Nurturing Co-construction

Articles from the Learning and Teaching Conference 2016

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Editorial introduction

Our large annual Learning and Teaching Conference at the University of Brighton, organised by the Centre for Learning and Teaching, offers a window on the range of exciting and innovative learning, teaching and student engagement developments at the University of Brighton, augmented by keynote speakers and visitors. This post-conference publication *Nurturing Co-construction*, gathers together some of those interesting and successful developments on which colleagues delivered and have now worked to present as scholarly publications.

**Professor Dilly Fung**, University College London (now London School of Economics) our keynote speaker, asked some essential questions about university-wide change, on the eve of our own university-wide curriculum development initiative. Professor Fung shared with us the ‘Connected curriculum’ which she brought as a change mechanism to UCL and asked the question which underpins all of these essays and the innovations and good practice which they discuss, ‘As we develop our educational provision, how do we know that we’re improving it and not just changing it? What is our image of ‘good’ education, both in the disciplines and across the institution?’ The paper explores values-based curriculum design and ‘a distinctive approach to research-based education’ leaving us with a range of questions and further exploration, some of which can be found in Dilly’s book *Connected Curriculum* (Fung 2017; UCL 2017a).

Assessment and feedback are always topical and **Dr Dipak K Sarker**, School of Pharmacy and Biomolecular Sciences, suggests the possibility of an equilibrium of expectation in assessments and feedback between student expectation, competence frameworks, discipline expectations, tutor and university practices in ‘Acting on feedback over assessment, an iterative spiral of improvement for both students and lecturers’.

Co-construction is a focus for **Dr Iain Wilkinson**, Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust and **Dr Joanna Preston**, St George’s University Hospitals Foundation NHS Trust, in their article ‘MDTea podcast: co-construction in concept and practice’ which considers Comprehensive Geriatric Assessment (CGA) for frail older adults in contexts of health and social care, in which many of our students are being prepared to work. They explore using learning resources, a podcast (The MDTea) based on the principles of co-construction, to enable students and practitioners to grasp the threshold concepts surrounding the care of older patients. Another article focused on inter-professional practice by **Christine Watson, Deborah Gowers, Steven Close and Jane Groves**, School of Health Sciences, ‘An evaluation of the use of Pecha Kucha in an Inter-professional Advanced Practice MSc’ discusses and evaluates the experiences of inter-professional health science postgraduates who used Pecha Kucha style presentations in their Advanced Leadership course, finding very positive engagement from the students and a nurturing context for inter-professional learning.

A university Learning and Teaching Scholarship funded innovation in the School of Education; the Education ‘Assignment Support Team’ (AST) is evaluated and discussed by **Melanie Gill** and **Louise Jackson**, School of Education, in their article ‘Evaluating the Assignment Support Team: a peer mentor project to support academic writing in the School of Education’. They report on an effective and now more widespread innova
tion in which third year undergraduate student mentors provide 30 minute academic-writing support sessions to first and second year students, face-to-face, via email or Skype, offering not proof-reading but hints and tips for the actual writing tasks. Both mentees and mentors benefit in terms of skills and confidence.

Another article on assessment from Kevin Morton, School of Sport and Service Management, focuses on ‘Assessing the boundaries: using technology to record alternative assessment approaches’. This article considers ways of overcoming any alienation among students in relation to assessment practices, building on the teaching and learning innovations which enhance student autonomy with practical solutions to make assessment less alienating and more productive, and to use ICT in doing so.

In their article ‘An evaluation of portable electronic device usage by mature nurse lecturers: a Participatory Narrative Inquiry’, Marian Willmer, Simon Whiffin, Maggie Stewart, Linnette King, Ian Taylor, Patrick Saintas, Laetitia Zeeman and Helen Stanley, School of Health Sciences, also consider practical use of learning technologies. They evaluate the use of tablet devices in higher education, as a resource for blended learning and teaching within nursing education and allow each participant to express their own engagement with the technology, highlighting issues around infrastructure and support; digital literacy; utility; embodiment and limitations. They incorporate responses from participants at the conference, reaffirming the strength of the approach in co-construction, collaboration and engagement with, and reflection on, the use of portable electronic devices in learning and teaching.

Mirika Flegg, School of Health Sciences and Maggie Gordon-Walker, Sussex Peer Support Network, address challenges in engaging community partners in knowledge production as they reflect on a community-led evaluation into peer-to-peer best practices in mental health service provision in Sussex in ‘When the community leads the way; peer-to-peer mental health: reflections from a community evaluation case study’ finding that peer-to-peer support services improved mental health outcomes and reduced reliance on public health services. It also shows the capacity of those with lived experiences to direct and conduct evaluations on topics of value to them, offering insights to improve collaborative working between communities and the institutions that support them.

Patrick Saintas, Wendy Hadley, Nita Muir, School of Health Sciences and Fiona MacNeill, Information Services, consider Web 2.0 tools in virtual learning environments in ‘A reflection of the use of Web 2.0 technologies in the co-construction of knowledge within the Introduction to the Global Health module of the BS (Hons) Nursing Programme’. Here they explore and explain how the module team and students used aspects of Web 2.0 technologies, within a blended learning experience, to facilitate co-construction of knowledge in the module, Introducing Global Health and its impact on nursing, to second year undergraduate nursing students.

The co-construction theme has produced a rich range of articles looking at using elearning, working in partnership in undergraduate, postgraduate and community contexts, and this collection of articles offers some useful ideas and successful practical interventions around assessment, learning technologies, mentoring and peer to peer work, and community engagement.

— Professor Gina Wisker, Chair, Conference Organising Committee
Co-creating a Connected Curriculum

Professor Dilly Fung, London School of Economics (Previously of University College London)

Abstract

As we develop our educational provision, how do we know that we’re improving it and not just changing it? What is our image of ‘good’ education, both in the disciplines and across the institution? This paper argues that we can work in partnership with students to build on the synergies between our research, our professional fields and our education, both within and across departments. Drawing on the field of philosophical hermeneutics (Gadamer 2004; Fairfield ed. 2012), it looks at what is at the heart of the academic mission. Is the purpose of higher education to provide individuals with what they need to succeed in a competitive world, or is it advancing ‘the global common good’ (UNESCO 2015)?

New possibilities for values-based curriculum design are introduced, drawing on University College London’s (UCL) Connected Curriculum initiative. Connected Curriculum (Fung 2017; UCL 2017a) takes a distinctive approach to research-based education. Exploring its benefits and some examples of its application at UCL and beyond, barriers to educational change are considered, including the need to reward and promote staff who commit time and expertise to education and education leadership (Fung and Gordon 2016). The paper concludes with questions for colleagues at the University of Brighton to consider, within and across all disciplines.

Introduction

What comes to mind when you see the word ‘curriculum’? You might think of all the topics you cover when you teach. You might think of all the paperwork associated with designing a programme of study, or a module, and getting it approved; the intended learning outcomes, teaching methods, student assessments. Or it might be something else entirely.

The Connected Curriculum initiative (Fung 2017; Carnell and Fung 2017) takes a values-based approach to thinking about how our taught programmes of study can be enhanced. It sees curriculum not primarily in technical terms but as ‘curriculum-in-action, which is the interplay of all those involved’ (Barnett and Coate 2005, p 159). What valuable experiences do we want students to engage with? What do students
Co-creating a Connected Curriculum

themselves value? What kinds of opportunities associated with studying at university, with being part of a university community, do they find transformative?

It is worth stepping back for a moment and asking ourselves what higher education as a whole is for. What is the purpose of a university in the twenty-first century? On the one hand it may be seen as an institution which aims to provide individual students with the best possible opportunities, in a competitive world, to succeed personally, socially and economically. On the other hand, we might take a more collectivist view: one that sees higher learning as aiming to enrich entire communities, for the mutual benefit of all. As argued in a recent UNESCO publication (2015), higher learning can be, and should be, connected with social justice, and with enhancing the ‘global common good’.

Discussing and drawing on a shared values base as we take a fresh look at the curriculum we offer can be very helpful. We can look again at the fundamental principles of educating students in a university environment. In our digital age students, academics and professionals are surrounded, even bombarded, by information – and by misinformation. Universities, through their educational activities, their connections with professional practice and their research, are in the business of teaching, testing, producing, extending and applying knowledge. How might this inform the ways in which we design our programmes of study?

The literature

The classic Humboldtian concept of the unity of research and teaching reminds us that the work of universities, and the substance and style of curriculum, is that of shared scholarly enquiry. The German philosopher Gadamer, in his opus magnum entitled Truth and Method (Gadamer 2004), argues that what we ‘know’ is affected by the historical and cultural contexts in which we live, and that interpretation of evidence must always be open to question as we continually shine a light on our own prior assumptions. Knowledge here is not something that is fixed, like some pre-established structure that students have to memorise and reproduce. It is constantly being developed, explored and advanced through dialogue. As each of us shares our knowledge horizons with one another, willingly revisiting our assumptions, our collective knowledge horizons widen. Connecting across disciplines as well as within disciplinary and professional groupings is therefore important. We need to encourage students to see through different knowledge lenses; and that includes opening the way to the kinds of knowledge and areas of focus that have traditionally been marginalised in a world in which the work of western, male scholars has held a privileged position.

The key idea here is the idea that whatever our background we must all continually test what we think we know. As Fairfield puts it, the human mind must always be ‘unsatisfied with what it imagines it knows’ (Fairfield 2010, p 3). This is particularly important in these days of so-called ‘alternative facts’ and ‘fake news’: we need to develop curricula that promote better understandings and more critical engagements with evidence, with argument and with ethics. University communities: teachers, researchers, professional practitioners and students, can use curriculum design primarily as a way of promoting dialogue and connections between different ways of
thinking and knowing. In this way, individuals and communities can extend their ability to challenge effectively the misleading claims of those who promote demonstrable falsehoods, whether intentionally or otherwise.

The focus here is not only on the planned curriculum, and the curriculum as ‘delivered’ (for example in classrooms, online or through work placements), but on the curriculum as *lived* - by our diverse students, and also by all those who teach and support them. As William Pinar puts it, curriculum is ‘complicated conversation’ (Pinar 2012). This idea of curriculum recognises not only what is explicitly taught, for example in lectures and seminars, but also the independent learning and enquiry that students engage in, for example through social media, informal networks and extra-curricular activities. This wider learning can be drawn into a shared conversation that enables us to push the edge of knowledge. This activity can usefully prompt us to address issues of equality and inclusion: who is really part of this conversation, and who is excluded, or just on the edge? How can all students be brought into a community in which they feel they have a voice?

**The Connected Curriculum Framework**

The Connected Curriculum framework (Fung 2017; UCL 2017a), now central to educational strategy at University College London (UCL 2017b), identifies a core pedagogic principle: that of students learning through research and active, critical enquiry. An increasing number of studies show that research-based or enquiry-based learning has great benefits, right across the disciplines (see for example Levy and Petrulis 2012, Wieman and Gilbert 2015 and Wood 2010). Curriculum, in this framing, is not only ‘research-lead’, in that students are kept up to date with the latest research in a field, but ‘research-based’. That is, the design of the programme of study and the ways in which it is taught and learned are underpinned by the principles of enquiry, of testing knowledge.

Surrounding the core principles are six related dimensions of practice (see Figure 1). Represented in graphical form as a framework for discussion, these all relate to an important aspect of ‘being connected’. They can be applied flexibly to different disciplines, but the intention is for all members who have a stake in the work of the university – including, very importantly, students – to explore what these dimensions mean in the context of a given field.

1. Connecting students with research

The first dimension of the Connected Curriculum framework is promoting connections between students and researchers. There are many ways in which this can happen, and the best approaches will be the ones that best suit the given discipline and local context. However, one activity that is proving both popular and successful is a first-year student induction activity called Meet the Researcher. In this flexible small group task, which can last a number of weeks and be built into the formally assessed curriculum or run as an informal activity alongside, students investigate the work of one of the researchers in the department. They find out as much as they can about the researcher’s work, dividing up tasks between them and thereby building on their teamwork skills. They then meet the researcher and ask her or him a number of questions, for example about what they are really trying to achieve, how
Co-creating a Connected Curriculum

3. Connecting across disciplines

The third dimension focuses on connecting across disciplines. Many programmes of study in higher education draw on fields that inherently connect several disciplines; others are more closely focused on one. In a complex, changing world in which knowledge is so readily connected and challenged online, we arguably do students a
their work is funded, what interests them most about the work and what are its main challenges. After this, they create a communications artefact of some kind to communicate the work of the researcher to a non-expert audience. Some students have created videos, which the researchers have subsequently posted on their web pages: a good example of a mutually beneficial dialogue, early in their course.

2. A throughline of enquiry

Central to programme design is the second dimension: a throughline of enquiry built into the curriculum. The focus here is on designing into every degree a joined up pathway of enquiry, with the aim of overcoming some of the intellectual fragmentation and personal disconnect that can arise from our modular systems. The intention is to challenge students to make connections between all of the different aspects of their learning – across modules, and also beyond the formal curriculum and empower them to develop their identity as a scholar, as a producer and as a professional.

This throughline can be created in various ways – for example, through a core sequence of mandatory modules that follow on directly from one another, or through a longitudinal, programme-wide ‘Showcase Portfolio’. Such a portfolio can be a curated expression of the best of students’ best work, and form a significant proportion of their final degree award (Fung 2017, Chapter 7).

3. Connecting across disciplines

The third dimension focuses on connecting across disciplines. Many programmes of study in higher education draw on fields that inherently connect several disciplines; others are more closely focused on one. In a complex, changing world in which knowledge is so readily connected and challenged online, we arguably do students a
disservice if we do not encourage them to explore or at least visit the perspectives of other disciplines. For example, an optional module at each level of study could comprise the study of a global challenge such as child poverty, human wellbeing or environmental sustainability, bringing together experts from different disciplines to help students see the subtle connections between different areas of knowledge. Another option might focus on one specific topic: a selection of nineteenth-century English novels, for example, but look at it through different lenses. So the novel might be seen through the eyes not only of an English lecturer but also through those of a sociologist and a historian. More radically, entirely new interdisciplinary programmes may be developed, such as the BSc programme at UCL (UCL 2017c), in which students study both sciences and humanities subjects through their degree. Students take mandatory core modules in which they are asked to make explicit connections between the different disciplinary approaches to knowledge. Might your department lead on the development of a new programme that builds on the expertise of colleagues working in different fields?

4. Preparing for lifelong learning

The fourth dimension highlights the importance to both individual students and society of preparing students for a lifetime of learning, including learning in the workplace. This is hardly a new concept, yet we may not always make the most of possibilities such as work shadowing and learning from alumni, or indeed of designing learning activities that mirror the messy, unstructured learning of those who are in the workplace and responding to unexpected new challenges. Across the disciplines, keys to this dimension include empowering students to express their knowledge and skills in ways that make sense to employers and others in the wider world, and preparing them for lifelong learning in a rapidly changing world.

5. Producing outputs

A closely related dimension of the Connected Curriculum framework is the fifth: ‘Students learn to produce ‘outputs’: assessments directed at an audience’. At every level of study, are students assessed at least once through an outward-facing communications artefact, directed at a specific audience? Students may collaborate to develop a film documentary, write a proposal on sustainability for a local organisation, or craft a journal article for a named publication. Such outputs or products can contribute to a Showcase Portfolio, enabling students to graduate with a publicly available collection of professionally produced work.

6. Making personal connections

The sixth and final dimension shines a light on the value of personal connections – particularly those personal connections between students, including those in different years of study, and also between current students and alumni. Peer mentoring and peer study groups are examples of approaches that build these connections, and promote a sense of belonging. Likewise, student assessments that are addressed to other students can forge creative links. A real-life example in Physics at UCL involves asking second year students to produce short videos for first year students, with the aim of helping them to understand concepts that they themselves found difficult (Fung 2017, 131). This has the additional benefits of enabling the second years to revise those key topics and developing their abilities to communicate science to others.
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Application of the Connected Curriculum Framework

Each of the dimensions of the framework needs to be applied to different disciplines in different ways, of course. But by developing new, creative partnerships with students and alumni to explore these themes, academics and professional colleagues alike are taking a fresh look at the ways in which whole degree programmes, both undergraduate and postgraduate, are constructed. They are also working together to develop new opportunities for diverse students to connect across years of study and with alumni, too, creating a shared ‘learning and research’ community.

UCL ChangeMakers

An initiative at UCL that is proving extremely helpful in taking new ideas and practices forward is called UCL ChangeMakers (UCL 2017d). The scheme offers some funding to students to work in groups to investigate an area of their curriculum or their wider student experience that they would like to change, and to present an evidence-based argument for that change. Other ChangeMakers are ‘scholars’, who investigate an area such as assessment and feedback and help departments other than their own to improve practice. Some even observe the teaching of lecturers from different departments who volunteer to get feedback from students from outside their own programme. Evaluation and research into these approaches are ongoing, but there are very positive signs. For example, there have been significant improvements in National Student Survey scores relating to assessment and feedback for the departments who have worked with a ChangeMaker scholar. At the same time, students are working with departments to consider where they think programmes are in relation to the six dimensions of the Connected Curriculum framework, and to co-design actions for future development.

The purpose of the framework is to promote dialogue among and across departments, both students and staff, about the ways in which programmes are designed, including the ways in which students are expected to learn and be assessed. The conversations can also range into the area of co-curricular opportunities, such as offering an ‘open-to-all’ research seminar programme or a peer mentoring scheme. The following twenty questions may help with those discussions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Key questions for departments and programme teams</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core principle</td>
<td>1. Are students encountering specific questions addressed by researchers and learning to articulate their own research questions, at every level of study?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students learn through research and enquiry</td>
<td>2. Can we adjust our teaching methods, student assessments and other aspects of departmental practice to prioritise engaging all students actively in research and critical enquiry?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dimension 1</td>
<td>3. Do students have opportunities to learn about the institution’s research, and other current research relevant to their studies?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students connect with researchers and with the institution’s research</td>
<td>4. Are students meeting with researchers and engaging with their work, for example through group activities such as ‘Meet the Researcher’?</td>
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<td>Dimension 2</td>
<td><strong>A throughline of research activity is built into each programme</strong></td>
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<td><strong>5</strong> Are students exploring the intellectual, policy-related, practical and ethical challenges associated with current research, and recognising their relevance to professional life more widely?</td>
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<td><strong>6</strong> Is there a well designed core sequence of modules, units and/or learning activities through which students steadily build their research skills and understandings, and is this explicit to students?</td>
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<td><strong>7</strong> Are students explicitly challenged to make intellectual connections between different elements of their programme?</td>
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<td><strong>8</strong> Can students have some flexibility and even take risks with their research-related activities, for example by working towards a Showcase Portfolio for which they can curate their best work?</td>
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<th>Dimension 3</th>
<th><strong>Students make connections across disciplines and out to the world</strong></th>
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<td><strong>9</strong> Is the programme of study structured so that students need to step outside their home discipline(s) and see through at least one other disciplinary lens?</td>
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<td><strong>10</strong> Are students required to make explicit connections between disciplinary perspectives, for example by collaborating with students of other disciplines to analyse evidence and issues?</td>
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<td><strong>11</strong> Through making interdisciplinary connections, are students challenged to address complex global challenges?</td>
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<th>Dimension 4</th>
<th><strong>Students connect academic learning with workplace learning</strong></th>
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<td><strong>12</strong> Are all students on the programme(s) able to analyse the ways in which their academic learning is relevant to the world of work?</td>
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<td><strong>13</strong> Do students have explicit opportunities to prepare for the workplace, for example through meeting alumni, shadowing, and work placements, and where appropriate through critiquing the notions of work and professionalism in society?</td>
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<td><strong>14</strong> Can students articulate effectively the skills and knowledge they have developed through their research-related activities and through their wider studies and experiences, and showcase these to future employers?</td>
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<th>Dimension 5</th>
<th><strong>Students learn to produce outputs: assessments directed at an audience</strong></th>
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<td><strong>15</strong> Are some student assessments outward-facing, directed at an audience, thereby enabling them to connect with local and/or wider communities (whether online or face-to-face)?</td>
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<td><strong>16</strong> Are student assessments across the programme suitably varied, enabling them to develop a range of skills including expertise in digital practices and communications?</td>
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<td><strong>17</strong> Are students required to revisit and use feedback on their tasks, both formative and summative, in order to improve their work?</td>
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<th>Dimension 6</th>
<th><strong>Students connect with each other, across phases and with alumni</strong></th>
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<td><strong>18</strong> Do students have frequent opportunities to meet and participate in collaborative enquiry with one another in diverse groups?</td>
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<td><strong>19</strong> Are they building connections with students in other year groups, for example through events or mentoring schemes?</td>
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<td><strong>20</strong> Can students meet and learn from diverse alumni, and build a strong sense of belonging to an inclusive research and learning community?</td>
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*The Connected Curriculum in 20 Questions (Fung 2017, pp 146-147)*
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Of course, it is not only departments who can take an active role in effecting change. Institutions may need to look hard at some traditional practices, including the reward and recognition of those who spend time on teaching and on enhancing students’ learning opportunities. Those who think beyond customary approaches, develop their practice in evidence-based, creative ways and have a positive influence on the work of their colleagues deserve to be fully rewarded through promotion processes. The higher education sector is beginning to make changes in these areas (see for example Fung and Gordon 2016 and Fung, Besters-Dilger and van der Vaart 2017), but there is still much to do. Other areas that might need to be addressed at institutional level include the development of digital and physical spaces: are these set up in the best possible way to enable students to take part in active enquiry, and to collaborate and review one another’s work in the manner of researchers?

Conclusion

The Connected Curriculum initiative has been adopted as part of a twenty-year strategy at UCL, so it is about looking into the medium and long-term future, as well as making some appropriate changes now. Do all academics immediately buy into this way of thinking about curriculum and curriculum change? No, of course not, for some, any initiative that has the strategic backing of the institution is inherently untrustworthy. Academic work has often been seen and practised as a solo sport and not a team game, so it can understandably be frustrating for some to be asked to have these collective discussions about new possibilities, however open the stimuli for debate are. But the minds of some are changed when they begin to see the creative possibilities afforded by these new ways of thinking. This is especially so when they see examples of interesting practices being developed by colleagues who have responded much more readily to these ideas, and indeed when they see possibilities here for foregrounding their own values and perspectives, even where these may run counter to the argument of this paper. The aim is simply, but perhaps also profoundly, to create an even more vibrant, interconnected culture whereby, as Angela Brew puts it, ‘students, academics and others who work in universities progressively work towards the development of inclusive scholarly knowledge-building communities of practice’ (Brew 2006, p 180).

In your department, how are you working with students to explore shared values and dimensions of practice to enhance the areas of curriculum you offer? Do any of these ideas resonate? Let us know through Twitter via @UCLConnectedC – we’d love to hear from you.

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UCL (2017d) UCL ChangeMakers, at: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/changemakers.


**Biography**

Professor Dilly Fung is Pro-Director (Education), London School of Economics, and at the time of writing was Professor of Higher Education Development and Academic Director of the Arena Centre for Research-based Education at University College London (UCL). Where she led a series of ambitious initiatives designed to advance research-based education, including the innovative Connected Curriculum initiative.
Other key areas included UCL ChangeMakers, a scheme designed to give students opportunities to lead on transformational projects. Drawing on her interdisciplinary roots in English, Political Philosophy and Philosophy of Education, and on her long teaching career in both further education and higher education, Dilly is interested in ideas of what we might mean by ‘good’ education in a diverse and challenging world: what are the relationships between ‘good’ education, research, educational scholarship and academic leadership? Her HEA-funded study, ‘Rewarding Educators and Education Leaders in Research-intensive Universities’ (Fung and Gordon 2016), analyses ways in which job families and career opportunities are changing in the sector and explores the differences between ‘teaching excellence’ and ‘education leadership’. These themes were explored further in a recent position paper written on behalf of the League of European Research Universities (LERU) (Fung, Besters-Dilger and van der Vaart 2017). Twitter @DevonDilly, Email: D.Fung@ucl.ac.uk.
Acting on feedback over assessment, an iterative spiral of improvement for both students and lecturers

Dr Dipak K Sarker, School of Pharmacy and Biomolecular Sciences

Abstract

The research presented, studies, explores and dissects the much discussed notion for feedback and grading on some form of assessed work. It is by no means clear to academics or students alike, the exact form that this should take. However, what both sides of the debate (students and academics alike) know, are the expectation of what purpose evaluation serves in the learning process. The final equilibrium position is one where student expectation is matched against that of the tutor within the framework of competence and degree description of the institution or controlling body.

Introduction

Repeatedly and unsurprisingly the habitual bugbear of students (and academics) is the question of feedback and feed-forward. Feed-forward (Race 2014) simply means feedback to permit the student to improve on the quality of their submission (Asonitou 2015). Feedback generally refers to the indication of extent or presence of points of excellence or weakness and inadequacy in a piece of assessed work; with no option for improvement on that piece. Colloquially both terms are used interchangeably. Feedback is a subject often least well received by the student body in the National Student Survey (NSS). The NSS has been instrumental in providing academic institutions with performance and student perception-related feedback. Students value feedback immensely and routinely ‘grumble’ about it across all institutions, where levels of satisfaction rarely top the 65 per cent mark (Howard and Maxwell 1980; Williams and Cappuccini-Ansfield 2007). On the contrary, satisfaction with tutors and courses is very seldom below 80 per cent. In 2016, chemistry students in The School of Pharmacy and Biomolecular Sciences (PABS) reported a 100 per cent or full satisfaction with their BSc degree. Despite this glorious evaluation, feedback was still considered a ‘bone of contention.’ Large cohorts can be particularly prone to an individual’s ‘poor’ perceived feedback because of the burden of marking and grading, which means it is often less detailed and voluminous than the student expectation. Recently, chemistry tutors offered year two students a two-hour feedback session of exam paper questions. Students were surprised to see the small amount of annota-
tion of exam answers by staff. This is not entirely surprising given the 140-180 student cohorts and the pressure to collect marks without routinely showing them to students, quite unlike coursework. This work is both a study and an exploration of feedback and assessment, which are inseparable and entwined.

The Deming Cycle

The Deming Cycle (or Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) Cycle) represents an ideal way of reinforcing and fragmenting a process into manageable tasks (Figure 1, below). The cycle is used widely in manufacturing industries and engineering (Deming 1950). However, the cycle is also applicable to the ideal simplified way of writing or managing a composition or assessment, and bears a striking resemblance to the pedagogic steps discussed in a Model of Experiential Learning (Kolb 1984); used widely to promote deep learning strategies over surface learning. The process is made of four steps starting with, i) a Plan (of key attributes), moving through ii) enacting (Do), then via iii) checking and marking (Check) to iv) acting on feedback or feed-forward information (Act). Parts (i) and (ii) can be considered the dominion of the student and parts (iii) and (iv) brought about by the tutor. Notably, in the case of the student the information provided in step (iv) is used to formulate another plan and therefore used to refine work or future efforts.

**Figure 1. The Deming Cycle - Plan, Do, Check, Act**

The learning process

Assessment for a learning process is discussed in some elegant detail by Brown (2004-05), who states that the ideal form of assessment should be based around a fundamental ‘Simplicity.’ Other authors add that a simplistic approach (without being cursory or trivial) is the best approach to obtain, convey and propagate (Figure 1) meaningful feedback to students (Baume et al 2004). This of course, depends on the nature of the desired feedback (Asonitou 2015). The two types are:

A. Feedback: Undertaken after being marked. Designed for future attempts of different work. Detailed ideally.
B. Feed-forward: Formative role for current attempt. Undertaken prior to summative assessment on the same work. Detailed ideally.

In both cases, detailed feedback is needed to get the most out of the exercise. So, in this way we must decide whether the exercise is formative (aids skill generation) or summative (results in an estimation of ability or skill i.e. a grade). Given that some detail is required the next question is based on the ideal form and characteristics of the feedback.

Feedback form and character

Types of feedback and feed-forward are discussed at some length by Hesketh and Laidlaw (2002). They discuss two basic types, firstly verbal, which can be direct and indirect, or individual sit-down sessions, which are seen as open and productive (Hill 2007). There are also more traditional routes such as the seminar or tutorial and these also work very well. However, one asks, how do you provide feedback to struggling students who do not attend regularly?

The second, non-verbal method can range from annotation of work to seminar and discussion forum group work. The simplest forms of feedback cover aspects such as, basic mark, grade, percentage and can be typed on a pro forma or handwritten. Alternatives include, electronic or automated responses, button-click programs and formulated auto-email. Old-fashioned formats are often written in brief annotations and symbols, direct points of weakness, points of commendation and points indicated in situ. However, newer formats can mean an extensive managed pro forma and highly categorised classifications, for example (i) two things to improve this work and (ii) style or grammar, clarity of argument and scientific or technical content, for the sciences. Intensive group activity based on summary and synopsis of the assessment and its complexities, significance or value has great potential but is time consuming and necessitates smaller group sizes. Lastly, there is a significant role for referential feedback by reflecting on ‘institutional/professional’ grade boundary indicators e.g. definitions of A*/E (Lapiņa and Ščeulovs 2014), as indicated in Table 1 (below and over). Academic work in the modern era is usually graded in terms of its excellence with regard to a series of pre-determined values or attributes, as indicated for first class work and unsatisfactory or failing work in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNDERGRADUATE GRADING DESCRIPTORS (levels 4, 5 and 6*)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>80-100</strong> A+ First class/Distinction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All learning outcomes/assessment criteria have been achieved to an exceptionally high level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The work demonstrates most or all of the following characteristics beyond that expected for work at the given level of study within the discipline:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Exceptional display of understanding, exploration, insight and/or research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• All specifications for the assessment task, including word limit/time limit where appropriate, have been adhered to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*General Examination and Assessment Regulations for taught courses: University of Brighton: University Marking/Grading Descriptors: Undergraduate: June 2012.
Rather like the chicken-and-egg concept, as trainers, we frequently ask ourselves ‘does assessment drive learning’ or is it vice versa? (Baume et al 2004) There are a multitude of behaviours (Table 1), with some students taking either a ‘learn-for-passing’ and ‘learn how-to-pass’ approach (they discuss this online in fora, such as Facebook). This is without learning, meaning, the context, value, reason and significance in a ‘bigger picture’, which is very often missed. Ironically, it is the latter that gives meaning to the facts and makes it harder to learn. Notably, some students ‘loathe and fear’ assessment (Hanrahan and Isaacs 2001; Neuderth et al 2009) and based on this surprisingly, some students resent the course and tutors that grade them (Grow 1991).

For the universities now preoccupied with student surveys and what this can mean for funding and therefore course viability, some students (Lowe and Cook 2003) that ‘get stung’ with low marks (McClure et al 2011) look for a means of giving ‘scorn’ in feedback such as ‘module and course evaluation documents’ or ‘rate your lecturer’ surveys, alongside genuine grievances. Colourful examples of the trivialisation of this informative role reduced to scorn include:

- ‘Dr X has the worst notes in the uni’ (vague with the true meaning and motive unclear)
- ‘Dr X is a poor lecturer’ (vague with the true meaning and motive unclear)
- ‘Dr X is unhelpful’ (vague with the true meaning and motive unclear)

Comments of this type cannot really be used, and this is a pity since it is unclear what the student is technically trying to say. Is the lecturer not good at lecturing or unentertaining and rather desultory or half-hearted? In addition, these comments can act as a demotivator for staff, as one staff member commented, ‘people get immune to over-negative feedback.’ Once students realise that assessment is a ‘crude’ but necessary means to grade (approximate) understanding and learning, it possibly becomes less intrusive and annoying to them.
Standardising evaluation

University course evaluation is not standardised despite numerous attempts to do so, but can it ever really be standardised when the students and staff have such different viewpoints? (Lowe and Cook 2003). In course development boards tutors talk about ‘standard feedback’ (Table 1) but this is impossible to do at some level because people have different ways of interpreting information and its complexity. Two good illustrative points may be:

- Minimalistic approach: ‘Dr X just fills in the margin with the odd word’
- Dr X is keen for positive feedback and gives ‘copious feedback’ but then ‘annoys colleagues by causing a delay in passing on exam papers and coursework’, when colleagues see marking and double marking within tight deadlines as the real priority.

There is a balance to be struck here in terms of a moderate volume of appropriately detailed feedback that applies to both large groups and yet satisfies the burden of the assessor. Students report dissatisfaction with feedback (Baume et al 2004; Rust et al 2004), which can be either unhelpfully positive or demotivating and exceptionally negative. Pertinent examples might include examples from students, such as:

- ‘I did not like the comments made and they were not encouraging’
- ‘Feedback did not show me where I had done the right things’ (Miller 1990)
- ‘Feedback is only needed to show me my errors’
- ‘I only need feedback to show me how to get a better mark’
- ‘The feedback did not show me the right answer’ (Chinn and Hertz 2002).

The other problem with giving out answers as wanted by the student but seen by the examiner as inappropriate, is that of facilitating rote learning and the inability to re-use questions, since answers are conveyed among students or posted online.

One PABS academic stated ‘if you provide lots of positive and critical feedback’ students will undoubtedly want more. This could become untenable as staff usually do teaching, research and outreach and must craftily divide up their time. Consequently, the real point is in the nature and quality of feedback itself (Roach 2014). Just how much is ‘just right’ or what is ‘too little and too late?’ The amount is related to the number of students, yet takes into account provision of sufficient information (Table 1) to improve the quality (and mark) that the work would obtain. Inevitably, 150 student essay papers take longer to mark than ten and the feedback given might vary depending on workload.

In the great debate over feedback, some things are forgotten: not all subjects are equal. A failure to accept a subject skill difference (Ecclestone 2001) can result in disappointment. For many of my students, often ‘soft science candidates’ for example, a variation in perceived difficulty of different modules, courses or themes persist, as do some predictable, clichéd sentiments that seem to prevail. The comments point at student thinking:
A. Module XX000 is ‘really hard’ (typically mathematical or fundamental science in nature, exam forms a large percentage)

B. Module YY000 is ‘really easy’ (typically non-mathematical, coursework seminar and workshop based)

In such a case the demands for feedback for anything to do with option (A) will undoubtedly be higher than for option (B), and this is obvious since an apparent ability to master the rigorous and difficult earns more commendation. Somewhat anecdotally, these kind of trends can be seen with PABS students. Evidence suggests that 50 per cent of students pick the most popular exam-based elective module (and this seems low given the student enthusiasm to the subject), yet 25 per cent of students pick an elective module with no exam, with no evidence of success and limited familiarity with staff (and this seems to point at the lack of exam being important). Notably, 0.7 - 2.1 per cent of students pick a choice of electives with ‘soft’ chemistry (largely recall-based topics and non-interpretative in nature) basis with popular staff and this again seems low.

What is very clear, whatever the subject matter, is the desire from students for feedback on a case-by-case basis (Lowe and Cook 2003; Wass et al 2001). Additionally, in modern higher education (Baume et al 2004) and with student-surveys weighting an institution’s potential funding, there is also a need to keep the ‘troops’ happy and drive good appraisal. However, one queries the need for giving feedback to all because institutional rules say so, since many students (35 per cent+) just want a grade (Mashoko 2016). The level of marking or workload seem closely related with numbers (course \( n=10 \) vs \( n=170 \)), from an academic’s perspective, a larger cohort size drives brevity of feedback (Ecclestone 2001). One remedy is to have timetabled sessions for feedback, but then, uptake can be poor for the following reasons:

- Students have got their mark, so why bother to turn-up (Hill 2007)
- Fighting against apathy or misconception, students say ‘show me and I’ll do it, I don’t care about why’
- Planning content of sessions and resisting the impatient mindset: ‘simply give me content that I need to pass the exam’ (Lowe and Cook 2003)

The solution is to give an indication that feedback has formative value – but how and what metric do you choose (Dent and Harden 2013) to convey this? Again, the answer possibly lies in showing evidence or proof that heeding feedback leads to a general increase in scores. For example, an undergraduate thesis moving from a mark of 58 per cent to a mark of 63 per cent is not uncommon after incorporating suggestions from a supervisor in ‘feed-forward’ mode.

Feedback sampling and methods

Moving on to cover study, which is tied-up with assessment requirements and expectations, it is worth reflecting on the composition of the student body. For a student cohort (sample population) of roughly equally mixed proportions according to age, the younger end (18-21 years) dominates, as might be expected with 46 per cent, followed by 29 per cent for 22-25 years, and 24 per cent for 26+ age bands. The stu-
dent body were of equally mixed ethnicity of, 33 per cent Asian, 27 per cent White, 24 per cent Black, and 3 per cent Mixed types (the remaining 13 per cent of students did not provide ethnicity data), and there were roughly double the number of females to males (71: 29). A third of student respondents came from the final year of a four-year programme of study (34 per cent). The staff base was roughly 60 per cent White, 20 per cent Asian, 10 per cent Black and 10 per cent Mixed ethnicity. Students were surveyed by questionnaire and interview, however, academic staff were only surveyed by interview.

Feedback findings

Key findings for students, which support other studies (Rust et al 2003), and those of staff are presented in Table 2 (below). One of the most significant comments was the disconnect between staff and students in terms of expectations and role. In most cases, students wanted more feedback and staff were hesitant to provide this as it was seen to compromise self-evaluation and self-direction.

Having been faced with criticisms over the value of feedback to trainee and instructor as a tool for conveying information, a question of the effectiveness of (good) feedback remains. The question of what represents a good and poor example of feedback (Figure 2 over) sits squarely at the top of ideal pedagogic practice. What seems abundantly clear is that marks need to be discussed where there is misunderstanding, but once again there is a time element needed for this with large university cohorts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students critique on feedback</th>
<th>Staff justifications on feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Negative tone, being vague and level of ambiguity</td>
<td>1 The main purpose of feedback/ feed forward lies in gap-closing current and desired performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Difficulty in adjustment: feedback was less directive than at school.</td>
<td>2 Recognised views are different between staff and students, meaning unfulfilled student expectations and the perceived ineffectiveness of feedback by student body (Lowe and Cook 2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Need for prescriptive feedback (Lowe and Cook 2003)</td>
<td>3 It was widely assumed by academics that feedback was clear and trouble-free (Ecclestone 2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Frustration at not being told exactly what improvements were needed (Brown 2004-05)</td>
<td>4 There was a need to engage both parties in dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Perceived poor timing of feedback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Best route for feedback/forward was via direct dialogue or via being shown specimens of good work (Roach 2014)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. What students and staff said in summary about the feedback they either received or gave out

In the debate over good, mediocre and poor feedback or feed-forward, who really decides what is good feedback? In the final analysis, it is either the student or the
Acting on feedback over assessment ...

recipient of the student work that can say if the feedback advice and direction worked (Table 3, above). Again, there are two perspectives, the academic wants autonomy and self-reliance at university level (Figure 2, above) and the students want to learn or rather increasingly, merely pass exams and assessments (Table 3.)

**Figure 2. So what is good feedback?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The tutor’s perspective</th>
<th>The students’ perspective (Brown 2004-05)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Facilitates student self-reflection</td>
<td>▪ Gets me high marks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Encourages tutor and college peer dialogue</td>
<td>▪ Less effort required after initial outlay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Helps clarify grading criteria, goals and standards</td>
<td>▪ Learn generic skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Provides opportunities for improvement</td>
<td>▪ Learn benchmark standards and expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Delivers high quality information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Encourages motivation and self-esteem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Provides information which may be recycled for pedagogic use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Proportionate with balance of other activities and value of assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3. What students and staff expect from feedback**
The net effects of good feedback

At worst, feedback serves as a means of indicating to a student that the mark associated with the assessment has been well-considered and compared to a set of standards. However, at best, the point of feedback is to initiate the students into independent thought based on the development of new skills and insights within the framework of a comprehensive and constantly improving job done. (Figure 3, below).

Conclusions

On close examination, what becomes clear is the complexity of the themes running through the issue of ‘feedback.’ The complexity of which has been likened to an interconnected non-symmetrical pattern, with the comment ‘If it was simple it would have been fixed in no time.’ What is patently obvious is the ‘disconnect’ between staff (university model) and students (school model) paradigms of the acceptable. Consequently, academic staff are happy with status quo but students are disaffected. Additionally, demands for feedback vary with the subject, cohort, age and stage of the degree programme. Some students seem more content with less feedback while others demand more and more. It becomes clear that there is a need to bridge-the-gap between student expectations and the perceived ineffectiveness of feedback or feed-forward routes.

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Biography

Dr Dipak Sarker started his academic life as a chemist and engineer before completing a PhD in Physics in 1995. After several years of post-doctoral and lecturing work at universities in France and Germany he took up a position in the School of Pharmacy and Biomolecular Sciences at the University of Brighton. His research activities at the University cover aspects of physics, nanotechnology, engineering and food technology. He has had a career-long interest in metrology, and in more recent years this has spilled into analysis of grading effectiveness and design of assessment methodologies for students. He is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and an Assistant Course Leader for the Pharmacy degree. Email: d.k.sarker@brighton.ac.uk
MDTea podcast: co-construction in concept and practice

Dr Iain Wilkinson, Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust and Dr Joanna Preston, St George’s University Hospitals Foundation NHS Trust

Abstract

Older adults with increasing levels of complexity and frailty represent a significant proportion of interactions within health and social care. Comprehensive Geriatric Assessment (CGA) is proven to improve outcomes for older adults and is a multi-dimensional, multi-professional process of assessment. CGA requires the integration and coordination of the care delivered by a number of health and social care professionals as part of a Multi-disciplinary Team (MDT).

In this article we explore the possibilities for a podcast (The MDTea1) produced using the principles of co-construction to aid with the grasping of threshold concepts surrounding the care of older patients. We discuss how these principles were used to develop this learning resource and how input from listeners is shaping future episodes. Co-construction in this instance has led to a learning resource that is a useful supplementary tool for health and social care practitioners working with older people.

Introduction

Older adults are the majority users of the UK’s health and social care services. Numbers of older people are increasing at a rapid rate as the two large cohorts of people born just after World War II and in the 1960s, known as the ‘baby boomers’, reach their later years. As these two birth cohorts age further they will contribute to the continuing ageing of the UK population. The population has seen the proportion of adults aged 65 or over grow by 47 per cent since mid-1974 and this age group now makes up nearly 18 per cent of the total population. Projections see this continuing to rise; indeed in 2014 the number of people aged 75 or over made up 8 per cent of the population alone (ONS 2015).

Older patients are more likely to be frail (Clegg et al 2013) and the identification and management of frailty requires a comprehensive geriatric assessment (CGA) (Turner and Clegg 2014). The CGA is a multi-dimensional, multi-component assessment...
process leading to an individual management plan. Patients with frailty may be identified by a number of frailty defining syndromes, which can be varied and broad. As such it is recommended that all health and social care assessments of older people include an assessment for frailty (ibid). The CGA process requires coordination between numerous health and social care specialists (including doctors, nurses, occupational therapists, social workers and physiotherapists). Each of these professions works within their own specialist field towards improving the state of health of the individual. Working together in this multidisciplinary way means that undergoing the CGA process increases an individual patient’s likelihood of being alive and in their own home in the 12 months that follow (Ellis et al 2011).

Learning in health and social care settings however, is often not multidisciplinary in nature, with many staff undertaking the majority of their undergraduate and postgraduate training solely with their professional peers and not within the wider multi-professional group that they work with. This leads to the development of profession specific communities of practice, but does not contribute to developing interdisciplinary community of practice focused on the comprehensive and collaborative care that older patients require.

We aimed to address this by using the techniques of co-construction to develop a series of free educational, supplementary podcasts suitable for the whole multi-disciplinary team (MDT) on common topics encountered by those working with older adults. In this article we will explain the initial principles of co-creating the MDTea podcast. We will explore how this leads on to the development of a theory of threshold concepts acquisition and how the feedback leads to further co-construction and learning for the podcast faculty.

Podcasts

Podcasts are digital audio files made available on the internet for downloading to a computer or portable media player (such as a smart phone or MP3 player). They are typically available as a series which can be accessed in a variety of formats, for example, through streaming or podcast hosting platforms such as iTunes.

Podcasts differ to standard radio and other broadcast media since they are specifically subscribed to. In education, they have been described as a ‘high-value, low-cost’ (Salmon and Nie 2008). In particular podcasts allow a growth in the potential situations where learning can take place (both temporal and locational). They can be developed to facilitate interaction, providing opportunities for learners to contribute to the construction of future episodes to develop and focus the learning for peers (ibid).

Research in other areas of education found that podcasts can broadly provide educational content in one of three ways:

- **Reframed podcasts**: Where content is reproduced in multiple media (for example, textbook chapters summarised as podcast episodes).
- **Complementary podcasts**: That add extra information to enhance the student learning experience.
Supplementary podcasts: That re-design and broadcast content previously presented in a more traditional educational setting (Taylor and Clark 2010).

Within healthcare education there are a growing number of examples of podcasts as learning tools. The greatest area of growth has been in emergency medicine and critical care, where there are a number of high quality podcasts providing reviews and comment of the published literature. The experience of a group of emergency care clinicians and educators of podcasts in emergency medicine led them to conduct research on ‘what makes a good quality podcast’ using the Delphi consensus method. 13 quality indicators met their threshold for inclusion (Lin et al 2015). These indicators may serve as a foundation for further research on quality indicators of social media-based medical education resources (so called Free Open Access Medical Education or #FOAMed) and prompt discussion of their legitimacy as a form of educational scholarship. Although podcasts are accepted as a novel use of technology for disseminating knowledge within general medicine, the uptake however, has been limited and the quality of the listening experience is variable thus far (Wilson et al 2009).

It has been suggested that social media provides a means of grasping areas of tacit knowledge by allowing and encouraging:

1) sharing of information
2) social interactions
3) informal networking possibilities
4) observation and listening opportunities
5) creating mutual trust (Panahi, Watson and Partridge 2012)

We aimed to build on these principles in the development of our podcast and will explore how we did this, utilising principles of co-construction in the next section.

Hearing experienced MDT members talk about looking after older patients and the ideas of ‘care’ in this situation, together with the subsequent social media based discussions and interactions of others, may well lead to a number of listeners grasping areas of tacit knowledge not previously accessible to them. Care is a threshold concept which is central to healthcare for older adults; this will be explored in more detail below.

Co-construction in podcast development

When starting the process of developing a podcast suitable for all members of the MDT looking after older people, we developed an MDT based faculty to guide the development and content to ensure that the podcasts have appeal to the wider MDT. There are no previous podcasts addressing team based learning, nor explicitly using principles of co-construction in their development on which to base the rules of our project. We therefore set ourselves three rules for creating the podcast, using the principles of co-construction, namely ‘the readiness to treat students as active partners in the design, implementation and evaluation of their education (Hargreaves 2009).
Faculty representation

The faculty involved with the podcast needed to represent the wider MDT that look after older people in the health and social care setting, in which learners practice. Our first step was to ensure that learners from each discipline were central in the development, governance and review of the project. Core faculty members represent nursing, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, pharmacy, doctors, physician associates and social work. Guest faculty are co-opted to assist with episodes covering specific topics, for example, dietetics, speech and language therapy, dentistry and psychiatry. Faculty members are from a mixture of clinical and academic backgrounds to maintain a balance of clinical practice and educational delivery in development.

Topic selection

One of the primary aims of the podcast is to break down barriers between disciplines, encouraging inter-disciplinary communities of practice. Therefore, each of the topics covered in any given episode of the MDTea podcast must appeal to more than just one particular group of learners from a single discipline. We therefore set a rule that each topic should be highly relevant to a minimum of two of the MDT disciplines. These two disciplines then took the lead on the literature searching and content governance for that episode.

Audience integration

The episode structure should provide opportunities for learners to directly interact in a number of places. All of these elements should encourage audience participation and interaction with the episode to guide both future topic selection and content. These are:

a) Starting each episode with feedback from previous episodes, which allows listeners to contribute their ideas.

b) All episodes to conclude with an ‘MDTeaser’ guessing game in which listeners interact via email or social media with the chance of winning a prize.

c) The production of infographics released before each episode to encourage discussion and the sharing of resources on social media about the forthcoming topic.

In addition to our co-construction rules, the interactions between the MDTea podcast Twitter account and the listeners prompt further co-production as the audience is asked about topics for future series and to give examples of best practice, which can then be discussed on the podcast.

Threshold concepts

The theoretical framework of threshold concepts (TCs) first arose during research and discussions as part of the Economics strand of the Economic and Social Research Council’s Teaching and Learning Research Programme Project: ‘Enhancing teaching and learning environments in undergraduate courses’ (Meyer and Land 2003). In discussion with the teachers in higher education Ray Land and Erik Meyer became aware that students found some areas of learning difficult, and indeed some students became ‘stuck’ when trying to understand particular (often key) con-
ceptual areas. For the students the final grasping of these important ideas (when they ‘get it’) led to a fundamental change in the way they viewed the subject matter. TCs tend to be tacit knowledge (Wilkinson 2015) and thus can be difficult to encode in simple language (Collins 2013).

Land and Meyer made the important point that there are concepts that are core to a given discipline but differentiate core concepts from their threshold concepts. Whilst core concepts have to be understood, and are certainly building blocks for further development, they may not lead to a qualitatively different view of the subject matter. A TC is transformative in some manner for the student, and leads to a change in subjectivity (or an ontological shift) since they have now changed for knowing this concept.

After discussions with teachers from a range of disciplines Land and Meyer concluded that there are five potential components of a TC and together they form a conceptual gateway (or portal) into a previously inaccessible way of thinking about something (Land and Meyer 2006).

- **Transformative**: TCs lead to a shift in the perception of the subject by the learner and in some instances may lead to a transformation of personal identity (termed a reconstruction of subjectivity).
- **Irreversible**: Once achieved this transformative change is likely to be particularly important for the mastery of the subject and is likely to be irreversible in nature. The concept is unlikely to be forgotten and to un-learn it is likely to need considerable effort. Land and Meyer also hint at the notion that their respondents (lecturers) noted that thinking about problems from the pre threshold (student) point of view was difficult.
- **Integrative**: A TC is meant to expose the hidden inter-relatedness of something. Other concepts and ideas that the student already knows are brought together for potentially the first time.
- **Bounded**: The knowledge gained is likely to form a boundary for the subject.
- **Troublesome Knowledge**: By their nature threshold concepts are troublesome to attain and may lead to high levels of anxiety among learners.

**Care and threshold concepts**

Within the field of healthcare education there has thus far been a relative paucity of work dealing with the identification of, or the practical usage for, TCs. By and large healthcare education at a higher professional level is performed in a university setting and study is split between the learning of theory (in a university) and the practical application of knowledge (in clinical practice).

When training, students have to make the transition from novice student to ‘expert’ practitioner over a period of three to five years. As with any ontological change this is likely to occur gradually. In healthcare education much of the education is centred on teaching students how to provide ‘care’ in the current healthcare environment. There is less emphasis placed upon the personal development of knowledge and furthering the fields of knowledge than in other fields of education, much of this happens in the postgraduate work undertaken by practitioners. The concept of ‘care’ is the core
business of healthcare education, although it is often assumed, and little curriculum
time is devoted to the analysis of what constitutes ‘good care’.

The concept of care is explored by Clouder in her article proposing that ‘care’ is in
itself a TC (Clouder 2005). In this analysis she draws on Toronto’s framework for
understanding the concept of care (Toronto 2001) identifying four aspects to care:
‘Caring about, taking care of, care-giving and care receiving’. The first two of these
areas are associated with a potential detachment by practitioners, it is possible to
care about, or take care of, someone without actually providing the hands on care
yourself. Giving care is however, much more hands on, and Clouder makes the
point that many students enter the profession to actually give care and the positive
response gained from patients and clients as care receivers helps reinforce this.
This is echoed in previous research (Wilkinson 2015) suggesting that geriatricians
practice maternalistic care, which is care that is delivered actively, is nurturing and
holistic in its nature. Indeed perceptions of ‘care’ are also the centre point of the
interaction between patient and clinical teams (Kinchin and Wilkinson 2016) this is
illustrated in Figure 1 (below).

Figure 1. Concept map of care
(Kinchin and Wilkinson 2016)

Clouder (2005) makes three suggestions to improve the crossing of this threshold
concept of care:

1) Thinking how teachers prepare students for their exposure to clinical practice
to ensure that they are capable of meeting the challenges ahead.

2) Ensuring a framework is in place to maximise a student’s exposure to a wide
range of patients at an early stage in their training to allow them to maximise
their own framework for care.
Looking at the support available to students undergoing identity transformation to maximise dialogue between ‘teacher’ and ‘students’ as the key to maintaining a sense of perspective when students experience uncertainty.

A theory for podcast social media’s role in acquiring threshold concepts

One area where TCs exist is in the form and meaning of language. As a person develops their skill in their given discipline, the meaning (signification) of common words (the sign), changes (Land et al 2014). For example, the meaning or signification of ‘care’ will change from a junior medical school undergraduate to that of a senior experienced clinician, although the word itself (the sign) will not.

The process one goes through, learning the ‘new’ meaning for the phrases and words we use and the settling of these ideas into one’s cognition, is termed the liminal space. Podcasts provide an additional and valuable opportunity to help students cross this liminal space by providing a graduated exposure to the new (and often tacit) concepts explored in a structured manner, which is relevant and complimentary to the experiential learning taking place in clinical practice. In other words listening to a podcast allows students a supplementary means of information transfer (Taylor and Clark 2010).

When grasping TCs for the first time, it is known that students often initially adopt a position of the mimic (where they copy the actions/wording used by others) (Cousin 2006). Much of this is learning developed informally from the workplace and taken from encounters with a range of personnel, some of whom are often not viewed as having a formal ‘teaching’ role (Boud and Middleton 2003) for example, peers or other professionals, but are still part of the local community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991). Listening to podcasts allows this to happen (in an additional manner to this ‘informal’ workplace learning) by giving learners information, turns of phrase and information supplementary to their current situational learning. Indeed the podcasts may make some of the ‘informal’/tacit knowledge gained from the workplace clearer by situating it in a formal knowledge structure. Interactions about the podcasts within both the learner’s local communities of practice and the larger community of practice in the digital space (Bates 2014) allows ideas to be shared and support given to the learning. This support and validation of the learning linked to the feedback into the podcasts provides the final aspect of co-construction.

Co-construction revisited

We have seen already the importance of elements of co-construction in the development of the MDTea podcast series, where the faculty co-create content for the programmes, which also influences the faculty themselves. The encouragement of listener feedback adapts the program and gives an insight to the faculty into the position of listeners and their liminal spaces. The learning is bi-directional (‘expert’ to ‘student’ and ‘student’ to ‘expert’) as shown is see Figure 2 (over).

The signification of words will change for the listener, the faculty and others interacting in the various communities of practice. This subsequent dialogue between all
participants on and in social media and the workplace, may well lead onto a reconceptualisation of existing knowledge structures and the development of new areas of knowledge as part of the reflection process described by Jarvis (2009). In this situation the podcast is a mediating artefact (Vygotsky 1978) encouraging listeners to develop their knowledge within their zone of development. It is here that the importance of a sound constructivist episode structure i.e. being explicit about the primary intended learning outcomes and building on prior knowledge comes through, providing a scaffolding for the learning by the listeners. Viewing the potential for podcasts to be the mediating artefact/spur for the discussion and subsequent reflection, makes them an invaluable tool for the development of co-constructed knowledge amongst the faculty, but also the community of listeners and those that they interact with in the workplace. In this context podcasts are a highly accessible means of supplementing learning by encouraging reflection on current practice, and we propose, the grasping of tacit knowledge and threshold concepts also.

**Conclusion**

Threshold concepts are key areas of, predominantly, tacit knowledge within healthcare. There is a growth in the numbers of older patients needing complex multi-professional health and social care. We propose that podcasts potentially provide a pivotal means of supplementing and providing scaffolding to listeners understanding of the threshold concepts present in MDT working and thus the ‘care’ of older patients. The development of the MDTea podcast using the principles of co-construction and the learning by co-production, stimulated by the podcast based discussions, has led to a learning resource that is a useful supplementary tool for health and social care practitioners working with older people.
Bibliography


Biographies

Dr Iain Wilkinson is a Consultant Geriatrician with a special interest in Orthogeriatrics and movement disorders at Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust, Redhill, Surrey. He is a fellow of the Higher Education Academy and has a longstanding interest in medical education and educational research into the threshold concepts contained within higher specialist training in geriatric medicine.

Dr Joanna Preston is a Consultant Geriatrician at St George’s Hospitals Healthcare NHS Trust, Tooting, London. She is interested in the role of education as a fundamental driver for service improvement and is deputy chair of the British Geriatric Society Clinical Quality Group.
An evaluation of the use of Pecha Kucha in an Interprofessional Advanced Practice MSc

Christine Watson, Deborah Gowers, Steven Close and Jane Groves, School of Health Sciences

Abstract

Purpose: This report evaluates the experiences of a group of interprofessional health science postgraduates using Pecha Kucha style presentations in their Advanced Leadership course.

Approach: Students were asked to present a change initiative within their area of work in the form of a Pecha Kucha. This was then presented to their peers who gave constructive feedback about the content and process. The students were also able to review their performance by reviewing a video of their work. As part of their masters, they were asked to write a reflective account about this.

Findings: Students’ engagement with the task was extremely positive. The students diverse reflective accounts of using Pecha Kucha as a form of presenting can inform teaching and help promote Interprofessional learning and teaching (IPL). Three clear themes were generated in relation to the students’ experiences drawing on the power of images, professional speaking and learning from the ‘unknown’.

Practical implications: Pecha Kucha is a useful alternative to more traditional PowerPoint presentations and actively encourages interprofessional learning according to the accepted definitions of IPL. For students at postgraduate level it offers a creative challenge and adds to their toolkit of practical communication skills.

Introduction

This report describes the use and evaluation of Pecha Kucha style presentations with a group of interprofessional advanced practice students on an MSc course. Pecha Kucha (PK) is pronounced, pa-chok-cha and is the Japanese term for chatter or ‘chit chat’. The PK presentation allows the student to use 20 slides, each slide displayed for 20 seconds. Our Advanced Practice students are senior members of healthcare teams and as such are expected to be able to critically analyse practice, argue for alternative approaches and implement change. As a formative assessment of these developing skills, students presented to their interprofessional peer group
and tutors in the PK style; ‘a practice development they wish to implement that will enhance service-user experience’. Evaluation was positive, students rated highly the experience and some have adopted this approach in their own clinical teaching.

**Background**

The concept of Pecha Kucha was first introduced in 2003 by two architects, Mark Dytham and Astrid Klein in Tokyo, as a method of presentation for designers to show their work in a concise and fast-paced manner (Levin and Peterson 2013).

The whole presentation lasts only six minutes and forty seconds. The slides should have carefully matched images to the topic being presented, rather than rely on text to convey the message. The presenter is thus forced to focus on the most relevant information during the strict time limit; to understand their subject well and to think about what the most relevant and pertinent points are. This rigid format, and the rehearsal and preparation required may be stressful for the student (Levin and Peterson 2013), and according to Masters and Holland (2013) flexibility of traditional presentation methods such as PowerPoint (PP) is lost. However, we felt the benefits of this challenge which forces the student to think, speak concisely and clearly on their topic would supersede the anxiety provoked by the format. According to Klentzin et al (2010) students using PP are concerned that they will ‘miss something out’ and PK could be seen to turn the tables on this notion with its focus on what should be included.

There is a paucity of good quality research into the effectiveness of PK, usually limited by small sample sizes with an absence of evidence as to its worth in Interprofessional learning (IPL). Some researchers have aimed to compare traditional PP with PK approaches (Gaze, Beyer and Lazicki 2013). Oliver and Kowalczyk (2013) found that those students who used a PK style presentation were awarded higher grades than the traditional PP, this they postulate is due to greater time spent practising the presentation by the PK group (two hours) compared to an average of one hour by the PP group. PK was used with postgraduate marketing students by Levin and Peterson (2013); they deduced that more than half their students felt that they had a deeper understanding of a particular theory through the use of PK. Our students are senior healthcare practitioners on a newly developed interprofessional MSc. A course requirement is to achieve 30 advanced practice competencies and to this end, we decided to use PK to facilitate the development of four of six leadership competencies that were relevant to the module learning outcomes; shown in table 1 (below).

| 1.1 | Identifying need and developing a case for change |
| 1.2 | Leading innovation and managing change, including Service development |
| 1.3 | Negotiation and influencing skills |
| 1.4 | Networking and collaborating |

*Table 1, MSc Advanced Practice (Health)*

*Advanced Level Leadership Skills*
Methods

It is important to spend time explaining the concept of PK to the students. A powerful way of doing this is by presenting the PK in a PK format. We also explain how to set the timing by using the automatic advance feature on a PP, making the whole presentation last six minutes and forty seconds.

Each student has time after the presentation for discussion and questions from the audience. The presentations were video-recorded and emailed to the students for inclusion in their practice ePortfolio and to aid reflective learning on the experience. The presentations were not marked but are a formative work-up to a 3,000 word critical reflection on their roles in leading an innovation. Formative assessment is used as a basis of continuing feedback, which aims to advance teaching and learning (Hargreaves 2005).

In addition, students were given written qualitative feedback on their performance from their tutors, using a pro forma looking at their presentation skills, engaging with the PK format and the content. As part of module evaluation, the students (n=15) were asked to write a 500 word reflection about their experience of PK using Borton’s (1970) reflective model. The presentation session was verbally evaluated by students and written comments placed on post-it notes, these inform and support the thematic analysis discussed below. Ten reflections from five nurses and five paramedic practitioners in senior clinical and managerial roles, were received and analysed separately by the authors to identify significant reoccurring statements and themes. Member checking was provided by two students who are co-authors of this paper which added trustworthiness to the findings.

Results

On comparison, the two reviewers identified similar categories which were then condensed into three themes and six overlapping sub-themes, which explain the students’ experience. The additional data from the written post-it notes and verbal feedback support the emergent themes.

![Themes from student reflections on Pecha Kucha](image)

*Figure 2. Students’ experience of Pecha Kucha*
The power of images

Students felt that the use of images, particularly in the absence of text, was a dynamic way to communicate with their audience. The visual appearance of both the slides and the presenter captivated the audience’s attention, allowing them to focus on the message. The feeling was that sometimes PP presentations can contain too much written information that is read verbatim from the slides.

‘The Pecha Kucha was an excellent tool as it helped to keep mine and many other presentations short and to the point so therefore really highlighted the main focus points’

Students articulated that PK was transferable to their areas of clinical practice, especially within the time constraints in the UK NHS:

‘I would consider using this presentation style in practice as found it so effective and with a quite limited time span and distractions in practice’

Professional speaking

All students agreed that part of their role as clinicians is to have the tools and ability to communicate effectively within their interprofessional teams and with stakeholders. By being introduced to the art of PK they had an opportunity to develop slick, succinct methods of communication which they felt might be transferable to many professional situations. The students realised that the information that accompanied each image had to be precise and focused due to the time limit involved:

‘Each slide is accompanied by information that is pithy, punchy and pragmatic thus there is no time to waste, one has to be mindful of what is left out almost as much as what’s left in’.

The nature of the PK requires students to rehearse repeatedly in order to manage the 20 second timing for each slide. All students noted the importance of practising in order to make their PK fluent and gain confidence with their presentation:

‘Once you are happy with the combination of pictorial impact and auditory volume, timbre and timing, my advice would be to practice, practice, practice. This improves confidence in yourself …’

On reflection, some students felt they had not practised sufficiently and felt that being ‘reliant on notes’ was a weakness. It was viewed as a challenge to disseminate their message clearly within a restricted timeframe. Some felt fearful that the automatic slide transition after 20 seconds would not synchronise with their verbal explanations:

‘it can be hard to keep up to speed with the timings and I felt a lack of control’

Unknown

This theme relates to the students lack of familiarity with the use of PK. All students, bar one had presented in professional situations before, but none had previously used the PK style of presentation:
Previously, I felt comfortable and familiar with the use of PowerPoint and therefore learning a new style of presentation caused anxiety.

Most students admitted to an initial anxiety when learning that they were expected to present to peers. However the group itself was considered to be highly supportive and students were interested to learn about each other’s professional discipline. By the time of the presentation, having been together as a group for several sessions, these feelings dissipated:

‘My initial thoughts were of fear and dread at having to present, but as I got to know the group and prepare my presentation my confidence grew’

‘... the feeling of genuine support from my class and tutors, and feeling comfortable with the knowledge that others shared my thoughts and feelings ...’

Students commented on the inter-professional learning gained from the exercise. Not only did they learn from each other’s style of presentation but it also gave them a valuable insight into each other’s profession and role:

‘I found watching the other presentations very useful, as I understood more what areas people are focusing on to change practice and the extent of their roles’.

However, one student felt ‘daunted’ by presenting to professionals from other fields who were specialists. The consensus from the evaluation suggests that the experience was largely a positive one, which for the majority of students was empowering. PK was described as ‘stepping up’ and forcing a ‘new way of thinking’

‘I can make a difference and influence practice’.

Discussion

The data clearly has limitations of small sample size and potential subjective researcher bias. Nevertheless, the overwhelming feeling from the students involved was that despite being a personal challenge and provoking anxiety, PK was beneficial to their learning. The art of effective presentation is an important skill for students to master; however, even when they are provided with guidelines regarding presentation format, students often read their PP slides, exceed the time limit, and lose focus. We believe PK is a useful alternative to more traditional methods and from this small evaluation we found from the students’ feedback, that it actively encourages inter-professional learning according to the accepted definitions of IPL (Goldman 2011). We would agree that PK can provide students with both auditory and visual modes of learning (Johnson 2012) and that PK is an alternative to ‘death by PowerPoint’. Given the relatively low student-teacher contact time at masters level, the time frame of PK offers an approach that is easily manageable with larger students groups.

Conclusion

There is a need for further research in order to evaluate the utility of PK within inter-professional groups and provide sound evidence that it benefits interprofessional learning. In the meantime, it is clearly a useful and challenging tool which appears to facilitate advanced practice students’ understanding of each other’s roles and achievement of leadership skills.
Bibliography


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Biographies

Christine Watson is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Brighton whose research interests are heart failure and inter-professional education. She works clinically as a nurse in cardiology and is the course leader for the MSc in Advance Practice for Health Professionals.

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Evaluating the Assignment Support Team: a peer mentor project to support academic writing in the School of Education.

Melanie Gill and Louise Jackson, School of Education

Abstract

This project report, based on the Learning and Teaching Conference presentation, aims to explore the process and outcomes of the School of Education ‘Assignment Support Team’ (AST) and is jointly written by the principal lecturer managing the scheme and one of the third year student peer mentors. The pilot project was funded by a University of Brighton Learning and Teaching Scholarship, which enabled four third year undergraduate student mentors to provide 30 minute academic writing support sessions to first and second year students. The writing skills included: assignment structure, writing style, referencing, engaging with literature and so on. Support was provided either face-to-face, via email, FaceTime or Skype.

The mentor role was not to act as a proof reader or to comment on specific content, but to offer hints and tips to improve a draft assignment in general terms of academic writing style and conventions or to help a student to get started.

The peer mentors were trained and managed by a principal lecturer in the School of Education with responsibility as the ‘Student Engagement Co-ordinator’, to develop skills to support their peers in a way that enhanced taught input from module tutors. They had all been PASS (Peer Assisted Study Sessions) leaders and averaged at least 2:1 grades throughout their own first and second years of study. The mentors were paid on a student ambassador rate and each worked a maximum of two hours a week.

By collecting feedback from the mentees we were able to establish how having this support has positively impacted on their confidence levels and assignment grades. We have also gathered the thoughts of the peer mentors to ascertain what they have gained from the experience of being part of the AST.

Introduction/background to the project

The need for this pilot project was identified from the Student Support and Guidance Tutor (SSGT) and feedback from Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS). Additional one-
to-one academic writing support was seen as a way to complement the PASS group sessions. Initial research identified similar ‘Writing Cafes’ in existence in other universities, for example, the University of Plymouth, and we adapted various ideas to meet our own needs.

Adams (2011) from Bath Spa University writes about the success of a similar project, and the positive impact not just for the students receiving support, but also for the mentors. We were also very aware of the benefit to students and peer mentors from our own PASS scheme research (Gill and McConnell 2016) and this project seemed a natural progression from PASS. Through PASS, the peer mentors increased their confidence, tried different strategies to enhance learning, and gained useful and transferable employability skills. The students receiving support, developed great rapport with the mentors, felt able to open up to them and were not embarrassed to say that they needed support, either socially, personally or academically.

The aim of the AST was to meet the needs of all students and not particularly those who are dyslexic and have access to a DSA funded learning mentor. However, we were mindful that changes to DSA funding from September 2017 would mean that even students with dyslexia would no longer be able to have funded one-to-one support, so we wanted to establish more inclusive practice to help all our students with academic writing.

Developing this project fitted in with the Student Engagement Coordinator and SSGT role and £ 1,000.00 funding was successfully bid for to pay the AST mentors through the Learning and Teaching Scholarship fund.

**Intended outcomes**

For the first year students receiving mentoring support, the aim was that this project would allow them to develop their study skills to work towards higher grades in assignments, or potentially redeem referred assignments. The mentors do not focus on subject content as such, but help to hone an awareness of level-4 requirements, such as referencing, academic writing style and conventions, engagement with literature and so on. They may also gain support with presentation skills, preparing for placement or building an electronic portfolio, depending on the programme requirements.
The third year student mentors delivering the support receive training and supervision appropriate to their role, which enhances their employability skills, particularly in relation to jobs in teaching and education. They also gain in confidence, enhance their own academic skills and acquire facilitation and mentoring skills.

**Logistics, planning and changes**

The Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLT) Learning and Teaching Scholarship funded £1,000.00 and the School of Education funded £347.40 to pay four peer mentors. Two half-day training sessions for the peer mentors were facilitated by Melanie Gill (School of Education) and Catherine McConnell (CLT). Ongoing support was provided by Melanie throughout the project and at regular de-brief meetings. The pilot project ran from October to Easter in 2015-16 (when our third year mentors went on placement).

The original plan was for one-to-one face-to-face support for first year students at a time to suit both mentor and mentee. However, this plan was revised after the first training session with the AST mentors, to become one-to-one support in a café or similar environment with all four mentors present at a set time each week. After a few weeks of low attendance however, we extended the offer to second year students and the final revision was to offer one-to-one support at a time to suit mentor and mentee, either face-to-face at a mutually agreed venue, or by phone, Skype/FaceTime or email.

**Quantitative data**

The table (over) shows the number of students supported by the AST during the initial pilot period and indicates their gender, year group and course, the issues they wanted help with, the format of the meeting and the outcome.

**Case studies from the AST mentors**

We felt that the best way to describe the type of interactions between the AST mentors and students was to give examples from practice in a case-study format. Below are two such case studies, each from different members of the AST.

**Case study 1**

Melanie was contacted by James (a pseudonym) a Troops to Teach student, who had seen the advertisement for the AST on studentcentral, but was based a long distance from campus and so was unable to get to Falmer easily. He wanted to find out if it would be possible to extend the services of the AST to enable him to have support by FaceTime. James had been struggling with a particular piece of academic writing which he found difficult to start, and was hoping that the team would be able to suggest a positive way forward. As a group, we felt that an online approach could be a really valuable way to reach individuals who did not have ready access to the team on campus, and thus enable us to offer support to the wider community of School of Education students.

James was contacted via his university email to make initial contact and we set a mutually convenient date and time to speak via FaceTime. It was requested that he
<table>
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<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Mode of Engagement</th>
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<td>Academic writing questions</td>
<td>Drop in</td>
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<td>Action plan, draft support</td>
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<td>Online/ FaceTime</td>
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<td>10/12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Troops to Teach Year 2</td>
<td>Structure, referencing, academic writing and grammar</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>Did not reply to offer of support</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>15/12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2 Yr BA – Year 1</td>
<td>Referencing, structure of essays, feedback from current essays, ways forward.</td>
<td>One-to-one meeting</td>
<td>Support given - Thanks received</td>
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<td>4/01</td>
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<td>Referencing/ Structure</td>
<td>One-to-one meeting</td>
<td>Support given</td>
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</table>
sent the title of his essay in advance of our telephone conversation. He was also asked to outline the challenges which he felt were facing him with his academic writing. Receiving James’s work and his concerns before we spoke enabled me to signpost the relevant information which I believed would be of benefit to him. After reading his essay plan and hearing his concerns regarding his academic writing, I forwarded him some advice sheets produced by the School of Education and explained where to find them with other useful material on studentcentral.

Finally, we spoke about the assignment via FaceTime when I was able to verbally signpost services and give him pointers to places where he might access specific advice about his academic writing and the concerns that he had. In turn, James was able to ask me any further queries and we had a supportive conversation as peers about some of the challenges of being a student. This process appeared to be helpful to him as he commented afterwards that he felt more confident about approaching the assignment after we had spoken.

**Case study 2**

Annette (Pseudonym), a mature first year student, made initial contact with Melanie for support. A face-to-face meeting was arranged on campus with a mentor to assist her with structuring and referencing a maths assignment. Annette brought her draft assignment along to our one-to-one session as well as feedback from her tutor. She explained that having been out of education for a number of years, she was not feeling confident about approaching her academic work. We reviewed the feedback together, reflecting on points of strength and weakness which could be used to improve future assignments and so build her confidence. Plenty of time was spent signposting and bookmarking resources which Annette could use independently in future, such as our AST folder of useful sources, PASS, ASK documents and advice on the SSGT page. We carried out a practice referencing sheet to ensure that Annette had understood the process of referencing and that she would leave with renewed belief in her ability. Annette gave positive feedback about the session and the benefits were felt by both Annette and myself in the role of mentor.

**Feedback comments from students who accessed support**

At the end of the pilot project, Mel emailed all those who had requested support from the AST to ask for their feedback. There was no formal template or survey, but a more informal approach was adopted, asking for comments by return email. It was explained that comments may be used (anonymously) for research and evaluation purposes. Some of the feedback comments are presented below:

‘I met with K back in January. I was just looking for a little support/advice to get me started on my Education Studies Assignment. I have been out of education for a few years and found it a little daunting having to write with an academic voice/tone. She was really friendly and provided me with some really helpful tips. Was really helpful and reassuring.’ (Year 1, BA Primary, one-to-one meeting)

‘I attended the assignment support group because I was stressed about my academic voice and references. The group were really friendly and approachable; they listened to my concerns before helping me. I read part of my draft to them,
they commented on what they liked and asked me to identify my worries. Instead of giving me the answers they directed me to the right areas (for example, the reference guidelines) giving me confidence with other assignments. They were really approachable and genuinely helpful towards my academic progress. It also had a huge impact on my grades. I increased from the 40 mark to an average of 72. My highest mark (80) being the one they supported me with.’ (Year 2, BA Primary, drop-in, now part of the team in Year 3!)

‘Thank you very much for your help today. It was very useful and you are a star.’
(Year 1, BA Mathematics Education with QTS, one-to-one meeting).

Benefits to the Assignment Support Team mentors

The following commentary is written by the AST mentors themselves on reflection of the project:

‘We, as a group, have found being members of the AST beneficial to our own academic work. Signposting the many services, which the university provides has reminded us of all the resources at our disposal and of the value of one’s peers in the development and co-construction of individual and group knowledge. It is our belief that our own academic writing and confidence has improved due to our role in the team.

It has also been a pleasure to be able to meet students from the wide and diverse community at the University of Brighton. We enjoyed the process of forming the first AST along with our peers and Mel. The process of forming and evolving the AST has reinforced our career aspirations as future facilitators of knowledge working within a collaborative community of education professionals.’

Lessons learned and ways forward

The AST has permission to continue in 2016-17, with the mentors paid for by the School of Education, and the role an extension to the PASS Ambassador role. The plan is to introduce the scheme in inductions/welcome week and to remind students before first assignments are due.

PASS sessions will be used to publicise the AST and will emphasise that support is only available up to Easter as the AST are on placement after that. We will continue to produce flyers and posters and to use Facebook, studentcentral and other social media to publicise the initiative since this was successful in the pilot project.

After the initial poor attendance at the drop-in sessions it seemed that one-to-one sessions worked best, either face-to-face or via Skype/FaceTime and so this is the way the project will be taken forward. Weekly drop-in sessions were not cost efficient or well used and so will be discontinued. Although fewer students than expected took advantage of the support on offer, those who did access support found it very useful; one student said that her grades increased from the 40’s to the 70’s as a result of engaging with the AST. Another student has since reported a similar improvement and this information could be used to publicise the AST in the next round.
Bibliography


Acknowledgments

With thanks to AST mentors: Kirsty Wilson, Sarah Lister and Emma Fowell from the School of Education.

Biographies

Melanie Gill has been a primary teacher and a youth worker and has worked at the University of Brighton for 15 years. She is a Student Support and Guidance Tutor for the School of Education, a role that comprises 0.5 of her Principal Lecturer post, with the other 0.5 encompassing her wider ‘Student Engagement Coordinator’ role and teaching post. She is part of the school’s senior management group and supervises the school’s Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) and the Assignment Support Team (AST). Mel gained senior fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) in 2013, and in 2015 won an Excellence in Facilitating and Empowering Learning award.

Louise Jackson is a former nurse and special educational needs teaching assistant. She is currently a University of Brighton student who graduated from the BA (Hons) Education degree in July 2016 and is currently studying on the MA Education course. Her interests are in the field of special educational needs and the use of collaborative practice by educators. Louise has been a PASS leader and mentor for the AST.
Assessing the boundaries: using technology to record alternative assessment approaches

KEVIN MORTON, SCHOOL OF SPORT AND SERVICE MANAGEMENT

Abstract

The culture of learning and teaching in higher education is evolving, alongside each new cohort. University staff in the UK are under increasing pressure to drive up standards and the quality of provision is often directly associated with the student as a ‘consumer’ and linked to perceived value for money through increased tuition fees. Some academics are demonstrating good practice through innovative pedagogy and enhancing their approach to content delivery through the implementation of Information Communication Technologies (ICT). There are no specific guidelines established for this in the higher education sector so there is an immense disparity in the offer between individual staff and between higher education institutions. Innovative practice can support a development in student autonomy and enhance their capacity as independent learners. This may not be universal, despite it being a positive movement forward in education, however, this approach discontinues abruptly when it comes to the assessment procedure. Some students feel alienated in the most vital aspect of their education, due to traditional assessment practices. This article will focus on practical solutions to innovating assessment strategy in higher education and discuss emerging ICT that could engage learners in the twenty-first century.

Introduction

On a professional and practically-oriented degree, such as, teacher-training in physical education (PE), it can be very challenging for some students to engage in written tasks, which constitute a major contribution of their assessment strategy, and can be a huge source of concern for many undergraduates (Hodgson and Harris 2012). They may not have the existing skill set to achieve their maximum potential, or see little relevance in the assessment strategy, which can lead to an imbalance between academic and professional discourse (Van Der Merwe et al 2013). There is an increased need, over time and political change, for diversification in higher education, as a means to strengthen the student base, raise enrolment numbers and build a brighter future for the education system as a whole (Raaper 2015; Harris 2005).

By forcing a percentage of the student body to engage in written academic practice, as part of their assessment mode (Hodgson and Harris 2012), higher education in-
Institutions (HEIs) are isolating a number of learners, who may not have the capacity to perform consistently well under strict traditional assessment conditions. The student will typically learn how to accomplish greater success via an understanding of the assessment ‘rules of the game,’ according to Bearman et al (2016). They suggest that despite some variation of assessment methods, total neutrality cannot exist and the practice of assessment can potentially interfere with learning.

Recognition of student’s technological experiences and web-based interactions, informed and cultivated in some length by social media, leads to a requirement on educationalists to apply greater consideration to their methods of engagement and delivery of content (Carruthers et al 2014; Kukulska-Hulme 2012). This is not to suggest there is a ‘one size fits all’ strategy, however, some measure of flexibility and innovation is essential. Change is required if higher education is to match student expectations and perceptions, and assessment is high on the agenda at most learning and teaching committees, and certainly a feature of their institutional strategy (Medland 2014; Tomas et al 2014). Medland believes through the evolution of the National Student Survey (NSS), that students have increasing influence over practice and provision in higher education and the level of reported student satisfaction is a concern for HEIs (Skinner 2014; Carruthers et al 2014).

Assessing the boundaries

‘Assessing the boundaries’ is a title dedicated to the idea that through innovative practice and experimental learning and teaching, academics can establish the need and extent to which they can diversify the assessment strategy used in higher education. The play on words associates a focus on assessment protocol with its limitations, for example, the academic rigour that encompasses traditional assessment methods (Younger 2015). This paper intends to establish how extending opportunity and choice over assessment practices may support a growth in independent learning and create stronger relationships between the student and the material studied. It also aims to highlight specific technology that can be used to aid the enhancement of assessment management in higher education.

Assessment in higher education

For many years HEI’s have assured a concentration of assessment as a necessity and through traditional means (Rickards and Stitt-Bergh 2016; Lorente-Catalan and Kirk 2015; Boud et al 2016) and there is certain common ground amongst UK establishments. According to Boud and Molloy (2013) the assessment pathway has evolved over the past five decades and the quantity and regularity of assessment tasks have reduced, as a result of increased student numbers and decreased government funding. Institutional strategies govern processes centrally (Clegg and Smith 2010), despite increased pressure on universities to change (Raaper 2015). Even the essence of change on higher education, however, could lead to a resistance and potential disorder, due to its unpredictable nature, existing university culture and the breakdown of staff characteristics (Brown 2017). The need for a formalised assessment strategy is highly important, as it establishes markers and goals to determine progress and performance (Mogessie-Ashenafi 2015). There is doubt that it simply cannot occur without some level of inequality being present, as highlighted earlier.
From a practically-orientated course, the alienated student group, who cannot access the techniques and skills required to perform to a high level in written assignments or examinations, may always be at a considerable disadvantage and the strategy endorsed bear little or no relevance to their chosen career path or skill set, in this example: teaching. Bearman et al (2016) stress policy-level decisions over assessment strategy can often be made by staff that have little or no relationship with the student body, or limited connection to their course. This would indicate that the student is not at the centre of higher education assessment strategy, which may lead to further alienation.

It is with this in mind, that some alternative tactics can be implemented. In strong learning and teaching, the student should be the most important entity and the relationship between student and teacher is fundamental to enhancing the learning process (Williams 2015). Nevertheless, traditional methods in higher education are adhered to as the norm and the individual’s best interests, potentially overlooked, outlining a hierarchical disparity in power (Lorente-Catalan and Kirk 2013). Students are capable of demonstrating a higher-order appreciation of content via varied means, such as, leadership, presentations, or the production of media sources, for example, a video extract, audio commentary, or even through the use of mobile devices to encourage a blend of assessment formats (Redecker and Johannessen 2013).

When considering the current educational climate for higher education in the UK, where tuition fees and quality of provision are constantly scrutinised and examined, it is important to note that the ‘student voice’ has inevitably increased and the learner, as a consumer, is demanding more from their commodity-based education (Biggs and Tang 2007). The undergraduate, or in the case of the degree in Physical Education with Qualified Teacher Status (PEQTS), the trainee, has great influence over the path and direction that their education advances in. They have very little authority however, over the manner in which they are assessed and therefore, the extent of their outcomes of the assessment (Lorente-Catalan and Kirk 2013). Comparatively, Evans (2013) states that students may require greater support regarding their expectations of assessment, suggesting that despite a newer climate of higher education existing, where an ethos of ‘the customer is always right’ may have emerged, a balance of power is still imperative.

The inclusion of technology

The introduction of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) into the assessment strategy in HEI’s is not a new phenomenon (Bennett et al 2017; Ritchie 2016), and will allow the course staff far more diversity in their approach to how individuals are examined. For example, on a practical degree, with the opportunity to lead and teach content, rather than write 2,500 words on how to teach that content, the level of relevance and importance is increased tremendously and more realistic experiences inevitably acquired. Furthermore, the student is more likely to apply the skills from the assessment in their own workplace and future career path (Osborne et al 2013) reflecting upon increased relevance at undergraduate level and enhancing their capacity as an independent learner (Iversen et al 2015). Ownership can be encouraged through additional choice, enhancing student autonomy, creativity,
criticality and originality in their style and approach; something which may have otherwise been missing from their completion of prescribed written tasks, thus preventing them from accessing the higher grade boundaries in their assignments. A more democratic approach, with increased student involvement and greater responsibility for their learning, according to Lorente-Catalan and Kirk (2013), will enhance skills for life-long learning, fundamentals not strictly fostered from the completion of essays or examinations. This formula for assessment is by no means new and it is argued (Kukulska-Hulme 2012) that HEIs need to enhance their technological offering to adapt to changing learner expectations. The principle (highlighted in this paper) may not be innovative, however, the methods of recording may be less obvious, along with the methods of using, storing and sharing material, which creates unique opportunities for staff and offers the ability to be experimental in their strategy (Bennett et al 2017). Students may also have the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and develop further, if they are to review their performance, perhaps at a formative stage rather than a summative one (Ritchie 2016; Bayat 2010).

The recording of assessment

There are many ways to record a practical assessment, but particular methods can impose a reality, or have a hindrance on the procedure. Although the recording of a teaching episode is vitally important for second marking, moderation and remote access for the external examiner, the presence of a video camera can have a negative impact on the person being assessed, leading to increased performer anxiety (Bergman 2013; Jordan 2012). Recording devices need to be set up in close proximity to the person being examined in order to establish audio feedback and good quality sound, this can be overcome however, through the use of an external wireless (radio) microphone, such as the Rode Filmmaker Kit, which allows the examiner to maintain a distance from the performer, whilst preserving sound quality and minimising impact on the performance.

When choosing equipment fit for purpose, it is important to consider the end product and exactly how good the recording needs to be. For example, most undergraduate work in higher education may not need to be of a broadcast quality (dependent on degree) and therefore costs may be reduced. With cheaper alternatives (to the example above, which is at the lower end of the market), there is more chance of a reduction in sound quality and far less likelihood of a wireless option, which may defeat the purpose.

The choice of video camera is also very important. If the camera and external microphone are compatible and both have excellent zoom and range (for example, 55x extended optical zoom and up to 100m range) the quality of the footage is increased. This is particularly important for cases of moderation or external examiners reports. With a higher powered zoom and stabilisation control (for example, SteadyShot) on the video camera, the subject can be filmed from further away with a limited drop in quality. If within range, the audio device will complement the video and the end product will be of a high standard. It is also important to give specific guidance to the person filming before and possibly during recording, to ensure that the footage will ultimately be suitable for scrutiny for examination purposes.
Purchasing equipment

Purchasing the most appropriate video camera is no easy task, due to the unique differences in models and intricate details that vary amongst various manufacturers. When elements of the specification, such as, capture, zoom and stabilisation quality are increased, so is the cost. The Sony HDR-PJ420 camera (presented at the Learning and Teaching Conference) is a great example of a video camera which has strength in all three elements previously highlighted, yet is not too high on the price range. It’s digital and optical zoom is excellent (55x extended optical and 350x digital) giving capture at distance with little loss of clarity. It also has a ‘SteadyShot’ stabilisation control and shoots at 1920x1080 High Definition (HD). Linked with the Rode wireless microphone, both tools have allowed for high quality video and sound capture for practical assessments.

Historically, in moderation scenarios, additional staff have been required to be present to observe, however, with filmed assessments, performances can be shared and viewed in a host of ways and most importantly, studied externally at a later stage. They can also be reviewed as many times as necessary to ensure accuracy and consistency in the marking process, and external examiners can gain access remotely.

Limitations of the inclusion of technology

The use of technology can, however, have an undesirable impact on staff time. For example, the charging, setting up and operating of equipment, along with the uploading and sharing of evidence, is not usually a quick process. It could be argued that the time spent organising the use of ICT outweighs the benefits realised by students and staff. Conversely, there is an expectation, not least from the students, that the delivery of all aspects of higher education will be a thrust toward the future, an innovative take on learning and teaching and the pinnacle of educational development (Biggs and Tang 2007). As service providers, Jankowski and Provezis (2012) believe that universities should deliver to student expectations, as the customers in a highly competitive market (Biggs and Tang 2007). With this in mind, staff should be trialing new approaches to content delivery, designing modular content that is as engaging as possible, and testing modern technologies to motivate and inspire newer cohorts (Kukulska-Hulme 2012). The use of ICT does not need to stop, however, once the assessment weeks start. If there is a technological presence throughout the module, it seems logical to extend that to the assessment strategy as well. According to Lomas (2007), academic staff do not generally view the student as a consumer, and research carried out suggested that this perspective leads away from the purpose of higher education. Some have agreed that if students were to have greater influence, particularly with regard to assessment strategy, this could lead to an ‘inflation of grades but not in standards.’

Practical variation

On practical modules this is far more apparent. For example, at the School of Sport and Service Management, many of the learning and teaching modules explore the teaching strategies around a typical curricular area. Some of which identify and investigate the use of innovative technology as a support mechanism for strong peda-
Assessing the boundaries... 

...gogy, however, the assessment strategy may be an analysis of the student’s writing competence: exhibiting little relevance between the approaches used within the module and the end product.

By varying the assessment strategy across a degree course, students will acquire a far more extensive and enriching experience in higher education, and if data can be collated from the learning process using ICT, there may be little need for summative testing (Redecker and Johannessen 2013). With trainee teachers, it is imperative that they should have opportunities to be imaginative, inventive and resourceful, in order to shape strong pedagogy in the future, which is more likely to result from a more diverse approach.

Students need to be immersed in their education and to have a connection to all aspects of their degree course, especially their assessment tasks, as this is deemed the most significant element of their academic study (Hodgson and Harris 2012). With enhanced connection to the assessment strategy, students will have greater ownership of their learning and a deeper appreciation for the material presented. They will become stronger independent learners (AlTameemy 2017) and more able to succeed at undergraduate or postgraduate level and in their chosen career path. If modular content can be delivered in a way that students appreciate the benefit of on a weekly basis, and all relevant aspects link effectively to their assessment path, they are more likely to want to attend lectures.

Additionally, if students have greater control over their assessment and the end product is not strictly defined, they will also have a stronger attachment to the assignment itself, although Bearman et al (2016) believe the educator will always grasp accountability over assessment procedures. Contrastingly, a student-centred approach may be the catalyst to drive autonomy and energise their individualised creativity. This can be achieved through the use of ICT; embracing a varied and fresh approach to assessment. However, according to Raaper (2015), the current power relations that lie within assessment practices in higher education may actually prevent students from ever gaining autonomy or influence over their assessment pathway, which could lead to negative consequences. Without such affiliation to their assessment, the student body may just complete the minimum requirements to achieve their personalised goals. They may not feel the ambition to push themselves further or take ownership over summative work and therefore an enthusiasm to be more creative and original may be extinguished.

**Conclusion**

In a professional degree, it seems remarkable that the method by which students are assessed may have no relevance to their qualified field. Once graduated, they will not be fully utilising their university-learned skills, adopted and refined through higher education. If this be the case, it is hard to comprehend why more practical and vocational forms of assessment have not already been introduced.

Whilst opposition might argue (Younger 2015), that a written essay carries a more appropriate level of academic rigour to satisfy the assessment criteria set by the
HEI, it may not hold any importance from the students’ perspective and has little influence over their learning (Boud et al 2016).

‘Assessing the boundaries’ is a suggestion that academics can stretch not only the extent of learning that takes place within their lectures, but also throughout their summative assessment, through an increased openness to change and contemporary pedagogical thinking. The use of ICT, if orchestrated and managed effectively, can support innovative practice and offer far greater choice and autonomy to the student. The enhanced connectivity to the assessment process is what can impact holistically on individuals and drive higher education forward to suit the modern independent learner.

Bibliography


Kevin Morton


Biography

**Kevin Morton** is a Senior Lecturer at the School of Sport and Service Management (SSM), where he teaches predominantly Physical Education to undergraduate and postgraduate students. Over his time at the university, Kevin has focused heavily on the implementation and development of Information Communication Technologies (ICT), sitting on the ICT committee at SSM and representing the school on the Blended Learning Sub Committee. Kevin regularly delivers training to primary, secondary and higher education staff, along with presenting at national conferences, for example, BETT 2015-17 and the University of Brighton Learning and Teaching Conference. His interests include pedagogical innovations and technological advances to enhance learning and teaching and assessment strategy.
An evaluation of portable electronic device usage by mature nurse lecturers: a Participatory Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract

Portable electronic devices are increasingly used in education (Livingstone 2012), practice (Bogossian et al 2009) and research (Johnson et al 2010). Within this context, and against the backdrop of the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2012-15 emphasis on mobile learning (University of Brighton 2012) we carried out a Participatory Narrative Inquiry (PNI) exploring the recommendations of Willmer et al (2014). Nine participants, who were mature nurse lecturers, volunteered to take part in the inquiry in exchange for being loaned a tablet device. Our aim was to evaluate the use of tablet devices in higher education, specifically as a resource for blended learning and teaching within nursing education. We opted to adopt an approach that allowed each participant to express their own engagement with the technology, including the problems they had faced. The participants took part in three group sessions that resulted in a collective narrative that highlighted issues around infrastructure and support; digital literacy; utility; embodiment and limitations.

The Learning and Teaching Conference session aimed to share our results and also to extend them by posing similar questions to those who attended the session. Our intention was to demonstrate how we generated understanding of, and made use of the tablet devices in evolving our work practices. We were particularly interested in sharing our responses to the new knowledge and the confidence that it engendered.

Conference participants’ responses were consistent with the datasets from our original PNI process, which confirmed that the themes that emerged were valid outside of the mature nurse lecturers’ experiences. Moreover, applying the PNI process at the conference reaffirmed the strength of the approach in co-construction, collaboration and engagement in getting people to think about how they engage with portable electronic devices.
Introduction

Technological advances mean that students increasingly access their learning material via handheld devices, encouraging the demand for online learning (Willmer et al 2014). Mobile devices are at the forefront of this change and household tablet device uptake doubled (to 44 per cent) in 2013-14 with nearly six in ten consumers accessing the internet via a handheld screen (Ofcom 2014). When approximately 45 per cent of learners claim to regularly use a tablet device and eight in ten (86 per cent) regularly use a smartphone (Pearson 2015), mobile learning technologies offer great potential. The challenge is for lecturers to consider the pedagogy before considering the use of technology to support it in order to promote higher order thinking and deep learning (Entwistle and Ramsden 1983). The danger in being led by the technology is that it can be levered into teaching with potentially little or no added value. However, it is important to recognise that there is often a perceived pressure to adopt new technology without an objective analysis of the benefits to pedagogy.

As the market for mobile technologies has grown so have the expectations of learners in higher education, requiring higher education institutions (HEIs) to keep pace with developing technology and skill (HEFCE 2010, Kukulska-Hulme 2011). Web 2.0 technologies afford learners the collaborative opportunity to develop their scholarly content (Minocha and Roberts 2008) and some 83 per cent of US college learners believe that the use of them transforms their learning, perhaps because 79 per cent claim tablet device use makes learning more fun (Pearson 2015). Making learning fun was also identified by Baid and Lambert (2010) and Willmer et al (2014). However, there is evidence to suggest that levels of technological knowledge and confidence decreases with age (Ofcom 2014), which was of particular concern for this group of nurse educators due to their older age profile. Nevertheless, this profile corresponded to the majority of UK academic staff who are over 36 years of age (Higher Education Statistics Agency 2014). Whilst achieving high levels of technological knowledge and confidence may be due to the way that technology is introduced and supported, the participants in the Participatory Narrative Inquiry (PNI) reflected this profile; being digital immigrants according to Prensky (2001).

As a consequence of a successful Centre for Learning and Teaching managed scholarship award, a number of tablet devices were purchased. There were no identified aims for the use of the devices beyond the support of blended learning in line with the University of Brighton Strategic Plan (2012) for the work of nurse educators. A number of nurse educators expressed interest in having a tablet device and in order to understand how they engaged with the new technology, a PNI (Hooley 2009; Kurtz 2014) approach was used. Stories were shared in group format using the approaches of Kurtz (2014) and Bruner (1991) with an emphasis on the way in which stories reflected how individuals generated knowledge and made sense of using a tablet device. The stories explained how participants created and developed their knowledge, acting on it to become more confident in the use of their device. The PNI set out to capture these learning experiences, enhancing the co-construction through engagement with participants at the CLT conference session.
Participatory Narrative Inquiry

The project started in an incremental and emergent way (Grundy 1993) and expanded over time. The project could be viewed as an example of technological determinism (Weller 2011) since it would not have begun had the tablet devices been unavailable. More importantly, however, is the recognition of the role that the project team members played in the context in which the tablet devices were being used. Initially, three tablet devices were available for use across the school (Willmer et al 2014). Subsequently, 12 additional tablet devices were made available to staff in order to aid their teaching, learning and assessment activities. Participants taught a range of subjects that included health law and ethics, child health and infection prevention and control. The level of digital literacy amongst the group was variable. All were accepted into the study with the single condition that they had to use their experiences to contribute to the evaluation. Six participants are excluded from this data because they did not continue to share their learning through to the final evaluation event. It soon became apparent that there was a need for the structure, direction and evaluation of this learning process.

Nine members took part in the PNI that consisted of four group sessions, which ran over a period of eight months. Each session lasted three to four hours where participants produced and analysed the narrative accounts.

At the first group session ‘prompt questions’ (below) assisted participants to produce narratives of how they used their tablet device for work purposes. Participants answered these in written narrative accounts that reflected their experiences.

1. **Tell me the story of how you were given the tablet device and what were the expectations of using it, in terms of:**
   a. what you thought the school’s expectations were?
   b. your expectations of the support you would receive for its use
   c. how were these expectations met?
   d. what are you using the tablet device for in your work and in your teaching?

2. **How has the tablet device changed how you work, mark or teach?**

3. **What is your vision of how you would like to use the tablet device?**

*Prompt questions from group session 1*

After writing a response to each question, participants shared their writing with the group participants. Together they discussed and agreed on the content meaning. Field notes were generated by a facilitator during these discussions and the written narratives were collated and stored on a password protected central database.

At group session 2, the agreed narratives from session 1 were provided for each participant and together participants made sense of the content. Group members read and loosely interpreted the content of the narratives according to patterns, themes,
regularities, contrasts and paradoxes and irregularities (Bruner 1991). Each participant wrote their interpretations down, and these were discussed during the group session, enabling the interpretations to be seen as co-created by the participants and the group facilitator. These interpretations were combined with those from the first session field notes. Themes were identified across these data sets and written up according to categories: Infrastructure and support; Digital literacy; Utility; Embodiment and limitations.

At group session 3 participants generated a joint narrative. This collective narrative was refined, shared and discussed at length by group members at group session 4.

**Results from Participatory Narrative Inquiry**

The experience of the project group was that by using PNI we were able to explore the issues raised by each participant. These were broad and variable and depended to some extent on the level of digital literacy of each participant.

**Infrastructure and support**

In order to fully embrace the use of the tablet device there was a requirement for both infrastructure and support (Willmer et al 2014). In terms of our experience of infrastructure, participants fell into two groups. The first two tablet devices were allocated to staff who had acquired them using funds from a successful CLT Fellowship Award. At this time, there was little structured infrastructure and support for mobile devices, for instance poor availability of university WiFi across and within university campuses (Willmer et al 2014). When the next tranche of tablet devices were made available, the infrastructure and support was more developed for example, app swap drop-in sessions, and increased WiFi coverage. Moreover, there was a greater recognition of the importance of support for engagement with technology in learning and teaching (University of Brighton 2014). The PNI process acted as both a form of peer support through ‘project meetings’ and the process of undertaking the evaluation. This sharing of experiences and the products of that experience (for example, new apps) became important for all nine participants.

**Digital literacy**

Although levels of digital literacy varied amongst participants, this played a small part in terms of how willing they were to embrace the process. Familiarity with the technology helped navigational issues but, with IT support, the more important issue was each participant’s mindset: the extent to which each was open to experiment with the tablet as expressed through PNI by levels of self-confidence.

**Utility**

The narrative evaluation made visible how communication had changed due to the ease of access to email (synced and therefore ‘always on’) on the tablet device. All participants noted the improved accessibility across geographical distance. The ease with which it gave access to email and other modes of electronic communication meant that participants quickly felt ‘ownership’ of their device. Notably this was expressed through the downloading of apps. Additionally, the mobile device positively changed the work processes of participants in terms of access to information (minutes of meetings, marking students’ work and supervision processes with students).
In addition, participants were able to personalise their device, and in doing so, faced another dilemma: how to handle the reality of ownership, specifically the ‘always on’ capability. This continues to present a challenge in terms of work-life balance that remains unresolved, although at least one participant felt that the ability to be able to easily check and respond to email outside ‘regular’ working hours was an advantage.

The narratives demonstrated how using the tablet changed the way participants communicated. For example, linking to other people via a range of electronic formats that included email, Skype, Google Hangout, blogs, Wikis and social networks such as Twitter. Participants often felt privileged and found that communication quickly became immediate with the portability of the mobile device. Although there were challenges (the burden of owning a scarce resource) confidence grew over time and, unlike the findings of Giddens and Sutton (2013) participants did not find their interpersonal communications were decreased.

**Embodiment**

Due to the portability of the tablet device, some participants recounted that they changed position more often when using it, resulting in better posture, which in turn reduced eyestrain and back pain. To the contrary for others, the tablet device led to posture issues due to looking down when using the device resulting in neck, head and back pain. For some participants, the tablet device amounted to another technological tool to be mastered; whilst for others, the device was not separate from them, and they were ‘changed’ by using it.

Participants’ narratives included accounts of how the use of the tablet device impacted on their cultural and social identities in the work environment. Tablet device users were the pioneers in our school, leading to questions such as, ‘Are we perceived as cutting edge if we have tablet devices?’ And ‘If we don’t have tablet devices how will we be perceived by students who are using them?’ Other narratives reflected on how participants felt challenged by the device when having to learn how to use it. Reflection on the experience of learning something new acted as a reminder of how students may feel when faced with new learning. Some participants felt out of their comfort zone and internalised feelings of insecurity, doubting their ability to master the new learning. Confidence grew over time as they became more comfortable with using the device for its myriad of functions, for example, online supervision with students via Skype.

**Limitations of tablet devices**

The following limitations were recounted in narratives: stories reflected how time consuming participants found downloading an app for each functionality, for example, online assessment, accessing email, opening .pdf documents, opening MS Word documents and editing via the Pages app. Each app had to be searched for and downloaded individually to expand the functionality of the device.

Participants spoke of the dangers of open free Wi-Fi zones. The risks involved have been linked to private information being intercepted, for example, banking details, over open networks that may compromise end user privacy. Private networks at home were regarded as safer.
The tablet device had memory restrictions which prevent larger documents and files from being saved on it. The Cloud can be used for this function by storing information remotely. Confusion arose about the use of Cloud computing for work, and in response, the university developed Cloud access to a SharePoint© site where documents can be stored.

The teaching and learning purposes that participants originally anticipated that they would be able to develop, have not come to fruition. Other limitations, described in the participants’ narratives were mostly overcome, with support from the project meetings and deeper understanding of the functionality of the device.

The CLT conference session

The session at the CLT conference presented the findings of the PNI described above, and requested participants to contribute in a similar way to continue co-construction by answering the following three questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question:</th>
<th>Themed responses:</th>
</tr>
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| What is your vision on using a tablet device? | • Fully integrated  
• Convenience and confidence, utility and ability to share  
• Portability and ease of use |
| What are others’ expectations of your use of a tablet device? | • 24/7 availability  
• Expertise  
• Expectations to use to full capacity for both admin and teaching to be valuable |
| What support would facilitate you to realise your vision? | • Infrastructure and support when required or identified responsiveness to request for support  
• Limitations of working on long documents |

Learning and Teaching Conference questionnaire

The themed responses from conference participants are consistent with the PNI datasets from the original PNI process: specifically around infrastructure and nature of support; levels of digital literacy real and perceived; utility in terms of ease of use and ability to share; and embodiment in relation to convenience and confidence. The only limitation identified was the difficulty of working on long documents, in contrast to the original PNI process which included difficulties in finding and downloading apps; risks of free Wi-Fi zones and confusion about Cloud computing. This may have been reflective of the levels of digital literacy of participants at the conference compared to those included in the original PNI process.
Conclusion and the way forward

An emergent change strategy (Grundy 1993) was appropriate because of the varied levels of digital literacy amongst participants and the need to support participation. The tablet devices were acquired and issued with no strict ideation in relation to pedagogy. The nature and experience of the mature nurse lecturers was varied, as all were digital immigrants (Prensky 2001). Rather than be viewed negatively as having a technologically deterministic approach, our experience of using PNI has been positive, supporting our engagement with technological development. We found PNI aided participants’ support to each other to work more efficiently. The provision of tablet devices within our school triggered the growth of a new learning community (University of Brighton 2014), where participants gathered and collaboratively over time, in order to become more proficient in using tablet devices. The process was aided by regular group meetings where participants shared narratives and exchanged information. Sharing of the PNI process, through presentation at the CLT conference, enhanced the notion of co-construction, collaboration and engagement. So, PNI enabled experiences to be shared and constructed, maximising the opportunity to work collaboratively for teaching and learning purposes.

Bibliography


Biographies

Marian Willmer is Principal Lecturer in the School of Health Sciences at the University of Brighton. She has been teaching in the area of health technologies since that late 1990’s, adapting and responding to learning needs in this area. Marian has published articles on the challenges of engaging student nurses with the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in clinical practice, and latterly in using digital technologies to support learning. Marian is a Registered Nurse and teaches the application of health technologies across academic levels and to both pre-registration, qualified health professionals and managers.
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Simon Whiffin is a part-time Senior Lecturer in the School in Health Sciences. He teaches in the area of health technologies and academic skills across a number of programmes in the school. Simon has an interest in how technology can be used to enhance teaching and learning. In his other role in the school, Simon develops information systems that are used principally to support practice placement learning.

Maggie Stewart has been a Senior Nurse Lecturer since 1991. Her previous clinical experience as a health visitor and research clinician with The Lullaby Trust informs most of her teaching within Public Health. Her masters is in health promotion and her additional scholarly interests are the safeguarding of children and other vulnerable groups. She leads two level-7 modules on these topics. Prior to this project she was talent-free in relation to IT issues and it was for this lack of competence that the project leader invited her to participate.

Linnette King is a Principal Lecturer and manages a special interest group for health law and ethics alongside facilitation of this subject area across a range of academic levels and courses. She is a Registered Nurse with a Postgraduate Diploma in Education, MSc Nursing, Masters in Law (Legal Aspects Medical Practice) and Masters in Research. Her research and professional interests are in confidentiality, making concerns known, professional responsibility and health, safety and welfare matters.

Dr Ian Taylor is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Health Sciences. His professional nursing background is in acute inpatient and community mental health nursing. Ian moved into nurse education in 1996. His current interests include undergraduate research and evidence based practice teaching. Ian developed expertise in blended learning approaches and has designed and implemented an innovative Clinical Nurse Research Careers module for pre-registration nurses for which he was commended. Ian received an Excellence in Facilitating/Empowering Learning award from the university in 2014, recognising his commitment to students to work creatively to improve the quality of their learning.

Patrick Saintas, Principal Lecturer is Course Leader for MSc Clinical studies. He has a keen interest in the use of digital technologies to facilitate learning and has a Postgraduate Certificate in e-Learning design from the University of Sussex. He is a Registered Nurse with a Master’s in Business Administration from the Open Business School. His research and professional interests are online Learning, Leadership and Change Management and the use of digital technologies in Healthcare delivery and Information Management.

Dr Laetitia Zeeman has developed a research and scholarly focus in the field of gender, sexuality and health at the University of Brighton. The central principles of this work question dominant discourses of health to recognise the strengths and abilities of people when they face adversity. When health discourses are actively deconstructed via the narratives people tell of their lives, we make visible how these stories inform identity formation and wellbeing. The overarching aim of this work is to reduce the health inequalities that underpin adversity. By opening up discourses of health and healthcare, and by tackling health inequalities, we can re-imagine participatory and socially just healthcare systems and clinical practice leading to material change.
Helen Stanley is Academic Lead for Nursing in the School of Health Sciences. She has extensive clinical and curriculum development experience in pre- and post-qualification nursing and interprofessional health and social care higher education, and has designed a number of practice-focused educational projects to support workforce planning and service redesign in the NHS. Her current PhD study is to identify the learning and development strategies in a clinical leadership programme that have an impact on workplace practice and culture.
When the community leads the way; peer-to-peer mental health: reflections from a community evaluation case study

Mirika Flegg, School of Health Sciences and Maggie Gordon-Walker, Sussex Peer Support Network

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to address challenges associated with engaging community partners in knowledge production by reflecting on a community-led evaluation into peer-to-peer best practices in mental health service provision in Sussex.

Design/methodology/approach: Conducted by three third-sector groups from Brighton and Hove, the community evaluation case study involved a total of 131 participants who had engaged with peer-to-peer services both as receivers and providers of support. A mixed-method approach included a survey, focus groups and a public consultation day. This paper reflects on these techniques in relation to accepted research practices and discusses opportunities for community-led knowledge generation.

Findings: The evaluation suggested that peer-to-peer support services improved mental health outcomes and reduced reliance on public health services. It further highlights the capacity of those with lived experiences to direct and conduct evaluations on topics of value to them. By providing examples and discussing differences between community-led evaluations and those situated within a higher-education and health-services context, this paper offers insight to improve collaborative working between communities and the institutions that support them.

Introduction

The NHS Five-Year Forward View (2014) suggests involving the third-sector (charities, voluntary, non-profit, patient groups) in health service provision to enable group-based self-management education programmes, and to encourage ‘independent peer-to-peer communities to emerge’ (p 12). The term ‘Peer-to-peer’ describes the diverse range of practices that provide opportunities for those with lived experiences to support each other in wellness and recovery, and is associated with terms such as ‘peer support’ and ‘peer recovery worker’ (Stamou 2014, p 167)
The shift in enabling patients to participate in the development and delivery of the services has been said to aid in managing limited resources (Fuhr et al. 2014) and improve access to mental health services (Repper and Carter 2011). Concerns over the estimated £70 billion spent on supporting those with mental health challenges in the UK (OECD 2014, p 15) has further increased public interest into peer-led services. For example, a cost-benefit analysis conducted by Trachtenberg et al. (2013) was cited by The Centre for Mental Health to claim that £4.76 can be saved for every £1.00 invested in peer support services (Knapp et al. 2014, p 19).

The success of NHS mental health services led by peers has been argued by Gillard et al. (2014, p 40) to be improved when peer providers are employed within voluntary organisations. This can perhaps be understood by acknowledging that the history of peer support has reported roots within the anti-psychiatry and community movements (Riessman 1989; Elias and Upton-Davis 2015). However, without understanding the ways in which third-sector groups provide these services, and the challenges they face, concerns should be raised that peer-to-peer services will become part of task-shifting strategies rather than representing an effort to improve services. These concerns surrounding peer-led service provision have already been raised in other patient populations, such as those with HIV (see for example Simoni et al. 2011, p 1590).

**Background and aims**

Three third-sector groups in Brighton and Hove (Mothers Uncovered (project lead)), Grassroots Suicide Prevention and Synergy Creative Community initiated an evaluation of peer-to-peer services within Sussex (Flegg et al. 2015). The aim was to understand how peer support could improve individual and public health outcomes, provide best practice recommendations and map the prevalence of services in the region. The groups employed two contract workers with lived-experience of mental health challenges and/or engaging with peer-based approaches, and worked collectively with other groups, service users, and voluntary, private and statutory service providers. The employment of individuals with dual identities as researchers and service users has been adopted by UK higher education institutions (see for example, SURE 2017). Service user researchers have contributed to investigations into peer support within mental health (see for example, The Peer Worker Research Project 2017).

The community evaluation involved a total of 131 participants via a survey, focus groups and a public consultation day. Reflecting on this evaluation and drawing from further examples, this paper aims to identify opportunities for collaborative partnership working that will enable patients and the public to further contribute to knowledge generation.

**Methodology and method**

Within the community evaluation, the project partners applied a combination of their professional and experiential knowledge to review existing literature, design the participant consent forms, and develop methods and materials. The project partners co-agreed all survey and focus group questions and co-designed the public consultation day. This approach is similar to co-productive approaches such as Participatory...
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Action Research (PAR) (Goodson and Phillimore 2012; Merrifield 1997; Park 1999) where community members determine the topic, methods and dissemination processes (Merrifield 1997). Nelson et al (1998) argue that PAR is a preferred methodology when investigating self-help/mutual help movements. Known as a participant centred method (Clark et al 1996) befitting of action research (Kitzinger 1995), focus groups were one chosen method of data collection and were co-hosted by peer leaders. Peers have hosted or co-hosted focus groups in peer ethnography (Ryan et al 2011) however, this approach also involves training peers in research methods (Price and Hawkins 2002; Schoemaker and Twikirize 2012; Ryan et al 2011). While scope did not exist to provide pre-training, this evaluation found knowledge surrounding research practices, methods and policies pre-existed within participants involved in the evaluation. This experience contradicts views held by some regarding the capacity of patient groups to understand and apply research concepts (see for example, Thompson et al 2009).

Analysis

The overall analysis most aligns with the approach used in Systematic Action Research (SAR) (Burns 2007; 2014). Most Action Research involves systematic problem solving at various stages of the analysis (Dick 2009). However, SAR additionally emphasises the need for cross-systems engagement; incorporating the use of multiple, collaborative and creative methods to consider potential impacts of change on the dynamics of the wider system (Burns 2014, p 7). An innovative approach was used to analyse qualitative data whereby individual participant responses were anonymised, visually displayed and themes collectively considered and discussed. This was informed from the techniques associated with a semantic thematic analysis and associated visual techniques as suggested by Braun and Clark (2006, p 81). However, the way the data was displayed was unique to this project. Responses to focus group questions were written in participants own handwriting (all participants were told that the facilitator would rewrite answers if they did not want their handwriting displayed). This was proposed by the third-sector groups as a way to communicate that those consulted are ‘people rather than numbers’ and to safeguard participants (giving them ownership and control over their responses). Further information on this process has been reported elsewhere (Flegg et al 2015). Survey responses provided quantitative data and were expressed in percentages.

The public consultation day was considered as a means of validating initial responses from focus groups and surveys and to explore possible solutions to identified problems. It brought together receivers/providers of peer support and service managers to advance the analytical understanding of findings through discussion, in a similar way as can be seen within a knowledge exchange conference (see for example, Scholes et al 2017, p 104). This bringing together of key stakeholders for the purposes of collaborative action learning was influenced by a Communities of Practice approach (CoP) (see Wenger and Snyder 2000; Hart et al 2013; Lave and Wagner 1991). The final report was emailed to all those that attended the public consultation day to further ensure that ideas were reflective of those expressed by the community. The findings were then publicly presented to the community and a report was distributed.
Findings

The results of the community evaluation suggested that peer-based approaches could improve individual and public health outcomes and access to services, address stigma, reduce risk behaviours such as engaging with substances or criminal activity and potentially reduce costs by reducing reliance and increasing uptake of public services (the results of the findings have been reported elsewhere see Flegg et al 2015). These findings were consistent with the evidence in the literature (see for example, Repper and Carter 2011; Ockwell 2012). The community-led evaluation based findings on self-reporting data and argued that future research using control groups, individual case studies and longitudinal studies tracking service use would further validate these results (Flegg et al 2015).

Reviewed literature suggested that peer support was considered by some as a cost-effective approach for mental health service provision (see for example, Knapp et al 2014; Simpson et al 2014) and may enable increase services access (see for example, NHS 2014; Repper and Carter 2011). Participants involved in the evaluation expressed that peer-led services should not be considered as a replacement for professional services, and suggested improved partnerships with academic institutions and public health providers.

The evaluation uncovered a range of challenges associated with providing peer support at the community level, such as instability within funding streams and administration shortfalls that result in fluctuating levels of service provision and a lack of promotion of services (Flegg et al 2016). A third of all participants both received and provided peer-to-peer services and expressed concern over the reliance and pressure on volunteers, lack of legal supports for staff and organisations, and challenges in accessing training and clinical support when needed.

Participants involved in this evaluation repeatedly expressed a desire to have ownership and control over knowledge generated that pertained to them, with one participant stating ‘it would be helpful if we could do our own research – maybe the uni teaching us and other groups how to do that’ (ibid p 287). To enable participation in future evaluations, participants suggested longer timeframes to support the involvement of volunteers and those with fluctuating health needs. However, existing structures pose barriers for groups wishing to commit to and engage with research and policy development practices. For example, funding streams for charity sector organisations are typically short in tenure, and staffing supports are limited and focused on service provision.

Following the project report presentation, attendees elected to form the Sussex Peer Support Network (SPSN). The network model was suggested to facilitate partnerships between peer-led groups and to create partnerships within the peer support community and the wider public health sector. This includes promoting collaborative research practices, where groups can learn from each other and identify professional and academic partners that are sensitive to their desire to be actively engaged rather than simply consulted.
Discussion

While methods can inspire community-led evaluations, the term ‘research’ is only applicable to those that are situated within contexts of higher education and professional bodies. This creates barriers for knowledge generated by third-sector groups to be considered scientific and publishable. Some, such as Thompson et al (2009) have suggested that the challenges associated with involving patients and the wider community in research may stem from resistance from individual researchers, resulting in discord between ‘the rhetoric of public involvement’ at policy and funding levels and the inclusion of patients and the public in knowledge production (p 211). This evaluation however, demonstrates the capacity of those with lived-experience to design, deliver and evaluate services relevant to their communities.

Emerging trends can be identified that aim to enable community members to initiate research that pertains to them. National research organisations exist to support the involvement of patients and community partners in research such as the Research Design Service (2016), INVOLVE (2012), People in Research (2016) and the James Lind Alliance (2016). Within the University of Brighton, the Community University Partnership Programme (Cupp) provides an opportunity for communities to suggest ideas for innovative ways of working in partnership, provides start-up funding and attempts to link researchers with community project partners based on shared interests and ideas (Cupp 2016). Another example is the Patient Led Research Hub, a collaboration between Cambridge Clinical Trials Unit, Cambridge University and Cambridge University NHS Foundation Trust to support patient-led research stating ‘importantly, we do not have a specific research focus, allowing us to support research proposals from any patient group, on any topic’ (Cambridge Clinical Trials Unit 2016). Specifically working within the area of mental health, SURE, at Kings College London, is the largest unit world-wide that employs researchers who additionally have experience of accessing mental health services and treatments (2017). Therefore, higher education can support patient and community involvement in knowledge generation by creating structures that enable them to identify where further investigation in service development and delivery is best-placed, and by providing opportunities to conduct these investigations.

The community evaluation identified needs associated with accessing training and education for peer providers and a reliance on volunteers. In collaboratively reviewing literature and practice-based examples, the evaluation identified the Professional Development Award (PDA) in Mental Health Peer Support (Scottish Qualifications Authority 2016). This level-7 award, is targeted towards those with lived-experiences of mental health challenges to develop skills in supporting others, and can be used to help receivers of this award access related qualifications within the mental health and social service fields (Scottish Qualifications Authority 2016). The experience of mental illness has been said to negatively impact education attainment (see for example, Kessler et al 1995), however it does not preclude those with lived-experiences in learning from these experiences. Education models that value lived-experience may aid in improving individual educational outcomes and improve workforce diversity within public health provision.
In consideration that an absence of funding and a heavy reliance on volunteers is a barrier to third-sector participation (Flegg et al 2015) concerns around economic support for peer-led communities must also be considered. At the same time it is suggested that patients and community groups take a more active role in self-management and care for others, they are also offered a diminishing role within commissioning (Hogg 2007). It has been argued that patients currently have a limited ability to make any real impact on strategic directions under current structures (Petsoulas et al 2015). Future research may wish to explore why there is an apparent link between reduction in community involvement at a commissioning level and raised challenges associated with mental health service provision (see for example, Hogg 2007). As this community evaluation suggests, without strategies to involve those with lived-experiences at every level, it is likely that the systems put in place from top-down establishments will be ill-aligned to community needs and capacity. What this evaluation does demonstrate however, is the capacity of the peer support community and their willingness to work collaboratively to address public health challenges.

**Conclusion**

This article reflected on a community-led evaluation into peer-to-peer mental health service provision (Flegg et al 2015) for the purpose of identifying opportunities for partnership working between patients, communities and the institutions that support them. The results of this evaluation identified areas where peer-led services can improve individual and public health outcomes. However it also highlights challenges faced by peer providers in meeting the needs of their community.

Peer-led services within mental health services have been argued to be more cost-effective (Knapp et al 2014) and interest in these approaches is increasing (see for example, NHS 2014). With high costs associated with mental health (OECD 2014), there is a danger that peer-led services may form part of ‘task-shifting strategies’ as can be seen in other patient populations such as those with HIV (Simoni et al 2011, p 1590). Rather, this paper argues that peer-based services and patient and public involvement in research, should form part of task-sharing strategies; with patients and communities situated at the helm.

Reflecting on this evaluation and identifying methodological and practice-based examples, this paper aimed to suggest ways public institutions can work in partnership with patients to address community needs. This fundamentally includes the development of structures and systems whereby the patients and public can identify areas of need and actively contribute to knowledge generation. In response to those that have been sceptical of the value of patient and public involvement (see for example, Thompson et al 2009), this evaluation demonstrates the community’s ability to provide and evaluate services. It demonstrates patient-led capacity and willingness to contribute to solutions that will improve the health and wellbeing of our community and beyond.

**Bibliography**


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Acknowledgements

With thanks to all those individuals and organisations that conducted and contributed to the community evaluation on Peer-to-peer mental health supports.

Biographies

Mirika Flegg has collaborated with marginalised groups as a programme developer, educator and researcher. She is a founding member of the Sussex Peer Support
Network, which aims to promote partnership working between peer support groups and the wider community. Mirika was awarded the University of Brighton Excellence in Community Engagement Award for engaging with those with personal experiences of health challenges in research. She was awarded Hero’s Medal from the New Zealand Government for developing a youth-for-youth employment model, and her advocacy work within Canada resulted in improved supports for youth in care and Aboriginal people.

Maggie Gordon-Walker is an arts professional, working as a performer, writer and director. She is an advocate for mothers’ rights, believing that their wishes around pregnancy, birth and postpartum are often ignored. In 2008, she founded Mothers Uncovered (www.mothersuncovered.com) to bridge the gap between informal drop-ins (not suitable for discussing difficult or painful issues) and the medical scrutiny of PND groups. All Brighton-based creative support courses are facilitated by past participants, celebrating the woman behind the mother, while allowing feelings to be explored honestly, without judgement. Supporting others to develop and sustain peer groups, Maggie is a founding member of the Sussex Peer Support Network.
A reflection of the use of Web 2.0 technologies in the co-construction of knowledge within the Introduction to the Global Health module of the BSc (Hons) Nursing Programme

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Abstract

Web 2.0 tools, incorporated within the features of Virtual Learning Environments, have already been acknowledged as playing an increasing role in providing facilities for information sharing, co-construction of knowledge, collaboration, communication and support (Armstrong and Franklin 2008). In the introduction to a Global Health module, students used blogs to investigate, analyse and organise new knowledge.

This paper will explain how the module team and the students have used aspects of Web 2.0 technologies, within a blended learning experience to facilitate the co-construction of knowledge relating to a module, which introduces Global Health and its impact on nursing, to second year Adult, Child and Mental Health undergraduate nursing students. The module team consisted of three academic staff and a skilled learning technologist.

The aim of this approach was to empower students to take responsibility for, and demonstrate ownership of their learning, as they worked towards achieving the module learning outcomes.

Introduction

The Global Health module arose for two reasons. Firstly, there was a drive for internationalising the curriculum (Law and Muir 2004) which created a demand for students to engage in global knowledge development. Secondly, in synergy with the internationalisation agenda, it offered the opportunity to develop a blended learning module within a curricula that relied on direct contact with students to ensure that Professional Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB) standards are met. The module team consists of three qualified nurse lecturers with an interest in this contemporary academic field, and a learning technologist who has been essential in developing and
sustaining the module. Involving the learning technologist at all stages of this development and implementation, ensured that the full functionality of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) could be exploited.

The Introduction to the Global Health module consists of a number of learning units with materials available in a VLE, which are used to structure the learning opportunities. Students opt to study this module and meet face-to-face in the classroom for an initial introductory session. Thereafter, students co-construct knowledge with each other by engaging with the online learning materials and sharing other resources through the blogging tool. The blogging engagement occurs at set points in the module, and also encourages a discourse of the issues pertinent to the learning units. Each member of the module team facilitates a themed group activity via the VLE only, with support from the learning technologist. This development is also consistent with the University of Brighton digital literacy strategy, in particular for facilitating learning in an online environment (University of Brighton 2016). This article will explore the underpinning pedagogies and the use of Web 2.0 technologies within the module. It will also reflect on the experience of the delivery of the module by the team.

The social web or Web 2.0 refers to a group of technologies which facilitate both the consumption and contribution of contents by a more active user (Armstrong and Franklin 2008). This group of technologies consists of a range of tools such as blogs, Wikis and media sharing sites, for example, SlideShare and YouTube and social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

O’Reilly (2005) referred to Web 2.0 as applications which include web-based software and services that enable individuals to create, share, communicate and collaborate on the web regardless of geographical, temporal or technological skill constraints. Initially the focus of Web 2.0 was for business purposes, but a subset of tools focused on creation and collaboration are now integrated within VLEs and are used by students and lecturers to support the construction of knowledge.

This paper will explore how the co-construction of knowledge has been enabled by using some of the facilities available within the VLE in the design and implementation of the module. The theoretical underpinning of the design and implementation will be addressed, as well as the rationale for the modification of the blog so that it could be used as a tool to fit with the aims of the module.

**Underpinning pedagogies**

Co-construction draws upon social and constructivist pedagogies (Vygotsky 1978) and is built on the view that individuals internalise knowledge from socially-mediated group discourse or activities (Hull and Saxon 2009). Armstrong and Franklin (2008) commented that Web 2.0 fits in well with these pedagogical underpinnings, since it is inherently social and concerned with the co-construction of knowledge. Co-construction of knowledge may be defined as an outcome of the combined intellectual collaborative learning tasks undertaken by students and teachers together, or among students themselves as part of the learning process (Kai-Wai Chu and Kennedy 2011). It is also characterised by an element of scaffolding in facilitating learning, where the strengths of the most able student collaborators are capitalised.
upon as a means of enhancing the acquisition of knowledge by the less able participants. Consequently, this may facilitate the development of deep learning as part of the process of sharing, interpreting and acquiring further knowledge as stipulated by Scardamalia and Bereiter (2006). The outcome is that students contribute by co-constructing and sharing knowledge within their learning community.

Considerations for module development

The following points were considered in the design and implementation of the module:

- Global Health, as an academic subject in nursing, is contemporary and explores globalisation and connections, and thus lends itself to a connectivist, blended learning approach. In connectivist pedagogy, much learning can occur across peer networks and the teacher will guide students across this landscape and provide answers to queries along the way. This is particularly important, as students may navigate technologies in a superficial manner without clear scaffolding to guide their learning (Siemens 2005). Furthermore, rapid developments in the field require that information is current, and therefore online sources can offer the most up-to-date resources.

- Students have a broad spectrum of prior digital experience and expertise and so clear scaffolding of content and support is required for skills development.

- Learning philosophy of the module team is learner-centric, offering opportunities to develop new knowledge and digital skills as part of a virtual learning community.

In terms of scaffolding:

There is a transparency of learning and assessment within this module as online learning activities are clearly themed around learning outcomes. There are four learning units with an assessed blog attached. As the narrative develops in these blogs, it contributes to the final assessment of a comprehensive essay around a related topic of student choice that addresses the learning outcomes (Biggs 2003).

Watch, think, reflect, dig deeper and discuss

Pedagogic activity entails that the learners should engage with (watch) the contents, (think) through quizzes and (reflection) points, engage in searching and retrieving further information (dig deeper) through reading, and engage with the blogs (discuss) to share and apply knowledge:

- smaller groups were created to facilitate blog learning discussions
- facilitators were present in the blog activities and provided regular engagement at set points to support, clarify, summarise and provide feedback to the groups (Skiba 2013; Poore 2016).

Blogging is one of the most widely recognised tools under the aegis of Web 2.0 technologies in education (Kai–Wai Chu and Kennedy 2011). Blogging affords the promotion of communication, collaborative work and the sharing of information. As previously mentioned, it is one of the tools used within the delivery of this module. The
utility of blogging, when facilitated specifically through a VLE, offers both benefits and potential challenges. On the one hand, the integrated blogging tool within the Blackboard VLE offers a simple and accessible publishing platform with a low technical threshold for participation. On the other, the tool lacks the level of personalisation and flexibility found in blogging services that offer free account options, such as Tumblr and Wordpress.com. In cases where students have prior experience with these services and other contemporary blogging platforms, the limitations of the VLE’s blog tool may be more apparent, leading to a possible perception that the tool is clunky.

Ultimately though, regardless of the tool’s physical and functional attributes, the key challenge when teaching with technology is to provide an authentic reason for students to engage with the tool or activity (Palloff and Pratt 2009). For example, a compelling incentive is for the activity to be assessed, but the position of the academic staff is to imbue the task with further subject-relevant value. This added value needs to be present in order to facilitate rich reflections, which have the potential to lead to deeper learning and to provide benefit to all who participate. A traditional blog would normally be driven by the singular wishes and interests of the author. However, when introducing a blog as a mode of writing within a class, student motivation cannot depend on internal drivers alone, and needs to be linked to the fulfilment of the learning outcomes, and also to be driven by meaningful collaboration and engagement, as was the case of the blogging activity discussed in this paper.

Perspective from the module team

An important outcome of engaging with the blogs, was that it provided an opportunity for the module team to make a timely assessment of the students’ understanding of the module content, in a constructively aligned reflection of the learning outcomes (Fry et al 2015), and also to make an interpretation of the degree to which they had engaged with the process of learning. The module also provided opportunity for both peer and self-assessment, through which the students could share knowledge and develop their digital literacy skills. In doing this, the module team were able to evaluate the degree to which students had successfully interpreted the clear and precise blog entry guidance independently.

The module design created a valuable framework for supporting the students’ development of research skills, by enabling their immersion in a topic of interest to them. Through their research, they could explore and discover new knowledge while also exercising their curiosity (Bruner in Aubrey and Riley 2016). This format clearly represented an opportunity for students to derive a sense of value from, and control over their contributions (Littlejohn 2008), with support and guidance which they could access and interpret. In a similar way, having explored a range of resources while researching their topic, students were encouraged and enabled to include critical analysis within their blog discussions, which indicated a hermeneutic experience of making sense of the wider topic, building and reflecting on their understanding (Schon in Hughes and Quinn 2013).

In relation to Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory (Akella 2010), it provided the opportunity to gain concrete experience of a new writing style, promoted reflective ob-
servation and critical examination in a range of contexts, and supported the abstract conceptualisation of applying logical ideas to understanding situations. Finally, to a lesser extent, it encouraged a degree of prediction and active experimentation around constructing their contributions.

This then, underpinned a learning cycle which provided opportunities for students who preferred to generate creative ideas from reflecting on experience (divergent learning style); for those who preferred to problem solve through following action plans (assimilative learning style); those who applied deductive reasoning (convergent learning style), and in some cases those who favoured experimentation based on their experience (accommodatory learning style) (Akella 2010; Aubrey and Riley 2016). Student success in the assessment has demonstrated that they were able to apply and analyse theoretical concepts to the learning outcomes.

There were, however, practical issues which may have constrained the full optimisation of the modules learning possibilities. These relate to the level of formative feedback offered to students, and queries that arose in the blogs to encourage discussions without focusing on the process of the assessment. Responses to each series of blogs were generalised and tended to focus on the strengths present in the contributions, rather than providing a more balanced overview, which identified strategies for further development which would have been more useful (Fry et al 2015). Finally, it did appear that the blog activities were undertaken with enthusiasm and that the students both enjoyed and benefited from their participation. This was evidenced through the quality of the work within the blogs and feedback from students.

An overview of the module was presented at the Learning and Teaching Conference, which resulted in some useful dialogue that addressed issues related to the type of assessment used within this module and whether a more co-constructive artefact, such as a group report may be more appropriate than an individual essay. The difficulties in assessing and evaluating the blog contents were also raised, as well as the issues of students ‘lurking’ and waiting till the deadline to contribute. Some students and facilitators raised this as they felt that there was a lack of discussion in the majority of blogs, but the references and thoughts behind certain global health issues provided knowledge and in-depth analysis. As already mentioned, the evaluations obtained so far have been very positive and have led to enhancements in terms of this module delivery, such as the use of Twitter and online tutorials using Skype. Students commented on the ‘engaging and thought provoking’ nature of the blog and the notion that other students’ contributions to the blogs expanded their knowledge of global health. The asynchronous ease of access to the blog contents together with access to other people’s views and ideas online were also viewed positively.

The technology of the Introduction to the Global Health module has gone through several iterations in response to student feedback and technological trends. Important adjustments were made to the delivery of the blogging activity and to how it was marked. In academic year 2013-14, the blog posts were written by the instructor and the students were asked to post comments in response to these posts. This created two issues, firstly, there was a conceptual disconnect between what the students were asked to do and what was described as ‘blogging’; they were commenting, not
blogging. The second issue was that this way of using the activity, positioned the students as consumers and not creators. The engagement in blogging at that time was lower than expected. The action plan put in place to tackle this included the re-emphasis of the blog as a summative pass/fail activity and as a vital research and discursive step towards the construction of the final essay. Also, the students were asked to write their own blog posts and comment on each other’s based on an initial post from the instructor prompting action. This change boosted the importance of the students’ writing, democratising the blog space; instructor and student were now blogging together at the same level.

The changes to the blogging activity supported the use of the VLE’s mobile app as a means for students to engage in posting and commenting on others’ blog posts. This was aligned with the goals of the module by allowing students to engage in mobile learning while out on work placement. Along the way, changes have been made to the module in order to respond to broader trends, for instance, all students are encouraged to upload an avatar, an image to represent themselves for personalisation in the blogs. Students are also encouraged to embed multimedia content including images, hyperlinks and infographics into their blog posts. Furthermore, the use of Twitter with a shared hashtag was introduced to provide a means to share up-to-the-minute content and resources. The inclusion of these elements provides exposure to the essential digital literacies required for contemporary careers in health (Department of Health 2016).

Conclusion

This module has provided us with valuable experience demonstrating the challenges of delivering teaching and learning online when predominantly delivered with only one in-person introductory session. A team approach involving educators as facilitators and a learning technologist has been important, not least in allowing creativity with the functionality of the VLE at an early stage. Evaluating and reflecting on the experiences of all the collaborators adds to both individual and collective insights as well as enhancements to the implementation.

It is evident that future research should focus on the enablers and barriers to collaborative learning, the nature of collaboration and co-construction in the learning process, as well as the innovations in the mode of assessing this type of digital learning. The students were able to develop and extend the content of the learning material within the module and also apply this to a new arena within a global context. It is anticipated that the module will evolve from an optional choice to be embedded within the core curriculum.

Bibliography


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Biographies

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