prove more useful than an inconsistent or staggered mode of dialogue.

Acknowledgements

This is a summary of a collaborative project, supported by library staff and academics from the Faculty of Education at Liverpool Hope University. The collaborators and contributors included postgraduate students, and Nadia Donaldson, Philippa Williams, Dr Joseph Maslen, Dr Cathal O'Siochru, Dr Claire Penketh, Dr Ruth Pilkington, Dr Jim Stack and Professor Lin Norton.

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Jamie Murphy (Murphyj2@hope.ac.uk) is a Student Intern and Postgraduate Academic Skills Officer, **Namrata Rao** (raon@hope.ac.uk) is a Senior Lecturer in Education Studies (and the corresponding author), **Joseph Maslen** (maslenj@hope.ac.uk) is a Senior Lecturer in Education Studies, and **Alex Owen** (owena@hope.ac.uk) is a Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood, all at Liverpool Hope University.

Who does well when assessed reflectively?

Stephen Powell, Manchester Metropolitan University, and **Peter Gossman**, University of Worcester

Introduction

Recently, the authors undertook a project that collected feedback from the past three years of graduates from Postgraduate Certificates in Higher Education (PgCHE) courses at four different institutions. At one of the meetings to discuss this, as the conversation meandered, we began to speculate about whether the academic disciplines from which candidates came correlated with the results that they got. In short, were

students from different discipline or subject areas advantaged or disadvantaged by our assessment instruments based on written reflections? We also considered the possibility that the type of assessment might favour, in some way, male or female students. This led us to consider the results profile for participants from one of the institutions of the original project, as part of the established quality enhancement processes, and it is this work that we report on here.

Method and hypothesis

As the result of the conversation we proposed two hypotheses:

a) that the distribution of mark range (in categories) against subjects (in Biglan (1973) categories) was related, and b) that the distribution of mark range (in categories) against the sex of the graduates, as held in the university's records, was related.

Our method was to create, for each hypothesis, a cross-tabulation of the results:

a) frequency of graduates in each mark range category, effectively pass, merit and distinction, and the discipline (Biglan category) that we could identify them with through institutional records

b) mark range category and the sex of the graduate.

This was done initially by using the eight Biglan categories (hard life applied, soft life applied, and so on) but in the final analysis this was collapsed to four (applied hard, applied soft, pure hard and pure soft). Table 1 illustrates the number of graduates per year and a total of 291 was included for each hypothesis tested. In some cases data was missing and these graduates were excluded from the analysis.

Academic Year Graduated	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	Total
Number	33	59	74	81	44	291

Table 1 Number of graduates per year

The course across the years remained largely unchanged although it was revalidated during this period. The course consists of two core modules of 15 credits each and one or two options (of 15*2 or 30*1). However, the predominant form of assessment for all the modules is a reflective statement.

From the table below (Table 2) it can be seen that the graduates mainly came from applied soft disciplines (e.g. nursing, teaching) which potentially reflects the course focus of the university, but may also be related to staff turnover. The results category profile shows a distribution where marks in the 60-69 (merit) range predominate.

	50-59	60-69	70+	Totals
Applied hard	6	34	9	49
Applied soft	22	76	49	147
Pure hard	4	8	6	15
Pure soft	5	33	26	64
Totals	37	151	90	275

Table 2 Cross-tabulation of mark category and discipline

When a chi-squared test is applied to the table above, a result of 9.88 is returned which when checked against a probability distribution table is between the 80% and 90% significance level (i.e. not high enough to support hypothesis 'a' – normally a 95% signified level would be required). We therefore conclude that there is no statistically significant relationship between the discipline of the graduate and the results gained. Technically, we cannot reject a null hypothesis of no relationship between the two variables. This we might argue is reassuring in some respects but it may also be that the data is inconclusive, perhaps due to the sample size.

When the data is collapsed further to applied/pure against results and hard/soft against results, the chi-squared statistic, in both cases, remains below an acceptable significance level.

Table 3 below is the cross-tabulation for hypothesis 'b'. The table shows a broadly balanced number of male/female graduates but that the frequency of graduates within the mark categories is different. The frequency of females in the 70+ mark category is higher than the projected expected frequency (provided within a chi-squared calculation). For males in the same category the actual frequency is lower than the projected figure. Fewer males than expected get distinctions which, in turn, means that the frequency is higher than expected in the 50-59 and 60-69 mark categories.

	50-59	60-69	70+	Totals
Female	17	71	58	146
Male	20	80	32	132
Totals	37	151	90	278

Table 3 Cross-tabulation of mark category and sex of graduate

When the chi-squared statistic is calculated it returns a value of 10.7 which is above the threshold significance level of 99%, i.e. it is statistically significant.

Discussion

This analysis poses some interesting questions for the designers of PgCHEs. Perhaps surprisingly, we found no significant correlation for the performance of students from different academic and professional disciplines. It could be that our sample size was such that significant associations could not be identified, or it could be that reflective writing as a form of assessment is a valid approach to take, in that it does not appear to disadvantage different groups of staff. A third possibility is that a more granular analysis, if we had a sufficiently large data set, would yield some statistically significant associations. For example, are particle physicists disadvantaged or advantaged by reflective forms of assessment?

Perhaps more interesting are the performance results of male and female students. These show significant association

between performance and sex that raises interesting questions for the curriculum design of these courses. There is, perhaps, a parallel here with the reforms to GCSE assessments, where the move away from coursework to examinations in 2018 led to a marked improvement in the performance of boys, in that genders do appear to respond differently to different forms of assessment.

We can speculate different possible explanations for the different performance. There could be physiological differences in the brain that favour women over men when it comes to being reflective. Alternatively, it could be social conditioning from an early age that reinforces stereotypes. For example, girls are more studious and motivated, better at coursework, whereas boys are lazy and will get away with the minimum possible. This is a tricky area and as much as anything poses a philosophical teaching/learning/assessment question for us as academic developers. Do we think that it is up to our students to apply themselves to the assessment set or do we seek to change the assessment such that we gain parity between males and females in performance? Are our assessment approaches valid and reliable, resting as they do in ideas of critical reflection? Or should they be broader based and, perhaps, have more analytically based assessments, or ones more closely related to the actual practice of teaching?

We could discuss the nature of assessment rather more but leave these as questions to ponder.

Conclusion

Our conclusion is brief and, perhaps, predictable. We think that this is an area that merits further study and that this may only be possible through institutions coming together to pool their data and exploring different classifications and lenses, viewing the relationships between outcomes and assessment to identify how different groups perform under different assessment regimes. There is then the question of validity of assessment – have we got it about right or are we doing wrong by some groups of learners?

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Dr Stephen Powell is the Acting Associate Head of the University Teaching Academy at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Dr Peter Gossman is a Principal Lecturer and Course Leader for the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education in the Institute of Education at the University of Worcester.

SEDA News

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Edited by Carole L. Davis and Mary Fitzpatrick

This Special explores the current state of play surrounding reflective practice. The hope is that readers will find practical support through the examples provided of accessible ways in which individuals can be enabled to develop as effective practitioners. Whilst the authors

offer a range of practical tools for different situations and purposes, it is recognised that these have been developed in tandem with theoretical approaches. The intention is to make things clear and accessible rather than complicated and alienating, as we appreciate that time is in short supply.

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