Enduring Legacies:
Emerging Innovations

Articles from the
Learning and Teaching
Conference 2015
Contents

Editorial introduction  
Professor Gina Wisker, Chair, Conference Organising Committee ................................ 6

Keynote  
Going back to our roots: disciplinary approaches to pedagogy and pedagogic research  
Professor Elizabeth Cleaver, University of the West of England ............................. 8

Articles  
Flips, double flips and advanced flips: next steps in flipping the classroom  
Dr Fiona Handley, Centre for Learning and Teaching .................................................. 18

Promoting intercultural engagement: developing a toolkit for staff and students in higher education  
Dr Mark Dunford, University of East London, Dr Marita Grimwood, Independent Learning and Teaching Consultant, Nita Muir, School of Health Sciences and Pilar Teran, School of Humanities ........................................................................... 25

How to make thinking visible in doctoral theses: practical implications  
Professor Shosh Leshem, Oranim Academic College of Education, Israel......................................................................................................................... 34

Moving on, moving up: challenges of moving from a foundation degree to a university top up degree  
Rachael Carden, Brighton Business School ................................................................. 43

A year in the life of a student support and guidance tutor  
Melanie Gill, School of Education .................................................................................. 55

Developing inclusive practices for student parents  
Dr Charlotte Morris, School of Pharmacy and Biomolecular Sciences .......................................................... 66

In celebration of David Watson: student learning through community engagement  
Dr Ceri Davies and Professor Emeritus Stuart Laing, Community University Partnership Programme (Cupp) ......................................................... 76
The Learning and Teaching Conference focusing on ‘Enduring Legacies’ was an interesting moment in which to share some of the exciting and innovative or long-standing effective practices of our learning and teaching community at the University of Brighton. So that the time limitations of a conference instigate further sharing and thought, we have again worked with colleagues over time for them to produce considered written pieces on their theory informed practices. A range of interesting, good practice is collected here.

In her article ‘Going back to our roots: disciplinary approaches to pedagogy and pedagogic research’, our keynote speaker Professor Elizabeth Cleaver, University of Hull, (now University of the West of England), focuses on the ‘Connecting Research and Teaching through Curriculum and Pedagogic Design’ initiative at the University of Hull, part of a whole-institution strategic journey towards curriculum and pedagogic redesign: ‘Curriculum 2016+’ a project with an alternative approach, and illustrated by two activities designed to support academic teams to engage with the scholarship of teaching and learning from disciplinary and practice based starting points. Dr Cleaver’s Hull based learning and teaching centre used their Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice module and a pedagogic design process to develop and share disciplinary understandings of ‘why we teach and learn in the way we do’.

Considering her own innovative practice and that developed through the CLT, Dr Fiona Handley, Centre for Learning and Teaching, looks at advances in flipped classrooms, a popular subject in previous post conference publications. In ‘Flips, double flips and advanced flips: next steps in flipping the classroom’ Dr Handley explains the pedagogic approach of the process of Flipping the classroom in moving some ‘content delivery’ from face-to-face sessions into resources accessed by students before sessions. She particularly reports on a CLT project encouraging staff unfamiliar with ‘flipping’ to combine it into their teaching, considering staff new to the process and those more familiar, whose new work now includes ‘double’ and ‘advanced’ flipping.

Dr Mark Dunford, University of East London (ex of University of Brighton), Dr Marita Grimwood, Independent Learning and Teaching Consultant, Nita Muir, School of Health Sciences and Pilar Teran, School of Humanities report on an HEA funded project concerned with ‘Promoting intercultural engagement: developing a toolkit for staff and students in higher education’, focusing on: increasing numbers of non-UK students and the need to prepare students for a globalised society, and recognising that academic staff are often uncertain about how to engage with this in their curriculum. They deal with such issues through developing a reflective toolkit to support academic staff and the processes of cultural negotiation in the context of programme teams and class groups.

One of our international visitors, Professor Shosh Leshem, Oranim Academic College of Education, Israel, shares some of her work on doctoral education in ‘How to make thinking visible in doctoral theses: practical implications’, in which she argues that quality in research, recognised and applauded for conceptualisation and high level thinking, needs to be visible in the text of the thesis. Her article illustrates how to
approach research in a scholarly manner moving from the descriptive to the con-
ceptual, by considering critical factors that represent the high quality that doctoral
research should demonstrate, and explains how candidates can raise their level of
thinking and show in their thesis that they are ‘thinking like researchers’.

In ‘Moving on, moving up: challenges of moving from a foundation degree to a univer-
sity top up degree’, Rachael Carden, Brighton Business School, draws on personal ex-
perience of academic and pastoral leadership on the Foundation degree in Business
at City College Brighton and Hove (an FE College) and current teaching at the Brighton
Business School, which suggests that the shift from FdA Business to BSc Business
(Top up) in a different institution is challenging. In this small scale case study, she
investigates the academic, personal and social transitional and induction experiences
of two groups of articulating students. The research objectives: the analysis and
evaluation by the learners of the practices and processes of the two institutions with
a view to developing potential improvements of transition for future learners.

Melanie Gill, School of Education, reports in ‘A year in the life of a student support
and guidance tutor’ (SSGT) on a survey focusing on student support and retention.
Whilst most students’ issues are focused on stress and mental health, or learning
support/dyslexia, the survey however, also revealed an increase in the numbers of stu-
dents seeking support and an increase in the number of students who were thinking of
leaving or intermitting from the university before making contact with the SSGT, which
has significant financial implications in the current climate.

In ‘Developing inclusive practices for student parents, Dr Charlotte Morris, School of
Pharmacy and Biomolecular Sciences, explores one of the enduring legacies of the
concept of inclusive practices, that flexible teaching provision should be embedded
in course design to benefit diverse learners, rather than making individual adjust
ments. She notes that more recently, student parents have emerged as a group with
a high level of need and a concern in terms of retention, and draws on recent re-
search into the experiences of student parents at the University of Brighton, to focus
on the benefits for student parents of expanding and developing inclusive practices
to meet their needs and enhance their university experience.

The last article by Dr Ceri Davies and Professor Emeritus Stuart Laing, Cupp, is ‘In
celebration of David Watson: student learning through community engagement’. It
celebrates the life, work and enduring legacy of the late Professor Sir David Watson,
Vice-Chancellor of the University of Brighton from 1990-2005, and highlights his con
tribution as the most influential UK thinker and writer of his generation concerning
both the purposes and the pragmatics of higher education. The paper combines two
of the causes he most championed: student learning and community engagement,
exploring how a programme of seed funding through the ‘On Our Doorsteps’ initiative
(2010), and part of the Community University Partnership Programme (Cupp) has
provided an opportunity for active projects to include these dimensions.

This collection of articles from the Learning and Teaching Conference is rich evidence
of the enduring commitment to inclusivity, widening participation, flexibility, quality,
and learning of rich value to our diverse student population and wider community.

Professor Gina Wisker, Chair, Conference Organising Committee
Going back to our roots: disciplinary approaches to pedagogy and pedagogic research

Professor Elizabeth Cleaver, University of the West of England (ex of University of Hull)

Abstract

As academics we are increasingly expected to take a more scholarly approach to our learning and teaching; an approach that moves beyond embedding the latest research findings from the disciplines into the curriculum. Yet often such scholarly activities are expected to adopt approaches stemming from the social sciences, the academic home of educational scholarship and research. For many non-social scientists such expectations can feel impractical and uncomfortable.

This paper explores an alternative approach, illustrated by two activities currently underway at the University of Hull which are designed to support academic teams to engage with the scholarship of teaching and learning from disciplinary and practice-based starting points. The ‘Connecting Research and Teaching through Curriculum and Pedagogic Design’ project forms part of Hull’s whole-institution strategic journey towards curriculum and pedagogic redesign: ‘Curriculum 2016+'. Fundamental to this project is a pedagogic design process which develops and shares disciplinary understandings of ‘why we teach and learn in the way we do’. The module ‘Researching Learning and Teaching Practice in the Disciplines’ forms part of Hull’s PGCert in Academic Practice (PCAP), and is designed to support early-career academics to use their own established and familiar disciplinary research skills and approaches to enhance their learning and teaching.

Setting the scene

What role can and should academic disciplines play in a world of higher education which is increasingly dominated by narratives which hail the importance and power of interdisciplinary research and teaching? To help to address this question, this paper is illustrated by examples from the work that I have undertaken on two projects that have taken shape over a period of 15 years, across four English higher education institutions. The projects have further been influenced by my work with a broad network of academic colleagues and educational developers from a range of disci-
Going back to our roots

Disciplines in both pre-92 and post-92 institutions. The starting point for both has been the recognition and re-imagining of the centrality of the discipline in all aspects of academic work including pedagogy and pedagogic research.

‘Curriculum 2016+’ is a whole-institution curriculum change project which has, at its very heart, a reimagining of the design process for undergraduate and postgraduate taught curricula. A fundamental aspect of this new design approach is the explicit connection of research and teaching as part of a holistic academic endeavour. The second project is linked to a recently published text *Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: Disciplinary Approaches to Educational Enquiry* (Cleaver et al 2014), which actively calls on academic colleagues to employ their disciplinary skills of research and enquiry in the development and evaluation of their learning and teaching materials and activities. Both projects are explored in greater detail below in order to return to the question posed at the beginning of this paper: What role can and should the academic discipline play in a world of higher education which is increasingly dominated by narratives that hail the importance and power of interdisciplinary research and teaching?

Some points of definition

It is important to note that I recognise that many academic colleagues do not identify themselves with, and many programmes of study do not draw upon, one discrete discipline per se. Discipline is used in the context of this paper, and in my broader work, as shorthand to describe the disciplinary area(s) and the field(s) of study and practice that are fundamental to each academic’s area of expertise, the degree programmes that they contribute to and run, and the academic communities or community of scholars to which they belong. This thinking stems back to my reading of the work of Lee Shulman (1993) which raises issues that still resonate two decades on. Shulman raises the paradox that still remains across much of the UK higher education sector, that contrary to popular expectation: ‘we experience isolation not in the stacks but in the classroom. We close the classroom door and experience pedagogical solitude, whereas in our life as scholars, we are members of active communities: communities of conversation, communities of evaluation, communities in which we gather with others in our invisible colleges to exchange our findings, our methods and our excuses’ (Shulman 1993: 6). He further states that ‘... the communities that matter most are strongly identified with the disciplines of our scholarship [and that] ... ‘Discipline’ is in fact a powerful pun because it not only denotes a domain but also suggests a process: a community that disciplines is one that exercises quality, control, judgement, evaluation and paradigmatic definition’ (1993: 6).

In one brief article, Shulman brilliantly identifies the split that higher education has reinforced in recent times across many continents: that research is perceived by many as the true academic undertaking, endeavour and calling, and that the education of students merely calls for generic technical skills that lie separately to what we ‘really do as a scholar in the discipline’ (1993: 6). Many have written about this subject but, I would argue, none as eloquently and concisely as Shulman!

Why does all this matter? What this has led many to assume, across a range of literatures and discussions, is that the relationship between research and teaching is
unidirectional and hierarchical. For example, the much drawn upon work of Healey (2005; adapted from Griffiths 2004) describes four key categories that illustrate different teaching-research linkages but with research always appearing to take priority in the relationship:

- **research-led teaching**, structured around subject content with content selected to be directly based on the disciplinary research interests of academic staff;
- **research-oriented teaching**, structured around developing a ‘research ethos’ in students in principle if not in practice;
- **research-based teaching**, designed around activities that are enquiry-led in nature with the potential for interactions between research and teaching emphasised;
- **research-tutored teaching**, designed to emphasise learning that is focused on students writing and discussing their essays and papers.

Within the bounds of this short paper, it is neither possible nor appropriate to provide evidence or a critique of the impact of such approaches to connecting research and teaching on the status of teaching. However, while they may go beyond Shulman’s contention that teaching is often viewed and performed as a generic technical task, the focus on the curriculum as a repository for research outputs and/or teaching as a medium for building disciplinary research skills, means that opportunities for viewing teaching and research as equal partners remain few.

**A rebalancing act**

As part of the curriculum redesign project at the University of Hull, we have emphasised a number of key starting points and principles to our academic teams. Two in particular are salient here. First, a refocusing on programme level curriculum and pedagogic design to develop and emphasise shared understandings and connections across the curriculum, rather than individually designed modules and teaching sessions. Secondly, an emphasis on making the implicit explicit: sharing understandings with colleagues and students about ‘why we do things the way we do around here’.

As part of this approach, Hull is actively fostering disciplinary differences in teaching, learning and assessment based on the recognition that just as our research methodologies stem from the epistemic roots of the discipline (what knowledge is, how it is created and how it is measured) so too should our pedagogies. In this vein, the Hull ‘Vision of Learning’ states:

‘At Hull we believe that research, teaching and learning activities are fundamentally interconnected through academic disciplines. Our understanding of this interconnectivity goes beyond simple research-teaching linkages ... [to acknowledge] the shared epistemic origins of research, teaching and learning practices in University settings. Just as our research practices are based on fundamental understandings of the nature of knowledge in a discipline (how such knowledge is created and how it is best communicated to facilitate understanding and app-
Going back to our roots

This approach helps us to recognise why teaching and learning takes different forms and has distinctive characteristics across the institution and allows us actively to foster this difference'.

The aim of this approach is to encourage academic teams to see curriculum and teaching as part of the wider academic endeavour, in answer to Shulman’s call over two decades ago.

Swimming against the tide?

At first, this focus back on the discipline may seem a little out-of-date. The dominant mantra in the higher education sector is that the real world does not come in disciplinary packages; disciplines and their self-imposed boundaries affect their ability to solve global problems and develop graduates ready for the complexities of twenty-first century life. But I would argue that strong disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity are highly compatible, and I have been surprised by how many colleagues have assumed that they are not. In fact their relationship is symbiotic: we would not enter into an interdisciplinary research project without a strong understanding of our disciplinary research methodologies and what they bring to the table. Equally, interdisciplinary research approaches and findings have the potential to challenge, augment and transform the discipline at its very boundaries. In the same vein, how can we truly teach in an interdisciplinary way if we do not have a strong understanding of our disciplinary pedagogies? Without this, interdisciplinary programmes may simply end up with parallel tracks of distinct content taught in separate unconnected ways with the student left to make sense of how it all fits together.

What I hope is becoming clear from the approach I am advocating is that I do not see disciplines as sitting in splendid isolation, but as active, changing and interconnecting entities. As Jacobs reminds us, disciplines are ever changing ‘nodes in a remarkably vibrant web of scholarship’. They ‘... are broad, not narrow; ... dynamic, not static’ (2013: 224). As such, they form the vital seed bank for cross-field exchanges and fertilisation. If we take this as a starting point, then those engaged in interdisciplinary teaching should acknowledge and reflect on what each discipline contributes to, and how it sits in relation to, the wider web of pedagogic knowledge and practice. In undermining or playing down disciplinary distinctiveness in teaching we are in danger of undermining the solid anchoring of future interdisciplinary work.

The ‘Connecting research and teaching’ project

As already discussed, one the main stumbling blocks to trying to ‘connect’ research and teaching at Hull is that the models currently at large in the sector do not present a vision of research and teaching in dialogue within disciplinary communities and contexts. At Hull I have led work to reconfigure the model and to look for meaningful common ground through which research and teaching can be joined. This work has had two key aims: first (see figure 1, over), to develop discipline-informed approaches to teaching and student learning that make explicit the why (the disciplinary provenance), the what (the content) of teaching and the how (the method); and secondly, to engage academic teams in recognising how through the use of language and act-
ivity in teaching, the meanings and boundaries of the discipline can be contested, stretched and changed.

One example of this latter process in action can be seen if we turn our attention to the idea of enterprise and entrepreneurialism in the curriculum. At first sight, it could be argued that these have little resonance with pure disciplines such as English or Physics. However, in the context of the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DHLE) question that was added in 2015, it becomes a pertinent issue that programme teams may now need to address:

‘Q32: How well did your recent course ... prepare you for being self-employed/freelance or for starting up your own business?’

In beginning to consider what being enterprising and entrepreneurial looks like within different disciplines, and in defining useful and relevant disciplinary language for these conceptual ideas, we actively challenge and expand the boundaries of our disciplines.

The work at Hull has drawn on two distinct but connected literatures. First, writing stemming predominantly from the USA on ‘signature pedagogies’: approaches to learning and teaching which can develop disciplinary ‘habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of the hand’ in our students (Schulman 2005: 59; see also Gurung et al 2009; Chick et al 2012). Secondly, two UK literatures on ‘ways of thinking and practising’ in the discipline and disciplinary 'threshold concepts', both arising
from the ‘Enhancing Teaching-Learning Environments in Undergraduate Courses’ project, which formed part of the Economic and Social Research Council’s Teaching and Learning Research Programme from 2001-04 (Housell et al 2005). These literatures explore the importance of transformative teaching and learning which, in turn, can support students to move beyond the development of disciplinary ‘ways of thinking’ (for example, thinking like an historian or a chemist) to develop ways of going about or ‘doing’ the discipline (for example, becoming an historian or chemist).

It is important to stress at this point that many of the teams that I have been working with at Hull are already showcasing excellent examples of disciplinary pedagogies. But where this is happening, the work is often implicit, with limited explicit or shared discussion of appropriate teaching approaches and how they connect across a programme. We are now asking teams to work together to make these connections explicit and to build on the excellent work already underway. This not only helps to ensure that pedagogy within and across programmes is connected up, but also can help students to engage in the whys and wherefores of teaching and learning approaches.

Briefing notes have been prepared and key reflective questions have been developed to support teams to prepare for Curriculum 2016+ programme validation. For example:

- What are the key ‘ways of thinking and practising’ that students should have opportunities to develop during their programme of study?
- What modes of teaching are best suited to developing the ‘ways of thinking and practising’ that characterise our subject area?
- What modes of learning should we be supporting our students to become skilled in and how do these, in turn, affect our teaching?
- How will we engage students in understanding our disciplinary pedagogies?

The validation documentation has also been restructured to reflect these questions and to ensure that disciplinary thinking remains explicit in the programme design and specification documents. The project is now working with programme teams to ensure that these aspects of the curriculum and pedagogy remain explicit to students in practice.

**Disciplinary approaches to educational enquiry**

Picking up the threads introduced earlier in the paper, I now wish to introduce another key way in which I am supporting and encouraging academics to connect research and teaching: by drawing on their disciplinary skills of scholarship, higher order thinking, theoretical development and empirical investigation in the development of their teaching practices. At the very basic level, I would argue that taking this approach puts the ‘higher’ into higher education and can differentiate the teaching and learning that takes place in universities from that in other educational settings.
This academic argument notwithstanding, other external drivers are also important. The growing accountability agenda in UK higher education and growing evidence of diverse learning needs as a broad range of students enter higher education, directs us towards exploring a range of effective ways for helping students to reach their full potential (or to benefit from ‘learning gain’ as HEFCE has most recently put it).

This all seems relatively straightforward: academics have a strong scholarly skills base and they are certainly able to generate plentiful evidence. But there is one sticking point. The study of learning and teaching is on the whole dominated by the evidence gathering approaches and methods of the social sciences. Now there is a logic to this! Higher education involves people in social contexts, so the social sciences are by definition the natural home of pedagogy as a field of study. However, taking this approach can exclude and alienate non-social scientists. I have watched (as a participant, a programme leader and an external examiner of Postgraduate Certificates in Learning and Teaching) as colleagues from a range of disciplines suffer disjuncture and discomfort when they are faced with educational terminology, teaching methods and research approaches.

This is something that Savin-Baden (2008) has charted in relation to undergraduates who are asked to cross the boundaries of disciplines without adequate preparation, and Stierer (2008) has particularly noted in relation to non-social scientists taking Postgraduate Certificates in Learning and Teaching.

As a social scientist myself, I find the idea problematic that all academic staff should somehow be able to become ‘qualified’ by undertaking a short programme of study in a different disciplinary area. This not only devalues the disciplinary area, but further bolsters the extant stereotype that anyone can be a social scientist. In very few other fields would you be expected to do a conversion course of 60 credits at Level 7 of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (QAA 2008) and become ‘qualified’. The following quotation from a social science colleague encapsulates these thoughts well:

‘As a social scientist I often find myself defending our methods and methodologies when I am in the company of ‘exact’ scientists - often perceived by many key stakeholders (students, society, industry) as ‘real’ scientists. Our methods and approaches are often perceived as ‘fluffy’, ‘easy’ and ‘soft’. It was great that on the [Postgraduate Certificate] such things were discussed and named (for once). More importantly, and the main message I have taken away from this module, is that academics should not just ‘borrow’ a ‘social science method’ to ‘quickly’ evaluate/research their teaching and learning in their discipline. They can and should use their discipline-specific methods. We train our social science students for many years to master these methods and it was [during the Postgraduate Certificate] that (for the first time) somebody clearly articulated the frustrations I have often felt’.

So is there another way? Can academic colleagues use approaches and methods that are more familiar to them to undertake and effect change in their teaching and their students’ learning? Would this help staff who are too busy to learn or are not
interested in learning a new discipline; particularly one with approaches they may not value or accept?

There are many benefits to this alternative approach. Not least, if we support staff to gather evidence and to reflect critically on their learning and teaching in ways that they already have experience and confidence in, this has the immediate potential to effect positive change. I also fundamentally believe that just as different disciplines bring new and helpful methodological and conceptual resources to interdisciplinary research projects, so too they can offer new insights into learning and teaching. So, while I am not saying that social science approaches and methods are wrong or impossible to master, I do believe that they are not the whole story.

Mirroring the principles of the ‘connecting research and teaching’ project, the ‘disciplinary approaches to educational enquiry work’ does not advocate silo working or remaining ensconced within disciplinary comfort zones. Academic colleagues are encouraged to recognise how their disciplinary evidence gathering approaches fit within the wider web of knowledge in higher education and the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. This awareness can provide a strong and vibrant seedbed for interdisciplinary work in learning and teaching. Not least, it can provide opportunities for colleagues to work together across disciplines to identify the most appropriate evidence gathering approaches and methods for different teaching problems and questions.

So what does this mean in practice? Hull’s Post Graduate Certificate in Academic Practice encourages early career academics to gain an understanding and awareness of their own potential disciplinary starting point for teaching enhancement activities, and to identify and reflect on the affordances and limitations of these approaches as well as their differences from and similarities to others. This is completed through a small enquiry project which forms the basis of the final module of the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice.

Concluding thoughts

The two projects presented in this paper are included to illustrate how I have been working with colleagues to recognise and re-imagine the centrality of the discipline in all aspects of their academic work including pedagogy and pedagogic research. The ultimate aim, which spans across this work, is to engage academic colleagues from a range of disciplines in building strong disciplinary foundations for improving their curricula and their pedagogic practice. This does not, in itself, negate the importance of interdisciplinarity; on the contrary it provides the seedbed from which informed interdisciplinary practice in learning and teaching can take shape and grow.

Bibliography


Biography

Professor Elizabeth Cleaver is Director of Learning and Teaching at the University of the West of England and was, at the time of writing, Director of Learning Enhancement and Academic Practice at the University of Hull. Her career in universities and research has spanned 20 years across a wide range of institutions and roles. Her early academic career was spent in the discipline of sociology where her research, teaching and publications centred on youth transitions to adulthood. Changing direction in 2001, she worked on a range of small and large scale research and evaluation projects on citizenship education and widening participation at the National Foundation for Educational Research. A move into educational and academic development in 2008 began the latest instalment of her career. Elizabeth’s current research interests lie in the area of disciplinary approaches to learning and teaching. The seeds of this interest began to grow while studying for her own Postgraduate
Certificate in Teaching and Learning when she became aware of the importance of teaching sociologically alongside thinking and researching sociologically. This has profoundly influenced her current work at the University of Hull, where she is now supporting academic teams to explore and develop their own disciplinary pedagogies. As an academic who has moved into a central role within her university, she is additionally interested in the way in which academic teams and central services in institutions work together and the role of central educational teams as ‘boundary spanners’ within institutions. Elizabeth is the current Chair of the national Heads of Educational Development Group, and is a Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.
Flips, double flips and advanced flips: next steps in flipping the classroom

DR FIONA HANDLEY, CENTRE FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING

Abstract

Flipping the classroom is a pedagogic approach that is increasingly being applied to higher education. It involves taking some of the ‘content delivery’ out of face-to-face sessions and putting it into resources which students use before the session. This means that more time can be spent in class on activities that encourage learning rather than lecture style presentations. During the academic year 2014-15 the Centre for Learning and Teaching ran an initiative to encourage staff who had never done a flip to incorporate one into their teaching. This paper presents the results of the project, considers how flipping can be encouraged, and for staff already undertaking flips, how they can progress their practice, including ‘double’ and ‘advanced’ flips.

Introduction

The flipped, or inverted classroom, as it is sometimes known is a pedagogic model where the ‘typical classroom and homework elements are reversed’ (Educause 2012). The model was brought to prominence by two US high school chemistry teachers, Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams, who originally wanted to be able to offer students who had missed class due to sporting commitments a way to catch up. These first flips were simply PowerPoints with an audio commentary shared between the two teachers that students could view at home. However, Bergmann and Sams quickly realised the potential of getting all students to view the videos at home before they came to class, as then in class, they could complete the learning activities with the help of the teachers (Bergmann and Sams 2012). This was effectively doing what would have been homework, but in class. They describe flipped learning as ‘a pedagogical approach in which direct instruction moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space, and the resulting group space is transformed into a dynamic, interactive learning environment where the educator guides students as they apply concepts and engage creatively in the subject matter’ (Bergmann and Sams 2014: 6 at: www.flippedlearning.org). They subsequently developed their flipped model to create programmes of study that allowed their students to complete their learning at their own pace while all working in the same class (Bergman and Sams 2014). Students could view videos and complete the class work as it suited
them, or as their ability in the topic allowed, an approach which is almost impossible to achieve in traditional teaching models. The model is increasingly popular in many schools across the USA and UK, and received national attention outside the education sector (New York Times 2012; Washington Post 2012).

The flipped classroom in higher education

The definition of the flipped classroom in higher education in the UK is broader than in Bergmann and Sam’s model, and is based on an understanding of the importance of active learning in the classroom, the challenges of finding time to allow those activities to take place, and the opportunities afforded by the use of new technologies. Its core features have been identified as ‘content in advance … educator awareness of students understanding, and higher-order learning during class time’ (O’Flaherty and Phillips 2015: 95). There is a wide variety of ways that the flipped approach can be incorporated into teaching, and quite often this can simply be a rebranding of activities that teachers have always engaged in with a technological edge, for example, giving students electronic rather than paper articles to read. There is a huge variety of different activities taking place, and these are only just beginning to be systematically researched and published. Overviews of these publications suggest that there is a lot of indirect evidence that the flipped classroom approach improves student learning (Abeysekera and Dawson 2015; O’Flaherty and Phillips 2015).

The potential for the use of technology within flipped approaches is also attracting attention. Within higher education it has been identified as an important development by Educause (2012), the leading think tank on trends in learning technology in all areas of education. This is mainly through the broadening of the media that students can use to access the flips, for example, mobile devices, and the range of resources that are easily created by tutors (e.g. video, quizzes) or accessed by tutors from the internet to share (e.g. Open Educational Resources known as OERs). The opening up of face-to-face sessions to more interactivity also encourages the use of technologies such as mobile devices in class.

As a result of this national and international interest, the University of Brighton developed a small flipped classroom initiative that was approved by the Blended Learning Sub Committee and Learning and Teaching Committee in autumn 2014. The aims were to identify the:

- impact on student learning as perceived by the students and indicated by their levels of engagement both online and face-to-face
- levels of support required
- technology requirement
- time commitment

While some staff at the University of Brighton are experienced in the flipped learning approach (see Wood 2014) this initiative was aimed at participants who had little or no experience. The one staff member who had previously created flips developed three new ones for this initiative. In total, seven members of staff signed up. Each
one was met individually by a member of the Centre for Learning and Teaching and a learning technologies advisor to discuss the pedagogic and technical aspects of the idea, and follow up support was provided as required. The discussion focused on developing ideas around both the material to be flipped and subsequent classroom activities that would be developed, based on the university’s blended learning tool, the 6 Key Steps to Blended Learning. The breakdown of the kinds of flips that were developed are presented in Table 1, below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of pre-session activity</th>
<th>Face-to-face activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students watch videos sourced from the internet (two examples)</td>
<td>1) Discussion and poster presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Students undertake the skills based tasks demonstrated in the video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students read ejournal articles (two examples) with an activity e.g. addressing particular questions</td>
<td>1) Nearpod interactive sessions, and group work to create a presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Discussion in groups applying theory to case study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students read online articles, visit websites and watch videos</td>
<td>Students visit exhibitions in London having chosen appropriate information to help them engage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students do internet research on a visiting speaker</td>
<td>Speaker spends less time on introduction and more time on question and answer session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students watch videos created by the tutor, and apply skills to a set reading, completing a form</td>
<td>Group discussion on the form</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Description of flips undertaken in the initiative

The flips developed by the participants were in many ways typical of the flipped classroom approach. These include finding resources on the internet which cover content which would otherwise be presented in class, for example, videos of skills that normally would be demonstrated at the start of a practical session. Reading journal articles before a session is a traditional learning activity, but these flips had the extra dimension of using ejournal articles that are accessible on many mobile devices, combined with students answering questions to focus the reading activity. Research has shown that increasing interactivity with flip materials increases student engagement (Delen, Liew and Willson 2014; McKenzie et al 2013).

While in the wider literature the flipped classroom is often characterised by the creation of videos based on PowerPoints, only one of these examples created a video from scratch. Creating videos can be quite time consuming, but was helped in this situation by the fact that the lecturer had video production experience.

The evaluation of the initiative showed that the time taken to support staff, at one hour, was less than envisaged, and that the main support was giving advice on what
activities to run in face-to-face sessions. The evaluation also showed that the average time taken to create the flip was about 150 minutes, a not insignificant amount of time for just one session of teaching.

Positive feedback from staff included:

'[students] all took the time to watch the video clips. They all engaged very positively in the post viewing tasks and the brainstorming and mingle activities during class' and ‘students fed back in student-staff meeting that they really enjoyed it’.

While at least one group of students engaged well with the flip resources, this was an issue for other groups, with feedback from staff on what they would do differently in the future including:

‘Finding ways of engaging all students with the content before the lesson, not all of the students looked at the content before the lesson’ and

‘Ensuring that students follow the logical process of learning and not short-cut/avoid more challenging elements ... further exposure to flipped learning would help’.

**Double flips and advanced flips**

The following are some examples of some very straightforward flips that are good starting points for developing multi-stage learning activities that bridge out-of-class and in-class activities, which are referred to here as double flips, and encourage students to undertake more advanced learning activities outside class (advanced flips). All of these approaches can involve students working together, through for example, problem-based learning approach.

The double flip is a flip followed by another flip. The flip before the class informs an in-class activity, which in turn produces a learning resource which forms the next out-of-class activity. For example, before class students watch a presentation on a theoretical concept, then in class groups apply the theory to case studies, and together create a four slide presentation on their case study with feedback from their tutor. After class students look at all case studies online, and come prepared for the next class ready to discuss their analysis of what the theoretical approaches reveal about case studies. The presentations can then be used as flips for next year’s students. This is a good way of incorporating a ‘students as producers’ approach into the classroom.

For more advanced students, face-to-face time can be maximised to give more time to higher level cognitive abilities such as synthesis and evaluation (Krathwohl 2002) to take place in class. In traditional flips, the out-of-class activities tend to be, for example, looking at resources and doing simple activities with them, which would be towards the bottom of Bloom’s Taxonomy triangle (figure 1,over), around understanding and remembering. By moving them out into the flip it allows more time for higher level activities such as application and analysis activities to take place in class time. Advancing this would involve putting application and analysis into the flip so that higher level skills of creation and evaluation take place in face-to-face time where the tutor is present to guide and extend this learning.
For example, before the class, students read an ejournal article (understand and remember) then do group work via a discussion forum to prepare a short presentation (application). In the session each group does their five minute presentation, then the class discusses the key points from each to create an overview presentation (evaluate and create). Research into more advanced flips such as this have shown that even with a reduction in face-to-face contact time, students achieved their learning outcomes (Baepler, Walker and Driessen 2014).

Conclusions

Overall the experiences of this very small initiative fit well with research into flipped learning generally. Student feedback is generally positive (Chen et al 2014), although, as with many initiatives that involve students to redistribute their work load, feedback can be mixed (O’Flaherty and Phillips 2015). Flipped approaches appear to improve student learning (Davies, Dean and Ball 2013; Kong 2014), although a concern for staff is that of students not doing the out of class activity, or not turning up to class (Chen et al 2014). There are various techniques to encourage engagement from students such as providing incentives for students to prepare for class, assessing student understanding, and providing clear connections between in-class and out-of-class activities (Kim et al 2014). A flipped approach can help groups learners of different needs (Brooks et al 2014) increase student motivation and can effectively manage cognitive load (Abeysekera and Dawson 2015).

Creating flips can be initially time consuming, but perhaps the biggest challenge for staff is relinquishing some control over the delivery of content, for instance, not knowing who has accessed materials before sessions, or active sessions developing in ways the tutor did not envisage. As Bergamann and Sams have stated, in flipped learning ‘control freaks need not apply’ (Bergmann and Sams 2012).

In summary the flipped classroom encourages new roles for staff, including using new technologies, planning learning activities over several sessions, increased communication with students, and further develops ‘expert facilitation’ skills. It also
Flips, double flips and advanced flips

involves new roles for students, as they access different resources in different ways, and do more inside and outside the classroom. There is also the possibility that students gain a greater understanding of how they themselves learn as they are encouraged to engage with the flipped classroom approach.

Taking up a flipped approach may be as simple as rebranding an activity that is already taking place, or just making small changes to free up even short amounts of in-class time. Even the simplest of changes can support a blended approach to learning, and the development of collaborative learning activities both online and face-to-face. It is perhaps this potential for a big impact from small changes that is the reason why the flipped classroom is capturing the attention of the education world.

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Biography

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Promoting intercultural engagement: developing a toolkit for staff and students in higher education

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Abstract

This paper describes and reflects on the development of an intercultural engagement toolkit for academic staff in higher education institutions, for use across a range of disciplines. Higher education in the UK is continuing to grapple with two aspects of an internationalising sector: increasing numbers of non-UK students (HESA 2015) and the need to prepare students for a globalised society (Guimaraes-Iosif 2011). Academic staff are often uncertain about how to engage with these forces in their curriculum (Barker, Hibbins and Farrelly 2011). A reflective toolkit to support academic staff was developed with funding from the Higher Education Academy (HEA), aiming to support universal processes of cultural negotiation in the context of programme teams and class groups. This paper will explore the six themes and the theoretical framework which is the scaffolding for the toolkit, including the most recent literature (Killick 2015; Leask 2015).

Introduction

This paper describes and reviews the development of a reflective ‘toolkit’ to support academics in developing intercultural engagement in the classroom. It was a response to two aspects of an internationalising sector: an increased number of non-UK students (HESA 2015) and the need to prepare all students, from the UK and elsewhere, for participation in a globalised society (Guimaraes-Iosif 2011). The toolkit, a series of reflective exercises; ‘talking heads’ videos; and simple self-evaluation tools, is designed for use in course teams and with class groups. It was developed for use across a range of disciplines by a team at the University of Brighton, between January and July 2015. This paper looks back on the process from its initial conception to the completion of the University of Brighton team’s work on it, and its submission to the funding body: the Higher Education Academy (HEA). The toolkit was finally made available by the HEA in early 2016 and can be downloaded via the
Historically, the University of Brighton’s approach to Internationalisation has been rather fragmentary. The Strategic Plan (2012-15) set out a laudable ambition to foster internationalisation of learning and research, with a commitment to nurturing values of inclusivity, yet this policy intention was not aligned with clear strategic drivers. The consequence was a series of well-intentioned activities scattered across the university, for example, two elective modules in Language and Intercultural Awareness were established in 2012, but with some important areas inadvertently neglected. Yet with no coordination of activity, such strengths often flowed from individual commitment. The operational context had shifted in 2010, when University of Brighton International College (UBIC), a partnership with Kaplan International Colleges, was established to provide international students with a foundation year in English Language and their chosen academic discipline. This resulted in a steadily increasing number of students from different countries entering a range of the University of Brighton’s undergraduate degree programmes. Therefore, the idea of an internationalised curriculum, whereby all students are supported to benefit fully from the significant intercultural learning opportunities available to them, became even more relevant as staff across the university were compelled to engage with a changing student cohort.

With this context in mind, a team based in the Faculty of Arts at the university began developing a co-ordinated approach to staff development in this area, building on strengths and redressing weaknesses. Following some initial workshops and awareness-raising events, the team extended to include colleagues from across the university. We gained initial support and then funding from the HEA through a Strategic Enhancement Programme in Internationalisation. We had seen that, while levels of awareness of issues and theories relating to internationalisation of the curriculum vary widely, even those academic staff with high levels of international experience are often uncertain as to how to implement effective changes to learning and teaching. Thus, we set out to create a toolkit to embrace diversity and facilitate cultural understanding within programme teams and class groups. Our initiative sought to bring a greater appreciation of the value of curriculum internationalisation to the university in order to meet policy ambition; deliver cultural change; and – primarily - bring about more effective learning and teaching for all.

The toolkit rationale

Our rationale for the toolkit’s design was that actively enabling and facilitating staff in intercultural engagement with their own students can promote meaningful reflection, leading to attitudinal change and creative growth. As Leask (2015) argues, ‘internationalisation of the curriculum is situated at the intersection of policy and practice in universities’ (p 3), and ‘a critical part of the [...] process involves critiquing the dominant paradigms on which the content and pedagogy of curriculum are based’ (p 105). The toolkit thus consists of a series of reflective exercises to support academic staff from different disciplines to work with their students and with one another to
assess their existing practice and promote intercultural engagement in the curricu-

um. Following Killick (2015), we believe that:

‘Significant change is rarely a painless process; it involves stepping outside the
ready-to-hand and can threaten our identities. Significant learning extends beyond
competencies into values, attitudes, and notions of self-efficacy to constitute ways
of being just as much for academic staff as it does for students’ (p 177).

In recognition of the sometimes ‘threatening’ nature of this work, we chose to
present the toolkit as a series of small, practically-focused exercises that can be
used flexibly as an organised programme of change, or engaged with in response
to particular issues. In this, we recognised the very varied existing levels of staff en-
gagement. The ‘toolkit style’ design, with exercises on each of six key themes, and a
self-evaluation task for each theme, is designed to encourage reflection on wider is-
sues by facilitating small-scale engagement in the first instance.

As Leask (2003) describes, research shows that effective intercultural learning for
students depends on the values, commitment and culture of the whole university,
whereby we all become intercultural learners. Such cultural change, she concludes,
needs to be addressed through ‘strategically planned professional development and
student services for all students and staff’ (p 7). Language learning can also have a
role (Harbon and Moloney 2015). However, what we certainly cannot assume is that
intercultural learning will occur simply as a result of intercultural contact (Volet and

An active and willing engagement with other cultures that is founded on an under-
standing of one’s own cultural position is an essential attribute for staff responsible
for facilitating learning in culturally diverse groups. Genuine intercultural engage-
ment, the ability to operate with social and professional competence across different
cultures, undermines perceptions of culturally different behaviour as ‘problematic’.
Research highlights a number of examples of this. Leask (2009) has argued that
plagiarism needs to be understood as an ‘intercultural encounter’ rather than a prob-
inclusive affordance networks’ that are important to student retention needs to start
from an appreciation of ‘students life-worlds’ rather than modifying existing struc-
tures. Ryan and Viete (2009), highlight the need for ‘respectful interactions’ between
students of different cultures predicated on a rejection of normative assumptions
which are based on native speakers.

Much of the literature on curriculum internationalisation explores what needs to
happen to enable effective learning. However, while Carroll and Ryan (2005) provide
plenty of practical guidance, the imperatives elsewhere in the literature are not usu-
ally matched by practical resources (Caruana and Spurling 2007). As Carroll and Ryan
argue, creating positive conditions for international students’ learning means ad-
dressing difficulties experienced by all students. Therefore, improving intercultural en-
gagement can be expected to improve the student learning experience more widely.

A values-based approach drawing on equity and openness to internationalisation is
essential to the long-term effectiveness of the learning and teaching environment for
all students, but particularly for those whose educational background is embedded in a culture that is radically different to that of their university environment. The team felt that producing an interactive toolkit with a focused approach to intercultural engagement would have the following benefits:

- Providing an ‘entry point’ for staff to engage with deep, attitudinal aspects of intercultural engagement through an initial assessment and then offering practically useful approaches to teaching diverse groups
- Encouraging the embedding of the values and practice of intercultural engagement in day-to-day learning and teaching activities, and programme structures
- Presenting challenges, sometimes radically destabilising ones, to preconceived assumptions and ideas through an initial critical reflection on academic practice just as genuine engagement with other cultural perspectives makes teaching more effective (cf. Carroll and Ryan above), so it can only enrich intellectual projects and processes.

**Methodology**

The methodology used for this project was robust with a consultation conducted across two campuses and from student and staff representations originating from arts, social sciences, health, education and humanities disciplines. Reflecting this, our project team included staff working across different geographical areas, as well as different epistemological paradigms – a fact, which was in some respects challenging, yet also added richness to the discussion. The team was further enhanced by the appointment of an independent specialist who offered a perspective on both data collection and analysis that was more cross-disciplinary and external to university structures.

Because the toolkit is intended both to be adapted to meet internal needs and shared more widely across the sector, our consultation across different disciplines ensured that the toolkit was flexible enough to meet the needs of practice-based courses as well as those that are more theoretically orientated. Working across schools also allowed us to draw on activity within disciplines where the number of international students is relatively high and developmental pedagogical activity has already taken place. We complemented this with innovative work in the schools, where relatively little development has taken place to date. One of the key benefits of this was that it involved a number of related and mutually supporting initiatives working together across disciplines to facilitate a more internationalised culture across the university.

We held four focus groups with staff and students from the range of disciplines listed above, between March and June 2015. All participation was voluntary and participants were drawn from a mixture of UK and other national backgrounds. The data from these focus groups was triangulated with data gathered from one-to-one interviews with academic staff from five schools, and thematically analysed. Focus groups and interviews were framed by a common set of questions agreed by the team. The questions structured discussions enough to ensure that they were similar
in scope, and were split into three sections: intercultural awareness (including how staff and students saw their own cultural self-awareness and how they thought their learning and teaching developed it); intercultural awareness in practice (focusing on the participants’ experiences of specific aspects of learning and teaching, including writing, group work, discussion, and using different cultural perspectives); and global citizenship (including what it might mean, whether participants felt it relevant to their disciplines, and whether their concept of it was reflected in their own learning and/or teaching). Global citizenship was chosen because it was a term used in university policy and strategy documents, but the team felt that it was not consistently defined, interpreted or valued.

The student focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed, and extensive notes were taken during the one-to-one staff interviews. All of this research was conducted by members of the project team, who subsequently met to discuss the transcripts and interview notes, share their perspectives, and identify the main themes that emerged. A team member then wrote up a summary of the discussion outcomes, which was circulated and further amended in the light of team feedback.

Research findings and toolkit overview

Both the staff interviews and the student focus groups revealed confused and diverse interpretations of terms such as ‘global citizenship’ and ‘intercultural education’. This was further compounded by a lack of understanding of intercultural competence amongst some participants. There was a call from participants to challenge current curricula to acknowledge different cultures and shift from a Eurocentric focus. However, despite this, there was no clear or consistent vision of what an internationalised curriculum should be. Both staff and student responses indicated that whilst diversity was acknowledged, it was not fully integrated into teaching and learning practices. Students saw ‘global citizenship’ as aspirational, and linked to respect for others. Yet where home students used the word ‘culture’ it was invariably in the context of other, different cultures, in contrast to the awareness of their own cultural norms and expectations shown by the international students we spoke to.

The six key themes we identified are listed below, with a brief summary of the reflective resources we created for the toolkit, in response to them:

- **Intercultural dialogue**: The toolkit includes resources to facilitate classroom and course team discussion of, and reflection on, cultural differences, including recognising how different cultural assumptions affect learning and teaching.

- **Global citizenship**: The toolkit has taken this term as a deliberately problematic starting-point for course teams and students to consider the values basis of any curriculum internationalisation initiative.

- **Positioning of the academic**: The toolkit contains tools to encourage staff and students to reflect on the challenge to the idea of ‘academic as expert’ presented by a culturally diverse student cohort; and how responding to such challenges creatively at undergraduate and postgraduate levels should ultimately benefit learning and teaching.
- **Design of curricula and assessment**: Tools in this section support academics to take an overview of modules and programmes; and to assess how well they (might be changed to) address the needs and interests of students from different cultural backgrounds.

- **International exchange and collaboration**: The toolkit provides simple frameworks to encourage staff reflection on how such collaborations may be better valued so that they are properly integrated with learning objectives and the curriculum.

- **Communications**: The focus of this section is on the need for any curriculum internationalisation initiatives to be well understood and communicated to, and between, students and academic staff.

The project’s early findings, including a discussion of these themes, were shared at the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) conference on Internationalising the Curriculum, held in Manchester during May 2015. Comments and feedback from this greatly supported the development of the toolkit, and confirmed its relevance beyond the University of Brighton. However, time restrictions placed by the funding body limited how much we could implement all the suggestions. The March to July timescale meant that, by the time the research and consultation process was completed, and a full draft was ready, teaching had finished. Therefore there were no opportunities to pilot it effectively with staff and students in authentic teaching situations.

In the light of this constraint, we reviewed the resource with colleagues within the University of Brighton and shared it more widely with a group of volunteers from the SEDA community. Feedback from the latter was in tune with our own thinking that, although we drew on the literature of curriculum internationalisation throughout the process, and members of the team were well-informed in the areas of curriculum internationalisation and intercultural communication, additional time was needed to situate these practice-based resources in the context of key research evidence. One of the primary benefits of this would be to provide an additional impetus for staff to engage with the resources (Schofield 2015). In addition, it was clear to all of us that a timescale of a full academic cycle would ensure adequate time for the rigorous process of piloting, review, and revision that we all saw as key to maximising the toolkit’s efficacy.

**Conclusion and looking forward**

The toolkit is now being used internally at the University of Brighton. The Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLT), which has responsibility for developing pedagogy and practice, and has also been involved in developing the resources, has already made it the focus of a CLT staff away day. The aim of this was to ensure that it will inform all curriculum development across the university. Ensuring wider engagement will depend on a person or a team leading, supporting and assisting the academics who use it, and this leadership will need to be based centrally in the CLT. The toolkit has already been incorporated into ongoing work in the College of Arts of Humanities.
and distributed across the Kaplan network where it will hopefully be adopted by colleges beyond UBIC.

The team behind the toolkit is aiming to ensure continued leadership and co-ordination internally, as the toolkit is finally piloted in the context of authentic learning and teaching. Externally, the toolkit was made available on the HEA’s website in early 2016 (https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resource/strategic-enhancement-programme-internationalising-curriculum-toolkit). However, due to the funding body’s recently altered priorities, it is at best uncertain whether they will provide a platform for further development. The core team is currently considering opportunities to revisit and complete the project by incorporating learning and feedback from its piloting as described above. We also wish to embed the resources more explicitly and systematically in the pedagogical literature. In the meantime, the toolkit will be accessible to academic staff at all UK institutions via the HEA, and we welcome feedback from users that might shape its future development.

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**Acknowledgements**


**Biographies**

**Dr Mark Dunford** is an Associate Dean in School of Arts and Digital Industries at the University of East London. From 2012-16, he was the Academic Quality and Partnership Director in the College of Arts and Humanities at the University of Brighton. He is also an active researcher and led both the Pan European Silver Stories (2013-15) and Story A (2015-16) projects. He was the primary contact at the University of Brighton for the HEA’s Strategic Enhancement Programme exploring the Internationalisation of the Curriculum.

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How to make thinking visible in doctoral theses: practical implications

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Abstract

‘Thinking is pretty much invisible . . . mostly, thinking happens under the hood, within the marvellous engine of our mindbrain’ (Perkins 2003), so how can candidates be assisted to make their thinking visible and explicit in their writing?

Quality in research is to be recognised and applauded for its conceptualisation and high level thinking. This thinking must be visible in the text of the thesis so that experienced researchers, supervisors and examiners can acknowledge the scholarship of the thesis. This article will illustrate how to approach research in a scholarly manner moving from the descriptive to the conceptual by considering critical factors that represent the high quality that doctoral research should demonstrate (Trafford and Leshem 2008). It will show how candidates can raise their level of thinking and exhibit in their thesis that they are ‘thinking like researchers’. It will provide strategies for candidates to adopt in writing and defending their thesis by making thinking visible in the thesis and later in their defence.

Making thinking visible: the theory

The doctoral degree is the highest academic qualification a university can award (QAA 2011; Tinkler and Jackson 2004; Trafford and Leshem 2008). There are regulatory procedures that each university provides that outline the nature of the award. Examiners of doctoral theses approach their task of reading and assessing the worthiness of a doctorate differently though. Some examiners see doctoral research as ‘an intellectual process rooted in the confident handling of theory’, others emphasise ‘the technical task involving data collection, analysis and interpretation, plus writing’ (Pearce 2005: 25). However, there are generic features of ‘the doctorate’ that transcend the individual university or examiner, and examiners use similar indicators to assess scholarly merit in a thesis. When these indicators are met, they constitute doctorateness, which is what examiners look for in theses (Trafford and Leshem 2008).

The journey to gaining a doctorate is intellectually demanding. It represents a high level of thinking about the scholarly nature of the degree. To achieve this, it is necessary to appreciate the connection between thinking about the research process on
a conceptual level, doing research which entails different levels of thinking at each stage, writing the thesis and defending it in the viva. Considering that ‘Thinking is pretty much invisible and that ‘mostly, thinking happens under the hood, within the marvellous engine of our mindbrain’ (Perkins 2003), it must be made visible in the text so that readers can acknowledge the scholarship of the thesis.

Dunleavy observed that writing with readers in mind will hugely help the quality of the text and feed into the development of scholarly thought (Dunleavy 2003). He argues that the act of writing may often be constitutive of one’s thinking. Murray (2006) supports this view, suggesting that thesis writers should see themselves as assisting readers, ‘by way of persuading them to see the value of their work’ (p 61). The writer has to provide a clear pathway through the thesis for the reader to recognise coherence. In the same vein, Phillips and Pugh (2000) indicate that writers are aiming to impart information and knowledge that they have to others who might not yet have it, and this means that assumptions have to be made explicit and ideas expressed clearly. The thinking that links ideas or emerges from assumptions has to be unambiguously translated into the written language.

However, taking into consideration that ‘thinking does not happen in a lockstep sequential manner, but is much messier, complex dynamic and interconnected, making its coherence visible, is quite challenging (Ritchart, Church and Morrison 2011). This paper will illustrate how to approach research in a scholarly manner moving from the descriptive to the conceptual by considering critical factors that represent the high quality that doctoral research should demonstrate. It will show how candidates can raise their level of thinking and exhibit in their thesis that they are ‘thinking like researchers’ and demonstrating a conceptual grasp of research. It will provide strategies for candidates to adopt in writing and defending their thesis by demonstrating doctorateness and making thinking visible in the thesis and later in their defence.

**Doctorateness as a framework for thinking**

So, what do examiners look for in a thesis? How will they determine the worthiness of the thesis? How can you make the text of the thesis clear in terms of the argument? Where are the signposts in the text that will help the reader not to overlook key aspects of the argument? Candidates should consider these questions right at the outset of the doctoral journey, so that they can be addressed in the thesis for examiners to appreciate when they read the thesis and later in the defence in the viva.

Research into examiners’ questions (Winter, Griffiths and Green 2000; Trafford and Leshem 2008) has shown that there is a pattern of consistency in examiners’ questions across disciplines, and they focus on the following criteria:

1. Does the thesis represent a level of scholarship which makes an original contribution to knowledge?
2. Does the thesis show that the candidate has a sound understanding and appropriate working knowledge of research?
3. Does the thesis display a critical stance towards the sources that have been used and the concepts that have been developed?
4 Does the thesis contain a clearly expressed purpose and provide conclusions that relate to that purpose?

5 Does the presentation of the thesis comply with university regulations?

These questions can be divided into two distinctive categories: innovation and development and scholarship and interpretation. These categories indicate how the thesis exhibits innovative features of research design that use concepts in a developmental manner, and the scholarship and interpretations of ‘realities’ that are presented by the candidate (Trafford and Leshem 2002). These notions provide four areas of capability that the candidate has to demonstrate: A. technology of the thesis B. theoretical perspectives C. practice of research and D. doctorateness. All four areas are equally essential, they are interdependent and yet, they are on an ascending level of conceptualisation. The highest level of scholarship is demonstrated in area D. If this is evident in the thesis, examiners will recognise that ‘... the doctoral thesis is a sophisticated, conceptually coherent and complex piece of research ...’ (Trafford and Leshem 2008: 36) and that the candidate is thinking like a researcher ‘within a system of ideas or way of understanding’ (Perkins 2006: 42). The confident choice and use of research approaches, by making explicit the linkages between key components in the research process in such a way that others instantly recognise and accept its scholarly merit, shows that the candidate is exhibiting episteme and has the capability to apply their understanding in appropriate ways.

So, what are the features of doctorateness? Doctorateness is a pluralistic concept which combines theory and practice, doing and achieving a doctorate. It is a jigsaw puzzle which includes critical components that should be interdependent. Only when the relationship between the components and their interdependence is explicit and apparent is high quality and scholarship displayed. Thus, inherent in doctorateness is the notion of synergy. It represents the criteria for assessing a doctoral thesis; it accommodates expectations of ‘the product’ and ‘the process’ and its generic features apply across the disciplines (Trafford and Leshem 2008).

How is synergy created? Practical implications

Where are the links? What are the relationships and the interdependence that create the synergy in the thesis? Showing linkages, theorising and synthesising are quite a challenge for candidates (Wisker 2008). I will present just a few examples of generic features of doctorateness which are ‘the glue that welds the model together’ (Whetten 1989: 491).

Doctoral research goes beyond just being a descriptive study and operates at a deeper level that seeks understanding at the forefront of the discipline. Thus, the thesis is examined to ensure that it contains an intellectual appreciation of the conceptual and theoretical basis of the research discipline (Finn 2005). This accords with the claim of Trafford and Leshem (2008) that examiners want to know more about the Why and How than the What or Who issues. The Why and How explain and the What and Who describe. Candidates must explain how links between different components of the research process justify why the research is coherent. This can be facilitated by having a bigger picture, or a mental view of the research right at the start of your jour-
ney and think about the research process as a combination of the essential factors of doctoral research. It is claimed that visualisation can depict critical thinking, communicate abstract ideas effectively, display integration of different parts in the thesis and thus demonstrate doctorateness (Ibid; Barrett and Hussey 2015). Let’s look at two models which illustrate understanding of doctoral research as a process:

![Visual map of the doctoral process](image)

**Model 1: Visual map of the doctoral process**  
(based on Trafford and Lesham 2008: 15)

This model is a visual picture of the research process. The arrows illustrate the dynamic nature of the process. Although the process is not a linear one, the stages hold true and it forces you to think about research as an interdependent process. It shows how your research is surrounded by your research context, which helps you to identify a gap in knowledge. You will need to explain how you identified the gap and why there is a gap. As you might realise, these are explanations on an abstract level rather than on a descriptive one. All the other stages lead to a contribution to knowledge related, of course, to the gap in knowledge. This whole journey takes place within the contextual boundaries of your research that you had defined.

A similar model that also shows the research as a process of linked decisions is illustrated in model 2 (over). This model portrays the sequence of decisions you have to make in explaining the choice of your research strategy. These decisions are interrelated and show different levels of thinking about your research design that have to be explained explicitly. The choices of paradigms have strategic importance as they affect the choices in the subsequent levels. For example, having to define the paradigm through which you see your research topic has philosophical, methodological and practical implications. Whether you are testing theory or developing theory will determine the methodological approach and investigatory approaches (Trafford and Leshem 2008). Explaining the links between these components, justifying the why’s and the how’s and showing how they all coordinate and build a solid research design, exemplify scholarly thinking.
Model 2: Research design as linked decisions
(from Trafford and Lesham 2008: 15)

The centrality of Conceptual frameworks

Leshem and Trafford (2007) highlight the ‘gluing’ function of the Conceptual frameworks (CF) and conclude that it is ‘... giving coherence through providing traceable connections between theoretical perspectives, research strategy and design, fieldwork and the conceptual significance of evidence’ (p 99). They further explain that by melding the CF explicitly within the thesis doctoral candidates can display scholarly maturity. This is supported by Ravitch and Reagan (2012) who claim that the conceptual framework is the connective tissue of solid research and that. A ‘well-conceived and articulated conceptual framework allows for the deep conceptualization of linkages between various aspects of our lives and our work; it guides us in our exploration of crosscurrents in our approach to the research and through the implementation of the research itself’ (p 158). Thus, conceptual frameworks have a critical role in doctoral research and also in examination processes. They introduce order and cohesion both in the thinking and writing process (Leshem 2013) and they function as signposts that run through the thesis as a conceptual thread to show interconnectedness.

Model 3: the Centrality of Conceptual frameworks
(from Trafford and Lesham 2008: 15)
Model 3 exemplifies the centrality of the Conceptual framework. Special attention should be given to the arrows between components. Being able to convert the arrows into words and articulate the reason, or rationale for the research as well as supporting intellectual methodological rigor (Ravitch and Regan 2012) demonstrates high level research and makes your thinking visible through the text.

Contribution to knowledge: where is the evidence?

Doctoral thesis should make an original contribution to knowledge. In the introductory chapter the thesis will usually clarify the gap in knowledge as an intention and then in the conclusions chapter the candidate will have to convince the reader that the gap or ‘niche in established knowledge’ (Bunton 2002; 2013) has been filled, by explaining how the outcomes of the research can be viewed as a contribution to knowledge. Swales (2005) quoting Bunton (1998:185) claims that dissertations sometimes may lack a certain explicitness with regard to the role and innovative character of the writer’s own research, however, this may not reflect rhetorical weakness but rather assume objectivity. After all, not all doctoral students believe in their hearts that their dissertations are really making a substantial and original contribution to their field. In a study of a 100 theses from three different countries that investigated how candidates claimed to have made an original contribution to knowledge, the evidence showed that the contribution to knowledge was not adequately explained in 46 per cent of theses (Trafford, Leshem and Bitzer 2014). Trafford and Leshem assert that omitting to explain why the research contributes to knowledge will not display doctorateness (2008: 189). Thus the conclusions chapter serves quite a critical role in determining examiners’ last impressions and ‘establishes the importance of the researched work’ (Wisker 2005: 291-292). They expect the chapter to present an unambiguous justification for your claim to have made a contribution to knowledge. Model 4 (above) helps us answer the question does the text in the conclusions chapter demonstrates a contribution to knowledge?
The model illustrates how you can link between the gap in knowledge and the contribution to knowledge by auditing the conceptual assumptions. In the introductory chapter of the thesis you should have presented features that explain what your research is all about. You could have used one or perhaps two of the seven generic features. You will realise that the description of your research topic using these features is on a conceptual level rather than on a descriptive one. Each feature establishes the boundaries of research and displays its uniqueness:

1. Application of conventional research instruments in new fields of investigation
2. Combining disparate concepts in new ways to investigate a conventional issue
3. Creating new understandings of existing/emerging issues
4. Design and application of new field instruments in a contemporary setting
5. Extending the work of others through a replication of their original methodology
6. Identification of new and emerging issues worthy of investigation and explanation
7. Originality in using the work of others

In the conclusions chapter, as indicated in the model, you remind the reader of how your research contributed to knowledge by using the notions implied in the seven generic features. This is reinforcement, and also closes the circle by linking the start of your research with the conclusions. For examiners this is a reflection of high level thinking and scholarship.

**Concluding words**

‘Doctoral writing is thinking. We write to work out what we think’ (Kamler and Thomson 2006: 4). Kamler and Thomson further explain that if the goal of research is to make sense of the data we have produced and to theorise it in order to develop understanding, then writing the research is central to the process of inquiry itself. However, Tishman and Perkins argue that to make ‘what we think’ visible we have to use ‘the language of thinking’ (Tishman and Perkins 1997). In our case of doctoral theses, Using the language of thinking implies that when examiners read your thesis they can immediately recognise that it demonstrates doctorateness and that you are thinking like a researcher.

**Bibliography**


Professor Shosh Leshem


**Biography**

**Shosh Leshem** is a Professor in Education at Oranim Academic College of Education in Israel. She was a visiting lecturer at Anglia Ruskin University in the UK for six years where she conducted workshops for doctoral candidates, supervisors and examiners. She is the co-author (with Trafford) of the book *Stepping Stones to Achieving Your Doctorate*, Open University Press, 2008. Her research and publications focus on issues in teacher education and doctoral education. She is currently a visiting professor and research associate at Stellenbosch University, South Africa.
Moving on, moving up: challenges of moving from a foundation degree to a university top up degree

RACHAEL CARDEN, BRIGHTON BUSINESS SCHOOL

Abstract

Personal experience of academic and pastoral leadership on the Foundation degree in Business at City College Brighton and Hove (a further education college) and current teaching at the Brighton Business School at the University of Brighton suggests that the shift from FdA Business to BSc Business (Top up) in a different institution is challenging. This small scale case study investigates the academic, personal and social transitional and induction experiences of two groups of these articulating students. The research objectives: the analysis and evaluation by the learners of the practices and processes of the two institutions with a view to developing potential improvements of transition for future learners.

Introduction

There are currently 161 education providers in England alone offering a total of 2,658 foundation degree courses. Of these, 165 are foundation degrees in Business or Business related subjects. Given that the majority of foundation degree students appear to want to undertake a top up course of some sort in order to convert their foundation degree courses into full degrees, this represents large numbers of students and significant resource needs nationally. There are 15 top up courses currently on offer at the University of Brighton including BSc Business (Top Up) at Brighton Business School (BBS) which is the location for this project (UCAS 2015).

Year on year, increasing numbers of learners are making the academic and personal journey from two year foundation degree courses (often delivered at traditional further education colleges (FECs) to undertake a final year of study in order to achieve a full BA/BSc award. These are often delivered at a university. This physical articulation presents two main areas of challenge for these groups of learners: academic (including changes of level; academic rigour; academic writing demands; requirements for more autonomous work) and personal (social aspects of adjustment, senses of belonging to the institution and the cohort and engagement).
What is meant by transition? It can be viewed simply as the physical relocation from one educational institution to another, or a more complex journey of personal and academic development predicated on the ending of one course in one institution and the study of another course in a different institution. The range of activities and processes used by these institutions to manage and support these transitional experiences can be critically evaluated by the learners themselves and key members of staff.

Some key questions emerge from literature searches around these transitional processes: When should the transitional support begin? When should it end? Who should be responsible? Are front loaded induction programmes enough, or should there be ongoing transitional support processes throughout the second year of the foundation degree and the top up year?

This paper details an investigation into what the learners in this particular case study think about their academic and personal transition. Critical evaluation of current methodologies is also undertaken.

**Transition literature**

The majority of literature on higher education transition focuses on first year undergraduates on traditional BA/BSc courses. Green (2007) investigated the mismatch between student pre-arrival perceptions of higher education level study and their actual experience of it, by focusing on the differences in institutional habituses (or values, habits and customs) between sixth form colleges and higher education level institutions. Krause and Coates (2008) considered that the perceptual gap between expectation and experience may have significant impact upon learner engagement (and eventual success).

However, research continues to indicate that direct entrants (for example, from HND/HNC and FD courses) to third year programmes are much more likely to have additional challenges compared to traditional first year students (Fotheringham and Alder 2012; Kivlichan and Chrinside 2011). Increasing interest has therefore been paid to the general transition issues of these non-traditional students, including a dedicated research and resource area initiated by the Higher Education Authority (HEA).

Penketh and Goddard (2008) interviewed groups of learners progressing from FdA study onto top up degree courses through a collection of learner narratives. These indicated marked differences between learners, who may have either an ‘aspirational narrative’ i.e. that they are studying at a level above their original expectations, or a ‘beset by trials’ narrative, whereby they perceive the progression and study experience as a series of trials which need to be overcome. This narrative approach could be explored further at the Brighton Business School.

Other transitional research into the target area roughly splits between the two key issues which have formed the focus of this case study i.e. academic transition and personal transition. When considering learners moving from one institution to another, Webster and Yang (2011) make an interesting distinction between academic transition (i.e. the process of experiencing a different type of learning) and academic induction (i.e. the process of integration into the academic disciplines). Both aspects
were investigated in this case study, where transition refers to methodologies designed to support the articulation from one course and institution to another, and induction refers to methodologies designed to inculcate the habitus and cultural and academic expectations of the new institution and course.

**Academic transition: experiencing a different type of learning**

Burkhill, Dyer and Stone (2009) examined pedagogic practices in FECs where higher education level courses are delivered. Findings indicated that further education based teachers prefer student-based teaching pedagogies such as classroom based activities rather than teacher focused methods such as lectures. Perhaps this explains why Reay (2002) had found that higher education learners had difficulties acclimatising to an unfamiliar academic culture, and that Greenbank’s study of progressing FdA students in 2007 unearthed issues around the challenges of adjusting to different methods of teaching and learning.

Issues around adjustment to the demands of moving up a level of academic study, especially when joining an existing cohort, have been found by Krause and Coates (2008). Such issues include learner ‘presage’ (or what they bring with them from their previous study and life experiences). Top up students appear to be desirous that their lecturers have some awareness of their prior learning (Bingham and O’Hara (2007) cited in Fotheringham and Alder 2012). Pike and Harrison (2011) concur, recommending that university teaching teams should be aware of new entrants in their classes and of their needs.

**Academic induction: integration into the academic disciplines**

Economic perspectives require us to consider resource issues and retention. Yorke (1999) states that the transition into expectations and requirements of higher level study must be managed well to avoid problems of retention. A philosophy echoed by the Select Committee of Education and Employment (2001) who ‘stated that the support at the beginning of a student’s academic career is critical to their success’.

In an HEA funded study, Harvey, Drew and Smith (2006) focused on the importance of effective induction programmes to engender learning communities, recommending that they be at least three weeks’ long and carefully linked to a programme of study.

When Gordon et al (2011) investigated preparedness for and levels of support needed by students onto a social work degree at advanced entry level in Scotland, they found that while study skills from previous courses prepared them well, they also had life skills and work experience which added value to their experience of learning and enhanced learner resilience. However, in order to facilitate this resilience other support systems were required, namely: knowledgeable and sympathetic tutors, good quality induction and support materials, and support from family and friends.

**Personal transition**

Personal transition has been shown to include challenges around social aspects and engagement with induction processes (Harvey et al 2006). These challenges include: integrating into an existing cohort of students (Fotheringham and Alder 2012); social
issues such as making new contacts (Green 2007), changes in personal identity and feelings of ‘self’ (ontological factors) and difficulties when accessing support (Goddard and Penketh 2009; Krause and Coates 2008).

Cree et al put forward the view that some top up students experience feelings of dislocation and loss (in Fotheringham 2009) due to problems of adjustment to degree level study. This is often due to the dislocation caused by being a successful learner in a small cohort, to becoming an average (or lower achieving) student in a much larger one. Also, there is a tendency towards anonymity in a larger institution which is not present in the smaller closed FdA groups. This appears to be especially marked in first generation degree students (such as many top-up students). Cree et al (2009) suggest that these first generation and non-traditional students enjoy hearing about experiences (through podcasts) of similar students who have undertaken this articulation.

Research methodology

Case study action research was undertaken in order to evaluate current transitional support processes from learner and staff perspectives. The results will be used to inform future practice for the academic year 2015-16.

Data collection took the form of interviews and questionnaires at both City College Brighton and Hove and the Brighton Business School, in order to evaluate the emphases placed on academic and personal transitional preparation and support processes in both institutions. Key staff members were asked to consider which methods and approaches had been chosen to support learners at different stages of transition, including pre-application support during the foundation degree, induction support and ongoing course length support.

There was a target group of 31 current top up students at the University of Brighton and 15 prospective top up students at FECs. These students were divided into two groups: current top up students at the University of Brighton (hereafter referred to as current students) who would evaluate the transitional challenges and support processes of moving from an FEC to the University of Brighton in the academic year 2014-15, and prospective top up students (hereafter referred to as prospective students) who are currently at FECs, in order to assess their concerns about future academic and personal transition to the university.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected through the use of online surveys. Likert scale questions were used initially to scope general perceptions of the successes of current processes; open questions invited more personalised qualitative responses which allowed the students to write freely about their own opinions.

Methodologies used to support transitions

While there is necessarily a blurring between support mechanisms aimed at transition support and induction support, the majority of support methods/strategies (necessarily perhaps) focus on induction programmes at the beginning of the new course. My findings tend to indicate that transitional support is actually needed much earlier in an FdA/Top Up student’s articulation trajectory in order to be effective.
Pre-application support processes for transition at City College Brighton and Hove

There are a variety of induction style activities during the first year of the FdA Business programme which highlight the possibility of moving to a top up after completion of the course, such as identification of progression strategies, published literature containing testimonials of ex-students who have successfully achieved a BSc Business and possible progression routes. There is very little in the way of formal monitoring of the effectiveness of these strategies.

During the second year of the programme, there is an emphasis on academic transition through overt clarification of expectations of course work grade bands. Currently there is a requirement for learners to achieve a merit level profile in order to progress to the top up. Study skills type training takes the form of consideration of ethical issues in research, workshops in academic writing, time management strategies and comprehensive formative feedback and feed-forward on assessment tasks.

Cohort sizes are typically small on the FdA (between 10 and 20 students) and teaching methodologies, as discussed above, are largely student focused. The majority of lecturers on foundation degree courses at the target FEI are not experienced lecturers in a university context and consequently, guidance about requirements for the third year course relies upon paper work and support from partners at partner colleges and University of Brighton partner staff. Recent liaison with the Top up course leader including visits to City College Brighton and Hove and the University of Brighton, with tours of the premises and opportunities to talk to current students have been seen as extremely useful by the current cohort of top up students.

Very little attention has been paid to personal and social transition at City College until recently. However, improvements have been with open days, and as above, visits from the course leader and ex-City College students on the top up course.

What current methods are used to support transition onto the Top-up at the University of Brighton?

Naturally, the main focus at the university is induction onto the Top up programme. The rationale underpinning the induction activities is to encourage individual exploration and challenges from day one in a safe and supportive (i.e. non-judgmental) environment. This increases collegiate feeling in the group which is further developed through ongoing support mechanisms.

There are two main support mechanisms in place: a formal pre-course induction programme and a year-long modular and tutorial support. In line with the focus of this study, these transitional support methodologies have been divided between those which support academic transition, those which support personal transition and those which support both.

Academic induction methods

There are several academic reading and writing activities utilised during the induction programme, including: speed reading academic articles, then working in groups to map these articles onto core course modules; online research into elective choices
plus help with selection strategies, a library familiarisation trip; an Internet Detective
online tutorial for familiarisation with computer room facilities; academic reading
tasks based around retrieval of relevant journal articles and exercises in summary
writing and group working. Individual academic tutorials are available throughout the
year with both personal and module tutors. One particular module (ML311) is de-
dsigned to develop both academic and professional skills. Additionally, there is a Top
up Research and Careers Club.

Personal induction methods
There are many formal and informal mechanisms for learners to access personal sup-
port, including: introductions to key members of staff; careers talks introducing em-
ploymability framework and careers advice, drop in centres and timetabled tutorials.

Methods which support academic and personal transition
Initial group activities include icebreakers with a focus on academic skills and exper-
tise. There are also personal visits by key staff including the Students’ Union, library
staff and ex alumni. Additionally, online methods comprise a ‘New Student Area’ on
studentcentral and a BBS Facebook page, which is run by online student ambas-
sadors. However, there are issues around access to these which is echoed in other
transition studies.

Tutorial support is extensive and takes the form of drop-in sessions during office
hours and on request during semester two.

Induction methods designed to enhance early group cohesion include team activi-
ties such as a NASA team task, which encourages individual reflection on team roles;
designing a campus quiz for freshers; a Strategy day including all learners (with the
lead tutor) which is a fun and challenging introduction to a core subject, and design-
ing a group quiz with support from the Students’ Union officer.

Student voices
Out of a cohort of 15 current FdA students, five said that they either did not intend to
undertake the Top up course or would pursue another course. Of the remaining ten
prospective top up students, seven responded to the survey (a response rate of 70
per cent). Ten current top up students responded to the survey from a cohort of 31 (a
32 per cent response rate).

Prospective students stated that ‘their college’ could support them better with
transition by:

- Helping to clarify the application process especially through the provision of
  honest guidance about whether/how they would meet the entry requirements
  of 60 per cent
- Liaison with the university about option choices and how to start preparing
  for these
- Providing more general information about the Top up year and giving some
  preparation about the way their work will be marked once on the course
They stated that the Business School could support them better by offering guided tours of the premises (which is on offer, but had not taken place at the time of the survey); offering a pre-first term induction (which is offered) and being open and approachable for guidance or general questions (which does take place).

In contrast, current students stated that the university could have supported them better with transition by providing some workshops around critical and analytical thinking; on writing reports and literature reviews and some training around time management. Furthermore, these students would like a focus on career prospects to take place at the start of the year rather than half way through, in order to help them choose the correct electives at the beginning of the course.

In terms of self-preparation, existing students said that they could have prepared themselves better for the Top up course by doing at least some research in relevant topics over the summer break; going on ‘a LOT of visits to the premises’ before the starting dates to accustom themselves with the facilities; researching critical analysis and practicing analytical and critical writing.

**Anticipated and experienced changes in teaching and learning**

The expectation and experience of the Top up degree being challenging was shared by both prospective and current top up students. While opinions of whether the prospective students expected the level of academic support to be the same in both FdA year two and the top up year were mixed, on average the current top up students said that there had been different levels of support in the two institutions. The expectation and experience of the Top up degree involving more independent work was shared by both prospective and current top up students.

However, while prospective students expect an increase in the amount of feedback from lecturers, they also listed the following reasons for not feeling academically prepared for the Top up degree:

- A bigger workload especially to achieve higher grades
- An increase in exam style assessment
- More academically challenging work
- Uncertainty about how the level of FdA work compares to that which would be expected in a university setting
- Lack of guidance about what the top up year would be like
- Uncertainty about whether/how they would meet the entry requirements of 60 per cent
- Not knowing how to choose specialist research areas
- Lack of confidence about the level of academic writing (especially reports)
- Lack of confidence about the changes in teaching and learning style due to different teaching methods
Requirements for more autonomous study

- Expectations of more background individual research into assessment tasks

Current students listed the following reasons for not having been academically prepared for the Top up degree:

- The extra studying and reading required being higher than expected
- Little experience of using academic journals
- Little experience of developing critical and reflective thinking skills
- Poor standard of essay writing, literature review skills
- Being in a large lecture theatre and trying to rapidly takes notes was difficult to begin with
- Being independent and working in much larger groups is seen to be intimidating by some
- Uncertainties about how to present their work

Personal and belonging

While all current students stated that they felt that they belonged to the university, and prospective learners expected to feel the same, the latter group listed the following reasons for not feeling personally prepared for the top up degree: lack of familiarity with the location and facilities and lack of understanding of the institutional practices of the university. Indeed several of the current students also showed a lack of awareness of these practices.

Transformational experiences

One current student concurred with the transformative nature of the course in that it had:

‘Helped me to be a rational and critical person which will probably benefit in my future career. What’s more, this had impact on me to develop interpersonal skills in managing conflicts when it comes to teamwork and allowed me to obtain self-discipline further, which gives me the opportunity to make a decision that is better aligned with my personal goals and values as well as attitude towards my study’.

Another stated that it had:

‘Allowed me to really develop my time management skills as I have had to juggle many assignments at the same time, and now I utilise this skill to make sure each assignment is completed to the best of my abilities’.

Prospective students appear to have expectations of personal and academic transformation including: acquiring a wider knowledge of business in practice; increased knowledge and learning during the course, which will in turn be transformative due to an increase in personal, academic and professional options in the future. One
learner stressed the importance of the opportunities to grow as a person as well as getting used to becoming a business person.

Challenges

Prospective learners anticipate difficulties around having a larger workload. This appears to be well founded given that all the current students said that the transition had been challenging due to harder assignments, and a ‘massive’ increase in the amount of reading involved; which was exacerbated by difficulties with procrastination and time-management. However, despite these challenges, all current learners stated that they had enjoyed the ‘Step up from the lesser workload of last year’.

Another two students were worried about class sizes. One stated that:

‘While I understand it will just be other top up students, it will be slightly bigger and therefore more daunting’.

Prospective students anticipated the following challenges: issues around family and work commitment which would, however, be matched with their determination to get a degree and a better job. One student stated that:

‘I also think it would make me appreciate the efforts and commitments put in together to be a graduate student. I hope to lead by example and learn from others’.

Prospective learners anticipate difficulties around spending more time studying outside of the university conflicting with existing family and work commitments. However, some current learners have enjoyed the experience of moving away from home and living independently for the first time; one said that now they had more independence and had enjoyed the challenge.

Current transition methods/strategies in place at other institutions

A literature search took place in order to investigate current thinking and practice around the area of academic and personal transition at higher education institutions. Emphasis was paid to differing pedagogic and digital methodologies currently in use to facilitate these transitions.

There are many and various methods currently being trialled in order to aid transition, induction and ultimately engagement and retention. For this study, any methods supplementary to those already mentioned have been divided into those that support academic transition, personal transition or both.

In light of Australian Federal initiatives aimed at widening participation, a large scale research project took place in and around the University of Wollongong in 2012. Bedford and O’Brien (2012) introduced a selection of methodologies aimed at academic transition which emphasise students’ engagement with formative assessments from induction tasks including: study and language skills workshops.

At the University of Southampton, Watson’s ideal of shared pedagogies (2010) states that induction activities should be multi-dimensional combining instruction, activity
and feedback (similar to many corporate online training courses). The University of Southampton, therefore, provide online access to 23 multimedia learning resources which conform to these shared pedagogies; in order to aid academic English for EFL students they offer short online pre-arrival courses (five weeks of English for Academic Purposes).

Methods aimed at personal transition include a ‘UStart programme’ at the University of Tasmania (UOW 2009) whereby second year learners set up and run orientation and induction programmes for new learners. Bedford and O’Brien (2012) adopted a similar policy with their ‘Staying Connected Project’, where second year students make phone contact with first years. This appears to have been very successful, whereas a Facebook page and other social media programmes have not. While this is clearly not possible face-to-face at Brighton, as the top up students would have left, perhaps this could be done online or as podcasts.

There are, of course, support methodologies which aid both academic and personal transition. In response to the Prime Minister’s Initiative (PMI 2011) the University of Southampton set up a ‘Prepare for Success’ (PfS website) which is a web-based transition tool for international students. They also offer a short bridging course in the form of an Orientation Week, with traditional induction practices, combined Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) with current second year students, and a helpdesk which is available for one hour per day for informal support (Watson 2010). The focus is on web-based and/or digital resources which include an online advice page with FAQs; video clips of other international students and integrated social media sites. However, with digital resources there appear to be access issues for new learners as these resources are often password protected or not open access, and therefore are not available to new learners until enrolment (often during induction weeks).

Similar initiatives have taken place at Bournemouth University. Thomas and Hanson (2014) focusing on supporting transition of widening participation and non-traditional students introduced a ‘GROW@BU’ initiative, emphasising social integration through a student engagement team (consisting of trained graduates with an interest in learning, teaching and coaching) and a support service. These individuals set up social activities such as bowling, quizzes and pub nights which were very successful in group cohesion.

Edward (2003) however, focused on an Activity Based Induction (ABI) which was based on Tinto’s (1993) transactional induction phase. This ABI programme introduced problem-based learning style induction activities, which included teaching staff, support staff and other new students. While these activities were socially very successful (but academically less so) there are many issues around resourcing programmes of this kind.

Conclusions

Transitional support has clear academic and personal impact on learning, engagement and retention (and therefore on economic resources). There is a clear desire amongst University of Brighton Top up students for some forms of transitional activities to take place earlier in their articulation process, especially in terms of
familiarisation of premises and institutional practices. During the early transitional phase, many of the concerns listed by prospective learners could be allayed through access to former student or current learner narratives, FAQs or similar. Once on the induction programme, activities should further emphasise academic and personal belonging through inculcation into institutional habitus, academic practices and culture. While many of these transactional and induction methodologies are currently heavily staff centred; increasing use of digital technologies, which have been trialled elsewhere, would lessen this burden. However, access to these resources is an issue which needs particular care and attention. Trials of discussion boards are currently being undertaken.

Bibliography


**Biography**

**Rachael Carden** has been delivering and managing higher education level courses in both further education and higher education institutions for the last 12 years. She is especially interested in ensuring parity of academic and personal higher education experience for learners in both environments. Previous research has been based around threshold concepts for academic progression to levels five and six for FdA level learners, and the impacts of using 'academic' terminology on the achievements of vocational FdA students. Her current research interests are based around investigating academic and personal transition from a further education to a higher education environment when undertaking a top up course in a university environment after completing an FdA course in an further education environment.
A year in the life of a student support and guidance tutor

Melanie Gill, School of Education

Abstract

2014-15 was my sixth year as Student Support and Guidance Tutor (SSGT) for the School of Education, part of a school-wide Student Engagement and Experience Lead role. The role focuses on offering individual one-to-one support and guidance, often related to academic needs but also to help students manage and enhance their general wellbeing. Data for the survey that follows was gathered using online questionnaires and feedback from follow up emails.

Most students’ issues are focused on stress and mental health, or learning support/dyslexia. I have had contact with 321 students this year (up to term end 13 June 15) which is 92 more than last year, but of those, 47 (14.6 per cent) were seen more than once, which resulted in 431 total individual contacts. Last year I recorded 266 contacts overall so there has been an increase of 165 contacts (62 per cent). Of the whole school population, I have had contact with 17.6 per cent of our students overall this year (321 of 1824) compared with 10 per cent last year. The number of students thinking of leaving or intermitting has increased by a quarter on last year. 18 per cent of survey respondents stated that they had considered withdrawal from their course, but had stayed on due to support from the SSGT. Another two gave similar feedback via emailed comments, implying that at least seven students had been retained who might otherwise have withdrawn. This has significant financial implications in the current climate.

Introduction

My research and findings focus on the continuing need for focused student support, not just from Student Services, but from personal and academic tutors and across higher education at all levels. This research provided an opportunity to consider and discuss the emerging trends and needs relating to student support, and to relate this to practice across the university at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

Key points of contact

The Student Support and Guidance (SSGT) role is split between offering individual one-to-one support and guidance, and facilitating voluntarily attended, cohort spe-
cific, group assignment support sessions. As in previous years, I did a short presenta-
dition during induction sessions for all new undergraduate and postgraduate, full and
part-time Year 1 students to introduce myself as the SSGT and leaflets were distrib-
uted to all students across all year groups. I have had contact with students from
16 School of Education courses across all year groups, including MA, Doctoral and
Troops to Teachers students. I also attended the School of Education Falmer Open
days, talking to prospective new students and their parents about the support avail-
able to our students.

I had contact with 321 different students this year (up until term end of 13 June 15)
which is 92 more than last year, but of those, 47 (14.6 per cent) were seen more
than once, which resulted in 431 total individual contacts. Last year I recorded 266
contacts overall so there has been an increase of 165 contacts, which is 62 per
cent. Of the whole school population I have had contact with 17.6 per cent of our stu-
dents overall this year (321 of 1824).

As last year, the number of students I have had contact with more than once has
again increased. Last year I had contact with 37 (16 per cent) more than once and
this year I have recorded 73 (23 per cent) return contacts between two and five
times. I still believe, as with last year, that there is an increasing trend of students
who present with complex and multiple issues.

I supported 145 (45 per cent) students in person (up 5 per cent on last year,) 18
(14 per cent) by phone (up 6 per cent on last year,) 223 (69 per cent) via email (up
14 per cent on last year,) and 14 (3 per cent) by Facebook (up 1 per cent on last
year), with 23 (7 per cent) students dealt with by someone other than myself (up 1
per cent from last year) and 20 (6 per cent) not responding to initial offers of support
or not turning up for appointments (up 2 per cent on last year). I also spoke on the
phone with two worried parents, as opposed to one last year (see figure 1 below).

![Figure 1: Type of contact with SSGT](image)

I record the gender of students I have contact with, and this data is broadly in line
with the gender balance of the School of Education, which for 2014-15 was 23 per
cent male and 77 per cent female students overall and I engaged with 19 per cent of males and 81 per cent of females this year.

Numbers of contacts across courses this year (see fig. 2 below) are broadly the same as previous years. It might have been expected that our younger, undergraduate, full-time students would require the most support, but over the years I have found this not to be the case. As last year, work-based, part-time, mature students face significant difficulties with home/work/study life balance and data shows that they may require more support than their younger, full-time contemporaries. (The high percentage of BA Supporting Learning 11-19 students accessing support is based on low overall cohort numbers, as I saw three out of a total of only five, and this was the first year of running this particular route).

Again, numbers for the full-time PGCE routes, particularly Primary, are also higher than might be expected, as these are students who already have experience of successfully studying at university and have an undergraduate degree. However, the one year, full-time route is very full-on and pressurised and causes similar stress and anxiety issues as those faced by the work-based, part-time, undergraduate students. Also, students who have done a first degree in a subject such as art or a science/maths subject have often not had the experience of writing reflective essays like those required of them on these programmes, and I find that numbers needing support with academic writing is high (as below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage from total course no.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BA (Hons) Primary Ed QTS</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA (Hons) KS 2/3 Ed QTS</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Year BA (Hons) Sec Ed QTS and SKE</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PGCE Primary (including GTP)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PGCE Secondary</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA (Hons) Education</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA (Hons) PSLD/EYPS</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cert Ed / PGCE Post Comp Ed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA (Hons) Youth Work/BA WWCYP</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA ECP/FdA EY</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA Supporting Learning (5-11)/FdA PSPE</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA Ed (UK)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA Supporting Learning (11-19)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Direct</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral students</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troops to teachers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2: Percentage of students accessing support from each course*
It might be expected that I would have much more contact with first years who are new to university, but although this is the case for some courses, for example, 2 Year BA; BA Education; Undergraduate Work-based learning (UGWBL), for others the picture across year groups is more evenly spread, for example, BA Primary; KS2/3; MA Ed.

Last year, most contacts from the PGCE secondary routes were from Maths and Design and Technology. This year the spread is more even, although maths and science are still the highest. Many of these students have Learning Support Plans (LSPs) for dyslexia and many people who excel in maths/science and creative subjects tend to have higher rates of dyslexia traits.

Although most students self-refer to me, last year saw a rise in those referred by someone else of 57 per cent. This year the trend has fallen back to 26 per cent and numbers self-referring have risen again to 74 per cent. Last year I attributed the increase in others referring, to more staff across the university being familiar with the SSGT role and knowing when to refer on. This year, there has been a university-wide campaign to publicise SSGTs with posters, leaflets and social media, which may account for the reversed trend. As in previous years, where the referral comes from someone else, it is most likely to be a member of the course team, for example, programme, route, year or module leader or support tutor. This year there were fewer referrals from Student Services (despite, or maybe due to, the new Student Information Desk (SID) system) and more from the School of Education programme assistants, administrators and staff in the Partnership Office, perhaps due to those members of staff becoming increasingly familiar with my role.

I also had telephone referrals from two very distraught parents this year, worried about the mental health and wellbeing of their children (our students).

I followed up 13 students where occupational health issues had been flagged, to suggest that a Learning Support Plan (LSP) might be beneficial and followed up 116 students issued with LSPs, which is 6 per cent of students from the school (the same percentage as last year.) Some of these students did not require any additional support but were pleased to have been contacted. Again, one new student required a Personal Evacuation and Egress Plan (PEEP) resulting in four in total across year groups throughout the school (see figure 3). Next year I will record the numbers of students who flag a disability on application as it will be useful to know how many of them go on to get LSPs when I email them in the summer before they start to advise them of the process.

![Figure 3: LSPs/OH notifications/PEEPS issued in the School of Education](image_url)
Most students’ issues are focused on stress and mental health, or learning support/dyslexia in line with last year (and the year before.) Again this year, I found that more students had multiple and/or more serious issues and needed repeat appointments/contact. Students thinking about leaving or intermitting have decreased by 50 per cent on last year (see fig 4). There is further discussion later in this report of students who thought about withdrawing and decided to stay on having engaged with me in my SSGT role.

In many cases I have been able to offer support and guidance myself, but for others it has been necessary to suggest referrals to Student Services or other members of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action taken by SSGT</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Referral to Personal Tutor/Route Leader/module tutor</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral to Course Leader/Year leader</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral to Careers Service</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral to Counselling Service</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral to Student Advice/Health and Finance</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral to Student Union</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral to Mental Wellbeing team/Disability and Dyslexia (including Mental Health team from 2013)</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral to GP</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Info given (student handbook, website, etc)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitigating circumstance</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation Office</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawn/transferred/intermitted</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reassurance/general advice given</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership Office</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emailed student to make contact and offer support</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ref to assignment support session or support given</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4: Student Issues
staff (see fig 5). It is worth noting that the numbers of students referred back to course leaders or personal academic tutors (PAT)/support tutors has also almost halved. Maybe where students have gone to course staff in the first place issues have been resolved or support given, negating the need to come to me. With the new support tutoring structure in place across the school for two years now, this may well be the case; although I have still seen a 62 per cent increase in the number of students I have had contact with overall, as mentioned earlier. Without good support tutoring in place I may have had even more students come to me.

As last year, I also saw students in separate group assignment support/academic writing sessions. These sessions were arranged with programme, route or year leaders and were targeted at students across all our provision from Initial Teacher Education (ITE) to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses. 231 students engaged this year, which is similar to last year.

**Follow up**

This year I have continued to be actively involved in clarifying and improving the system for the follow up of students with Learning Support Plans (LSPs) and Occupational Health issues. School of Education systems and procedures continue to be used as a model of good practice by the Disability and Dyslexia team across the university. I have continued to develop relationships with staff from Student Services this year to help improve our structures and our ability to respond to student needs. We have made a few changes to the way we inform placement schools about students with complex disabilities, particularly with regards to mental health, so improvements to our systems continue to be made as needs arise.

I have had input into some School of Education Senior Management Group meetings and whole staff briefings to inform key staff about proposed changes to Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) arrangements, and to feedback information from the Student Experience Forum. I also facilitated a meeting at the beginning and end of the year for our Student Experience leads and support tutors.
It was interesting to scrutinise the Withdrawal Tracker data from the Strategic Planning and Projects Office. The Student Retention Improvement Team (SRIT) ran a presentation to summarise the data and it was heartening to see that the School of Education has done very well over the past two years in relation to retention. We have retained 33 more students than last year, and had retained 30 more last year than the year before, so it is a positive picture. Of course, it is impossible to directly attribute these figures to support given by the SSGT or support tutors and other School of Education staff, but it is interesting to note that as our new support tutor system is embedded and the SSGT role continues to grow, that this correlates with improved retention rates across the school.

**Evaluation feedback**

Feedback was sought from students who contacted me for individual support by means of follow up emails, asking for their permission to use their comments as part of my annual evaluation. 74 of 321 (23 per cent) replied, sometimes to say they were back on track and doing well or to ask for additional support with the same or with a different issue. This compares with a 22 per cent response rate last year. Emailed feedback received from students would suggest that those who responded were very satisfied with the support and guidance they received.

I also sent out a link to a Google survey evaluation form as part of this email and had 24 (7 per cent) responses. A survey was also sent out at the end of this year as requested by the Student Services SSGT manager; although only 14 responded (5 per cent).

However, of the combined 38 responses (12 per cent), 36 were positive and two were negative. Eight out of 24 students specifically commented in the feedback questionnaire that they had considered withdrawing from their course, and that meeting with me as the SSGT had directly changed their minds and helped them decide to stay on. This has huge financial implications in the current climate and will almost certainly have helped our overall retention figures.

Some quotes in relation to deciding to continue are as follows:

‘Yes, I considered withdrawing. I had already taken one year out from my course, and upon returning I was extremely overwhelmed. I had depression and did not think I could cope with returning back to higher education. I continued with my course and have no regrets’.

‘I was persuaded to continue – she opened my eyes to the value of my degree’.

‘Getting an extension was sufficient to make me feel able to continue with the course. Also, the awareness that the Uni would support me to see my course through to the end. (My situation was and continues to be a difficult one as it changes as time goes on.) When I asked for help Mel got back to me very quickly’.

‘She helped guide me and realise that I have a manageable issue that with support will not impact on my course’.
A sample of other comments are presented below, showing the range of issues and variety of students that I have had contact with this year:

BA Primary Year 3 student: needed extensions due to family issues:

‘Thank you for your quick response and being so understanding and supportive. I shall get in touch with my support tutor and year leader this evening’.

BA Primary Year 3 Student with LSP: not given full 14 days extension:

‘Thank you so, so much for all your help :-) when I emailed you last week I was literally at breaking point with stress’.

PGCE Secondary student: suffering from anxiety and panic attacks:

‘Thank you so much for all your help and support. I have been to see the disability and dyslexic team who have asked me to provide evidence to make an appointment which I am now doing’.

BA Professional Studies in Learning and Development Year 1 student: struggling with own childcare and attendance:

‘Thank you for all your help. Your email has really helped me realize that I really don't have many sessions left, so the situation doesn't seem as hopeless as first thought. I really don't want to defer for a year’.

BA Primary student: struggling financially:

‘Thank you for your email. Your advice helped and I’m in the process of applying for hardship funding now so hopefully all will be under control soon’.

BA Education Year 2 student: failed all level 5 assignments this year. Considering leaving:

‘I found the meeting with you a very helpful one and I am now getting on with my new essays in order to pass with a good grade and then I'm going to focus on seeing if I can re take in summer. Thank you for all your help, as you really put things into perspective for me’.

BA Primary Year 4 student: very anxious and blocked about writing:

‘Following our meeting, I'm pleased to let you know that I have finally completed and submitted my assignment. I'm still not convinced it's up to my usual standard but hopefully it will be ok. Thank you for your support and the confidence boost’.

BA Primary Year 1 student: wants parking permit due to anxiety about public transport:

‘Thank you for your response. I have not contacted the Disability and Dyslexia team about this issue but I will do so now. I am meeting with my support tutor today so I will discuss these issues with her. I will continue to work alongside my doctor to find a solution to this issue. Thank you again for your support, it has
been really useful and has helped point me in the right directions which is already making a positive impact on my University experience’.

BA Primary Year 2 student: feedback after attending my level 5 writing seminar:

‘I attended your lecture this morning, regarding Level 5 writing. I left feeling motivated and ready to read, in preparation for writing my Foundation Subjects assignment’.

PGCE Primary (four students): Halls contract ends before course:

‘Thank you for all the time, effort and communication you have put in to help sort accommodation out for us. We appreciate that we raised the issue at a late stage, and are grateful that you were able to contact the right people in the right way to resolve the problem. This will now be a lovely end to the course without having to worry about further accommodation issues. Can't thank you enough’.

PGCE Secondary: international student with English as an additional language:

‘Thanks for your timely help with my essay writing by referring me to iASK proof reading service. They helped me to correct my references as well as helped me to improve my essay’.

Other SSGT projects

A new venture this year has been a series of collaborative events delivered jointly by all the Falmer-based SSGTs for students across the campus. We started with a Family Fun Day on a Saturday in November aimed at student parents and their families, which was a huge success. 33 student parents attended with 78 partners and children, together with four members of School of Education teaching staff with their children. There were about 130 students/partners/children in total and five SSGTs staffing the event. Lorraine Harrison, Head of the School of Education also visited on the day as did Clare Hughes, SSGT Manager. The five Falmer SSGTs took turns through the day to staff the registration desk, face painting queue and supervise the bouncy slide. Volunteers from the East Sussex Reptile and Amphibian Society came and the array of creatures went down really well with parents and children alike.

In January 2016 we ran a Falmer ‘SSGT Stressbusting day’ for students across the campus. 139 stressbusting tips and suggestions were received by students, a number of whom attended mindfulness and yoga classes. This led us to making a film in May 2015 with Centre for Learning and Teaching Springboard grant funding, where students interviewed other students to get their stressbusting tips. The film has now been made available on studentcentral, together with another short film of the SSGTs introducing themselves and their roles.

Ways forward

The SSGT role will develop further next year with the appointment of a new 0.5 post to complement my continuing 0.5 post as SSGT and allow me to focus on other developments within my overall Student Engagement role. I will continue to use Face-
book and Twitter as this has been a success this year. Pre-enrolment groups are popular and there is scope to have involvement in more new and ongoing groups.

Next year and the year after will see a decrease in students being able to access Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) funding (Willetts 2014). This will impact mostly on those with issues such as non-complex dyslexia, etc and will mean that individual learning support mentors will not be accessible for these students. Universities are being advised that they will need to provide teaching and learning strategies that are more inclusive for all students. In anticipation of this, I have bid for and have been awarded £1,000.00 scholarship from the CLT for 2015-16 to pilot a new Writing Café idea and will be paying four third year students who have been PASS leaders as Study Skills Peer Mentors. The overall project aim is for first year students on undergraduate programmes in the School of Education to gain one-to-one peer support with academic and study skills from third year undergraduate students. For the first year students receiving mentoring and support, this project will allow them to develop their study skills in order to work towards higher grades in assignments, or potentially redeem referred assignments. The mentors will not focus on subject content as such, but will help to hone an awareness of level 4 requirements such as referencing, academic writing style, engagement with literature, etc. They may also get support with presentation skills, preparing for placement or building an electronic portfolio, depending on the programme requirements.

The third year mentors delivering the support will receive training and supervision appropriate to their role, which will enhance their employability skills, particularly in relation to teaching and education jobs. They will also gain in confidence and enhance their own academic skills, and will acquire facilitation and mentoring skills.

To conclude, this has been another fulfilling and successful year as the School of Education SSGT. I appreciate the ongoing support and enthusiasm I have had from colleagues, and the positive response I have had from the students I have had contact with. I believe this is a worthwhile role to enhance the learning experience of our students and hope to see the role develop in the coming year and beyond with another 0.5 SSGT post-holder in place. With the current and continuing university-wide focus on student retention, the role of the SSGT has become ever more relevant in enhancing student experience, retention and success.

Bibliography:


**Biography**

**Melanie Gill** is a Student Support and Guidance Tutor (SSGT) for the School of Education, a role that forms 0.5 of her principal lecturer post, with the other 0.5 encompassing that of wider ‘Student Engagement Coordinator’ together with her teaching role. Melanie is part of the school’s senior management group and supervises Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS). She is also on the School Board of Study in her SSGT role and represents the school on the University Disability Forum.

Developing inclusive practices for student parents

DR CHARLOTTE MORRIS, SCHOOL OF PHARMACY AND BIOMOLECULAR SCIENCES

Abstract

Over the past two decades, the Widening Participation agenda has aimed to encourage a diversity of learners to partake in higher education and to improve the provision for these learners. This wider policy context has engendered challenges for universities in terms of learning and teaching. One of the enduring legacies of this era has been the concept of inclusive practices which has gained momentum in recent years. This comprises the notion that flexible teaching provision should be embedded in the design of courses in order to benefit diverse learners, as opposed to individual adjustments, with a particular focus on removing barriers for disabled learners. More recently, student parents have emerged as a group with a high level of need and a concern in terms of retention. With changing demographics and potentially increasing numbers of mature students (Universities UK 2012) this is of urgent concern for the sector. Drawing on recent research into the experiences of student parents at the University of Brighton, this paper will focus on the benefits for student parents of expanding and developing inclusive practices in order to meet their needs and enhance their university experience.

Introduction

A research and development project was initiated (and funded by a Learning and Teaching Fellowship) in order to identify good practices around meeting the learning needs of student parents at the University of Brighton. The project responded to research that identified the challenges faced by student parents representing a serious retention issue (NUS report 2009). It also built on concerns arising from initiatives run by Student Support and Guidance Tutors (SSGTs) around supporting mature students. These concerns chimed with sector-wide findings, summarised by the Chief Executive of the Equality Challenge Unit who stated that the NUS (2009) report ‘provides compelling evidence of the lack of support and isolation that many student parents experience – as a group they are at serious risk in terms of retention’. In addition, changing demographics in the student population (Universities UK 2012) mean fewer younger students are predicted to apply to university over the next decade in a context of financial uncertainty. Underpinning this work is the univer-
University’s commitment to equality and diversity and to widening participation, recognising the potential benefits of participation in higher education to the individual learners and their families alongside wider benefits to society (Hinton-Smith 2012). Over 50 per cent of our students at the University of Brighton are mature (2013-14 Equalities data) which is above the sector average. The Student Income and Expenditure survey (2011-12) indicated that 7 per cent of full-time students and 46 per cent of part-time students were parents who lived with their children; this is likely to be a significant minority of University of Brighton students and so it is therefore essential to address these issues.

The project aimed to conduct research into student parent experiences in order to make recommendations for their enhancement, and identify positive strategies to address any barriers to full participation. To this end, the researcher, working closely with the Student Experience Officer (Equality and Diversity) and the Student Union, undertook consultation with key colleagues and students, reviewed relevant documents and conducted a university-wide survey and interviews with individual students, culminating in a dissemination event and conference presentation with further opportunities for feedback and dialogue. Key findings identified that there is currently inconsistency across the university with respect to including student parents fully in learning, teaching and university life. Issues emerged around the culture of the university, perceived to be geared to meet the needs of younger students without caring responsibilities, while student parents felt they had a lack of visibility, voice, awareness, understanding and representation. In addition to student parents, the needs of student carers generally should be taken into account; many, including some younger students, have caring responsibilities (which include elderly parents and relatives with disabilities as well as children). According to the Care Act and Children and Families Act 2014, a carer is someone ‘who provides or intends to provide care for an adult or child’ and so would include students who have a duty of care to children, parents or other family members. Bringing the needs of such students into focus would help meet the Duty of Care towards young carers, those whose relatives require care during the course of study, pregnant students and those with maternity/paternity entitlements. The overarching recommendation is therefore, to work towards a more inclusive culture for students who provide care through understanding and awareness; inclusive teaching and learning design and practices; the provision of high quality pastoral care and through ensuring their needs are taken into account in all aspects of university life.

Inclusive teaching practices

Inclusive teaching practices aim to encourage, include and value a wide diversity of learners. Rather than making adjustments or alternative arrangements for an individual or specific group of learners only, inclusive practices are embedded in the planning and delivery of learning (Adams and Brown 2006). Inclusive practices are characterised by flexibility of course design and delivery, including assessment and potentially benefit all students, recognising that all students have different learning styles and needs. Incorporating such adjustments routinely into course design may benefit a diverse body of students and support their overall wellbeing by reducing

1 46.3 per cent of students as an average are mature (HESA 2014).
stress and enabling success Morris 2010). For example, spreading out assessment deadlines as far as possible benefits those students for whom stress may be triggered but it can also ensure the whole cohort are able to prepare effectively and perform better, including those with caring responsibilities who need to manage complex and unpredictable demands on their time. While implementation means more thought and time needs to be put into initial planning, overall, it reduces the need for individualised adjustments and can therefore improve efficiency and ensure that institutions are meeting the anticipatory requirement (introduced by SENDA 2005). It is recognised that inclusivity is not simply making education available but ‘being proactive in identifying the barriers and obstacles learners encounter in attempting to access opportunities for quality education, as well as in removing those barriers and obstacles that lead to exclusion’ (UNESCO 2016). In summary, institutions anticipate and adapt to the needs of their students rather than students being expected to adapt to the organisation. For student parents and carers, I argue that this means not only mainstreaming good teaching practice but cultivating a positive institutional ethos around caring responsibilities, and providing high quality opportunities for targeted support and pastoral care provision.

The NUS (2009) research identified specific factors which can create barriers for student parents’ learning, including styles of learning; modes of study; timetable provision and deadline schedules. Further recommendations included collecting data on student parents, the provision of appropriate support, removing barriers to engagement with student life and the need for better information, advice and guidance. One of the key recommendations arising from the report was that: ‘Universities and colleges should carry out impact assessment of their learning and teaching practices for student parents’. In the light of such concerns across the sector and with continuing recruitment and retention challenges going forwards, it is timely to review and seek to bolster and develop provision, with particular respect to inclusive teaching practices. This issue also taps into broader concerns around Widening Participation, access and equality. Following the Dearing report (1997) which stipulated that those who have the ability to benefit from higher education should have the opportunity to do so, the sector has aimed to promote and support participation from a more diverse range of learners, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This has historically been linked to skills enhancement and targeting child poverty, and so student parents (lone parents in particular) and their families might be seen as potential beneficiaries of this drive. However, widening participation is not simply related to recruitment but places additional responsibilities on higher education institutions (HEIs) to meet the learning and support needs of a more diverse range of learners. In the light of higher student fees, universities must strive to ensure access for students (Browne 2010) and are required to have an Access Agreement in place. This goes beyond admitting a diversity of learners towards ensuring that inclusive practices are embedded in every aspect of university life, especially learning and teaching to best enable student success. The OFFA Access Agreement for 2016–17,

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specifies that mature parents should be actively included in such considerations and explicitly encourages universities to consider what they could do to increase measures to attract and support them across the student life-cycle.

Methods and methodologies

Drawing on an overarching case study methodology, the project utilised mixed methods, comprised of a survey and interviews, following on from an initial literature review and consultation. Ethics approval was granted through the Centre for Learning and Teaching and the research design sought to engender broad quantitative findings, providing frequencies of response in combination with more in-depth qualitative data highlighting complexities of individual students’ experiences. Narrative interview techniques were employed to capture participants’ stories of their experiences alongside a semi-structured interview schedule, which aimed to address areas of specific concern identified in the literature review. An initial university-wide online survey was distributed via email and social media with support from the Student Union, SSGTs in each school, Student Services and the Marketing and Communications team. The survey enabled the recruitment of students for qualitative interviews as participants were given the option of taking part in further research.

The project research was complemented by consultation with key colleagues from across the university, supported by the Student Development Officer (Equality and Diversity). Consultation with a stakeholder group captured the perceptions of key staff members alongside students of what the main issues are for student parents, and helped to identify good practices. An initial consultation meeting included both staff and student stakeholders as well as colleagues to ensure student parents’ voices were at the heart of the project. A dissemination event also took place at the end of the project, which included a roundtable discussion for key stakeholders to enable findings and recommendations to be taken forward and developed into an action plan, which has been implemented in academic year 2015-16. The following presentation of findings draws on the survey data and so a summary of respondents is provided below:

- Respondents (n = 129):
  - 78.6 per cent undergraduate
  - 42 per cent lone parents
  - 91 per cent women
  - 84.5 per cent full-time
  - 58 per cent also in paid work
  - 13.6 per cent also have disability
  - 56 per cent commuting/43 per cent locally based

Findings

Respondents highlighted a number of positive benefits to studying in higher education. They also stressed that they have much to contribute to their courses in
terms of the high levels of commitment to their studies and skills, motivation and experience that they bring. This needs to be stressed, as presenting a deficit model whereby student parents are viewed as a problem is unhelpful. In line with previous research, participants experienced high levels of challenge and I focus on such challenges here with an emphasis on addressing potential barriers. Competing demands on their time in terms of studies, family responsibilities and in many cases paid work was, predictably, a major challenge, requiring much forward planning and management. It should be recognised that this is an issue which disproportionately affects women: in UK society, it is still generally expected that women manage the majority of caring, emotional and domestic work (Fawcett Society Report 2016), often performing double (or triple) shifts in order to perform all these duties (Hochschild 1990; 1997). This is often exacerbated for student parents who also need to incorporate study time into their daily routines, in some cases necessitating a third or even fourth shift, not to mention the time needed to commute between home, childcare venues, work and university. The gendered aspect of such challenges is reflected in that over 90 per cent of respondents to the survey were women. The high levels of lone parents should also be noted.

Childcare is often arranged through a combination of formal and informal care and often comes with unpredictability. Organising additional childcare at short notice can be impossible (and unaffordable). It can be particularly challenging for lone parents and those who do not have family members who may be able to provide back-up childcare locally. Participants in this study tended to choose the university because it was the nearest to them, their homes, family and work responsibilities. With many therefore commuting within or from outside the city (56 per cent of respondents), transport emerged as an issue in terms of cost, (in)convenience, reliability and lack of access to parking. For all these reasons, timetabling and course organisation is therefore key in enabling parents to plan their time as far in advance as possible (NUS 2009). Studying in higher education also has financial implications, and for parents it can mean negotiating complex combinations of social security, grants and loans and earnings. While many are motivated by the prospect of higher earnings, there is much precarity and risk involved (Reay 2003), including an immediate loss of earnings for some. In recent years a move towards an ideal of ‘intensive motherhood’ has been identified in western culture (Hays 1996), requiring concentrated time, financial and emotional commitment from mothers, and so women in particular can experience guilt associated from spending time on other activities, and some respondents reported this emotional impact of studying and consequent strains on both studies and family relationships. Fathers can also be impacted by gendered expectations and report feelings of guilt at loss of earnings while studying (NUS 2009). Ultimately parents have undeniable legal and moral obligations towards the welfare and care of their children. In emergency situations such as children becoming unwell, parents have no choice but to prioritise their needs above studies and other responsibilities. Children and families often have high levels of need and this, as one part-

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6 According to the Office for National Statistics (2014) In 2014, women accounted for 91 per cent of lone parents with dependent children and men the remaining 9 per cent.
Participant observed, can fluctuate over time, at children’s different developmental stages and with varying sets of family circumstances in ways that can be unpredictable. As Hinton-Smith (2012) also argues, writing about the case of lone parents, it is important to take these practical, financial and emotional complexities into account when considering provision for student parents. I will now move on to address the key issues around inclusive teaching to enhance student parents’ learning experiences.

What would improve the learning experiences of student parents?

When participants were asked what would improve their learning experiences, responses fell into two main categories; the need for more flexibility generally in learning and teaching and more awareness of the specific needs of student parents. Inclusive practices that could benefit student parents include more opportunities for online learning, recorded lectures, revision days, reading weeks, positive, constructive feedback and good quality teaching generally. Some participants resented the time spent coming to university for lectures which simply comprised of reading from a PowerPoint presentation, perceiving that they could do this at home. It was considered that more thought could go into planning courses, modules and weekly timetables, and spacing out the assessments more realistically to take the needs of students with complex lives into account:

‘Options to complete modules in a different way. Some modules require attendance and participation and focus solely on group work. This becomes difficult when sick children or stressful family life may prevent this. Better understanding of the way that student parents have to study is critical’.

Use of online resources for learning was considered essential to support parents in balancing multiple responsibilities. Parents were more likely to miss sessions due to unavoidable issues such as children being taken ill or other family emergencies, and so needed to find ways to catch up with missed work and access the learning. Ensuring that presentations and other resources are online is inclusive for a variety of learners and can be vital for parents, and many respondents requested the recording of lectures:

‘I would like the lectures to be video linked. I have to stay home when my children are ill’.

Flexibility: Some students felt that they had been dealt with unfairly in terms of attendance, extensions and mitigating circumstances as their needs as a student parent were not taken into account. One interview participant’s experience of lack of flexibility in requesting an extension due to her planned childcare arrangements collapsing, left her feeling that the university was set up to make her fail; this student felt that while she was contributing all she could to her peers, the course and university, this was not reciprocated in terms of efforts to meet her particular needs:

‘That’s the only time I’ve ever asked for help from the university specifically to do with children and it didn’t happen. I haven’t got a lot of faith in it, put it that way’.

This was strongly reflected in the survey data and also applied to issues of attendance and extensions as reflected in the following extracts:
‘Unfortunately my child has been acutely ill this year which caused me to be off university. When I emailed the module leader about this she wasn’t in the slightest bit sympathetic or understanding ... I then received an email from my tutor about my attendance. Given the circumstances, the last thing I needed to feel was pressurised by the university for something that was out of my control’.

‘I think extensions should be available for all parents, especially if assignments are due in after the holidays and the children have been off school. It is impossible to write an essay and entertain a child at the same time’.

These issues highlight the importance of awareness and understanding from academic staff. For some, there was a feeling of being isolated with a lack of recognition and understanding about their needs from academic staff, although this depended on the particular school. There was a higher concentration of student parents on some professional courses in particular, and so there tended to be more understanding on these courses, but there was still a perception that it came down to individuals. This is indicative of a lack of consistency in terms of awareness and willingness to be supportive to student parents; some participants considered that in some cases this came down to whether or not the member of staff had children themselves. Concerningly, as suggested in some of the comments, such experiences can lead to a perception that the university as a whole, far from supporting students’ studies, is working against their need to achieve their potential grades, to complete their studies and to participate fully in university life.

**Social integration:** There was an acute sense from some participants of struggling to fit in to university life, feeling different from other students, exacerbated by difficulties around participating in extra-curricular activities. This is of concern, considering the influential academic literature on the importance of social integration and belonging for student persistence (for example Tinto 1975; 1993 and Thomas 2012). Positive interactions with staff and peers and opportunities for peer to peer support were reported as extremely valuable by participants. While some of this can be nurtured through extra-curricular activities, student parents often find it hard to attend these, and so any opportunities of helping students to integrate with their peers within the curriculum and especially during the induction period can be invaluable. Participants found it particularly helpful to be introduced to others in similar situations for ongoing peer support and this can be facilitated within academic settings as part of learning. They appreciated opportunities to share their wealth of insights and experiences within class discussions and for other opportunities to contribute to learning and university life (such as leading PASS groups and social media forums). Building a sense of community and being valued and recognised as individuals and as a group has the potential to make a big difference to student parents’ experiences.

**Academic skills guidance:** Many student parents experience the challenges to study encountered by mature students as a group, including returning to study and adjusting to higher education, managing the workload and refreshing or updating study skills. Students found study skills beneficial when included within the curriculum and there was also a desire for access to further resources. While the university does
have online study skills guidance, signposting to such resources as part of learning could be helpful:

‘Lecturers should sometimes take into account the fact that some students sat for their A-levels decades ago and as such cannot recollect all that was taught then, so rather than assume everyone is on the same page, they can give references to materials to help such students’.

Unsurprisingly, given the demands on time and other resources (including space), independent study was the most challenging aspect of higher education for the majority (74 per cent). Additionally 38 per cent struggled with assessments and 35 per cent with lectures and seminars. In some cases this reflected problems with attendance but was often related to needing support with adjusting to study in higher education, especially after a break. Giving good quality feedback which is positive and constructive can be particularly beneficial for such students in helping to build confidence and develop their skills.

High quality pastoral care emerged as essential for this group, in complement to inclusive teaching practices. A number of wellbeing issues were raised including lack of sleep, difficulties in maintaining a work-life-study balance; stress and exhaustion; difficulties in finding time for managing health issues and self-care and the emotional issues of anxiety and guilt as previously discussed. Being able to discuss these issues in confidence with understanding members of staff, whether professional student services staff (such as a counsellor or SSGT) or an academic tutor was invaluable. In some cases, lack of time meant it was hard to identify and access the many different sources of support and guidance on offer, and so accurate, effective signposting is a key component of pastoral care. As personal and academic tutors are very often the first port of call for students, it is important that they are aware of the issues and confident in their ability to support those with caring responsibilities and to signpost for further support as appropriate. Such support needs to be highly visible, accessible and proactive in targeting groups such as student parents where there is likely to be a high level of need.

However, it should be stressed that it should not be down to supportive individuals to help student parents have a good experience; rather it is of paramount importance that those with caring responsibilities are recognised and valued throughout the university, and that a culture and environment supportive of parenting and caring is fostered and built into policy, practice and institutional ethos. Participants frequently mentioned that students tended to be spoken to en masse as though they were eighteen year olds. This reflects more widespread assumptions of the typical student as young, male, autonomous and without caring responsibilities and other commitments outside university (Estes 2011; Leathwood and O’Connell 2003): In an increasingly challenging and volatile economic context this model is becoming increasingly unrealistic. There is much scope therefore in working towards developing more inclusive, caring university cultures (Alsop, Gonzalez-Arnal and Kilkey 2008) which recognise the realities of juggling multiple responsibilities in relation to work, study and care.
Conclusions

Despite the many potential barriers to participation which this article has touched on, student parents have much to contribute to university life and much to gain in terms of self-esteem, professional development, financial security, individual and family wellbeing and providing a positive role model to their children (Hinton-Smith 2012; NUS 2009) with further potential benefits for widening participation (should their children be inspired to enter higher education). They also have much to contribute in terms of their wealth of life and work experiences and insights, their motivation and commitment, and their ability to manage time and juggle commitments - they consequently can provide positive role models for other students. Supporting student parents and carers effectively and removing any barriers to learning and their right to participate fully in a meaningful student experience is essential, in order to realise these benefits and their academic potential. The multiple responsibilities balanced by student parents necessitate targeted intervention to facilitate participation. This links to the importance of building robust academic and support infrastructures which work together to underpin and enhance student resilience and retention (Hinton-Smith 2012).

As Hinton-Smith stated in our end of project event (October 2015), there are individual, departmental, institutional and policy responsibilities in recognising and responding to the complex needs of many student parents and removing barriers to full participation. Higher education professionals should be empowered to feel they can make a difference while inclusive practices have the potential to benefit all learners:

‘Individual HE teachers and other staff should recognize the difference that we can make to students’ lives through providing and supporting inclusive learning where diverse students can belong and thrive to fulfil their potential and transform their lives ... good practice for those with childcare responsibilities [at all levels] is far from diverting resources toward a minority group away from the larger student body, but rather represents good practice in developing inclusive learning environments for all students in their diverse complex lives made up of many combinations of responsibilities’ (Ibid).

Ultimately, student parents’ life experiences mean that they bring valuable perspectives, strong motivation, a range of highly developed skills, confidence and maturity to higher education and beyond. Therefore, it is important that caring responsibilities are visible and valued and that any barriers to accessing high quality learning and teaching are removed; inclusive practices for all are implemented, and the needs and challenges of this specific group are fully recognised and addressed.

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**Biography**

**Dr Charlotte Morris** is a Student Support and Guidance Tutor at the University of Brighton with research interests in higher education, which include widening participation, student disability, equality, inclusivity, mental health and wellbeing, undergraduate and postgraduate learning. She also teaches Sociology and Gender Studies at the University of Sussex.
In celebration of David Watson: student learning through community engagement

Dr Ceri Davies and Professor Emeritus Stuart Laing
Community University Partnership Programme

Abstract

Our session at the Learning and Teaching Conference was presented in celebration of the life, work and enduring legacy of Professor Sir David Watson, who died of cancer most prematurely in February 2015. David was Vice-Chancellor of the University of Brighton from 1990-2005; he was undoubtedly the most influential UK thinker and writer of his generation concerning both the purposes and the pragmatics of higher education. We are fortunate that he has left us all an immensely rich and varied body of work to influence and stimulate our endeavours in the years ahead. He was quite, quite exceptional.

Our paper combines two of the causes he most championed: student learning and community engagement. We explore how a programme of seed funding through the ‘On Our Doorsteps’ initiative (begun in 2010), and part of the Community University Partnership Programme (Cupp) has provided an opportunity for active projects to include these dimensions.

On Our Doorsteps

Cupp at the University of Brighton was established in 2003, and contributes to the social engagement and civic life of the university. We provide a first point of contact into the university and are committed to developing sustainable partnerships that benefit community organisations, the quality of university education and research and the lives of local people. One of the ways we do this is through a programme of seed funding which is the subject of this article. Established in 2010, the ‘On Our Doorsteps’ programme focuses on developing and supporting partnership projects between staff, students and local communities through small grant giving and offering practical support and advice in getting them going. These projects focus on:

- activities close to each of the University of Brighton’s five Campuses
- demonstrable community and university benefit
- application of subject expertise from across the disciplinary range
establishing long term relationships

In 2014, this approach expanded to include the Hastings Exchange Seed Funding; at which point the programme became known overall as the ‘Cupp Seed Fund’. These projects draw on the breadth of academic expertise across the University of Brighton, impact on the neighbourhoods of all our campuses and seed the growth of long term partnerships that contribute to meeting local community needs and bringing real issues into teaching and research. On Our Doorsteps is supported by close inter-university working with our student volunteer service, Active Student and our Community Liaison colleagues. Externally, we work closely with the infrastructure organisations for the voluntary and community sector in our campus locations in Brighton, Eastbourne and Hastings.

Between 2010 and 2015 we funded 36 projects across Brighton, Eastbourne and Hastings. Projects cover topic areas such as local food production, mental health, community development, urban planning, children and families, natural resources, LGBT identities and equalities. What they have in common is a commitment to exploring these areas in partnership and through principles of ‘community knowledge exchange’. This means valuing different types of knowledge, particularly the knowledge held in communities and developed through practice (Davies 2011). Mutual benefit is also an important principle underpinning partnerships, meaning that those involved should be able to identify outcomes for all partners.

In the past year we have looked back to 19 projects funded between 2010 -12 under the original On Our Doorsteps initiative, through an evaluation led by Stuart Laing to help us better understand the outcomes and legacies of partnership working of this type. This evaluation has focused on a range of areas of interest including the benefits of partnerships to university and community partners, and how these projects contribute to research, teaching and community action. This short paper looks in more detail at the findings from 10 of the projects evaluated (descriptions follow) in which we found over 85 per cent had student involvement, and 60 per cent of projects also showed a benefit to the design and development of the formal curriculum. The forms of student involvement recorded were:

- As part of formal curriculum
- Voluntary activity relevant to degree subject
- PhD topic
- Student Union initiative

We now briefly summarise those projects with the following section, then expand on what these different types of involvement looked like within projects through a range of examples; helping to draw out the ways in which students were involved, and what this meant for their learning experience and for the curriculum they receive. Following this exploration, we reflect on how these findings fit alongside David Watson’s thinking on the role and place of student community engagement, and how partnership activity supported through seed funding can further strengthen high quality outcomes for learning and teaching.
The Projects

The ten projects that informed the detail presented in this paper were:

**Black History and Cultural Memory in Brighton:** this partnership established an ongoing exchange of skills and knowledge between academics in the School of Humanities and a local black history group involved in practices of history-making and commemoration.

**Community Town Planning:** Aimed to stimulate interest in community engagement within planning and to provide a hub for sharing information and practice in Hastings.

**Eastbourne Gardening:** staff and students, local residents and users of local community organisations use campus green space to garden in raised beds and to create a sensory garden.

**Growing Local Food Communities:** increased awareness of the benefits of and involvement with local food production, preparation and consumption among staff and students at different campuses and respective neighbouring communities. This project gave rise to a Student’s Union food co-op which staff can also now access.

**LGBT Needs: Preparing for the Equalities Act:** this project aimed to improve the lives of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people in Hastings, Rother and East Sussex by creating strategic networks between academic institutions, students, local communities and services. It also aimed to affect the awareness and decision-making of local elected representatives, suppliers of services and employers.

**Triangle Community Project:** Architecture students worked on a ‘live brief’ to produce initial strategies and designs for improving the ‘Triangle’ area of streets and houses in Brighton. They held a public exhibition of the results.

**Community Engagement for Health Wellbeing:** The project explored working practices between two providers of educational services aimed at different audiences (the university and community partner). The project aimed for university students to gain in-depth knowledge of a community learning context through observation and participation/facilitation and, for the community learners, to gain access to up-to-date knowledge on relevant health topics.

**How are you feeling?** This poetry-writing project explored the feelings evoked through having/recovering from a stroke in order to shape positive rehabilitative narratives with stroke survivors. Material was gathered through talking to stroke survivors at three local stroke clubs. The project aimed to provide an opportunity for participants to talk about their stroke in non-medical terms, in a way that promotes their social and community inclusion. Their words were turned into poems (by Kate Tym), which formed the basis of a performance and pamphlet.
**Round Hill Community Project:** a partnership to deepen community cohesion in the Round Hill area and increase understanding of different groups’ needs and issues through gathering information about their views and needs and then sharing this information and the resulting plans for action.

**The Bigger Splash:** This project aimed to develop an effective model to support sports studies students to volunteer within local sports clubs, offering capacity to local organisations and ensuring students graduate with skills and experience relevant to their degree.

### Student learning

Student involvement in projects can be broken down into eight different strands, as follows:

- The project being central to a PhD topic in Human Geography, with the research student effectively serving as the leading university member.
- Inclusion in postgraduate professional curricula in Architecture and in Nursing teacher training.
- Masters History students taking up voluntary placements.
- Inclusion in undergraduate and postgraduate Occupational Therapy professional curricula.
- Undergraduate student voluntary activity within the university: specifically the creation and tending of gardens.
- Undergraduate voluntary activity outside the university: in the areas of Sport Coaching (specifically swimming) and Nursing (talking with stroke survivors).
- Mixed level and mixed subject student voluntary activity (not course related) on a project designed to enhance community control over a local neighbourhood.
- The joint involvement of the Student Union and the student body at large in the development and success of on-campus food co-operatives.

In the great majority of cases the student input was based on specific course and subject activity, where the students were selected on the basis of having particular skills or expertise deriving from their academic or professional discipline, which they could apply within the project, and where their subsequent benefit (in terms of experience and knowledge gained) could be strongly related back to their existing curriculum.

Some comments from students on the value of this experience included:

‘For me the placement has been such a useful experience in finding the ways that history and politics can engage and captivate people. This process is ongoing and informed by the challenge to be critical and interpretive with that history’.
‘Working as a Nutritional Advisor ... provided me with a very rewarding opportunity to be included as part of the ... community, instead of just being classed as a student. This allowed me to apply the knowledge that I have learnt on my course to new and interesting sporting situations within the area. I found applying this knowledge to questions parents had regarding their child’s nutritional needs an interesting role to fulfil’

‘I feel that I grew [on talking with stroke survivors] from the experiences that were shared with us by these wonderful and amazing gentlemen’

‘I would not have seen this in hospital’

As this last comment particularly encapsulates, many students were able to identify the additionality which this kind of relatively unmediated contact with the clients, customers or users of their disciplines provided to their learning, for both academic and professional subjects. This was felt to be subtly different from that type of contact structured through a formal placement, which typically takes place through the framework of an employer organisation. A major (and necessary) function of such employment placement is to learn the (formal and informal) organisational rules and disciplines of a particular professional culture or large enterprise. In many On Our Doorsteps projects the focused volunteering then provided something slightly different – and complementary.

Students from professional courses commented on the added value of this different perspective, while those from ‘academic’ courses noted the excitement of being able to apply their subject knowledge to real world situations. This type of involvement might provisionally be titled ‘specialist/expert volunteering’.

The identification of such immediate benefit to student learning for those directly involved was not especially surprising, although the degree and extent of the closeness to, and relevance for the specific curriculum has not always been recognised. However, we also found something which was more unexpected.

In 60 per cent of the projects there was also evidence that the knowledge and experience which the academic staff involved derived influenced their delivery and design of future course curricula, enabling the benefit of many more students beyond those directly involved in the project itself.

In some cases this was a matter of the whole orientation and emphasis of a course curriculum. The evaluation report for one project commented that the students’ task was:

‘the first to be undertaken by Architecture with certain explicit social – as opposed to design – aims in mind ... an exemplar of a new way of working with our neighbours, one in which a community’s needs are as important as the design outcomes’

In other cases, the experience of the projects has led to the introduction of new material into existing modules. This is typically of a case study form and is often taught by the staff directly involved in the original project; this enables staff to introduce the students to the processes of project delivery and knowledge generation as well as communicating the new knowledge accrued.
Thus a project dealing with LGBT equality issues has contributed to the content of the undergraduate modules, ‘Contemporary Rural Geographies’ and ‘Geographies and Sexualities’ as well as to the MSc in Applied Community Psychology. Similarly the project Growing Local Food Communities has been discussed within the module ‘Citizenship for Environment’.

The project, How Are You Feeling? which was concerned with the experiences of stroke survivors, has had a particularly wide ranging curriculum impact. The main community partner, the performance poet, Kate Tym has presented sessions within the post-registration nursing degree and also the Postgraduate Certificate in Health and Social Care Education. The project has also both influenced the development of, and featured in, a new pre-registration nursing degree module, ‘Arts and Health’. The experience of the project also helped to initiate a new ‘Community Engagement’ module on the same programme which is now being taken by 20 per cent of the students. The Eastbourne Gardens project similarly, has had a broad impact through both being part of the Occupational Therapy core curriculum and also developing issues which are reflected in the Hospitality modules, ‘Food, Culture and Society’, ‘Gastronomy’, ‘Sensory Evaluation of Foods’ and ‘Trends and Issues in Hospitality and Event Industry Sectors’.

Overall, the extent of longer term curriculum benefit across the On Our Doorsteps programme has been something of an unanticipated outcome. With hindsight this may however seem less surprising for, after all, where else does the curriculum come from other than the recording of, and reflection on, specific innovative activity, whether through scholarship, laboratory or field research or practical activity? The lessons of these On Our Doorsteps Projects are then, that with a little more deliberate planning and focus from the beginning, the degree of curriculum benefit (to a very wide student body) which can be derived from these projects, may be one of their most enduring legacies. Our preliminary follow up work on a further ten On Our Doorsteps projects from later years (soon to be reported) does seem to provide more evidence to support this conclusion.

**Concluding thoughts**

In a memorial lecture for Sir David in October, Stuart Laing reminded us that at the beginning of his book *Managing Civic and Community Engagement* (2007) David Watson asserts that:

‘commitments to civic and community engagement are a strategic matter, which go to the heart of the culture and values of any higher education institution’ (ibid: xvi).

This, Stuart argued, is a fundamental point. Civic and community engagement is not, or should not be, an optional extra, just a new kind of replacement extra-mural activity at the margins but rather a central principle of the whole organisation. What is interesting about the activity that stems from the projects that were the subject of evaluation, is that they centrally locate outcomes for research and learning and teaching within them. Thus they provide an important context and opportunity for exploring student learning and community engagement. Approaching these causes in this way has led to tangible outcomes and creative responses to them.
From David Watson’s long historical perspective, student learning and community engagement are characteristics of a growing movement. We situate On Our Doorsteps, and the programme of seed funding within Cupp as part of this landscape of activity. Indeed, within Cupp itself we also have colleagues writing and contributing to these agendas (see Millican and Bourner 2014). This is a debate which is now international in nature, and we seek to connect to others across the globe who are also seeking to build new ideas and practice. And so in closing, we would wish to highlight and acknowledge the importance of experiment and innovation in processes of engagement. And to keep alive the challenge of how you learn to create and use a shared body of good practice, whilst still being open to the new. This is the point that On Our Doorsteps finds itself at.

References:


Biography

Dr Ceri Davies has worked for the Community University Partnership Programme (Cupp) since 2008 as Development Manager, Community Knowledge Exchange. She was awarded her PhD in 2016, which explored the intersection of knowledge, power and participation in community-university collaborations.

Professor Emeritus Stuart Laing retired as Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University of Brighton in 2014. He is now Professor Emeritus in Cultural Studies and works with Cupp on an occasional basis to help promote and develop the significance of university-community engagement.